Classroom Discipline: Is a desire to empower students a health hazard for teachers?

Ramon Lewis. LaTrobe University
r.lewis@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract

Of all the activities which comprise the role of a teacher, classroom discipline is one of the most significant. It not only provides the opportunity for teachers to instruct students in their traditional school subjects but it is also integrally related to the issue of inculcating a sense of responsibility in students. In selecting an approach to classroom discipline, some teachers experience, and have to deal with, tensions arising from their desire to utilise educationally justifiable models while still quickly and effectively gaining and maintaining the order in the classroom essential to ensure subject learning takes place, and teachers and students feel protected from threat. This paper examines teachers' estimations of the stress that arises when they are unable to discipline students as they would ideally prefer. More importantly, the way teachers cope with any stress which does arise is documented using the Coping Scale for Adults. The results indicate that teachers who report more stress are those most interested in empowering more their students in the decision making process. Associated with increased concern is a greater use of Worry, Self-blame, Tension reduction, Wishful thinking and Keep to self. The most concerned teachers also express a greater tendency to get sick as a result of the stress. These data suggest the need for professional development curriculum for teachers to assist them in effectively sharing power with students and in reflecting upon a range of more productive coping strategies.

Of all the activities which comprise the role of a teacher, classroom discipline is one of the most significant and is clearly of concern to many parents and teachers (Langdon, 1996). Discipline can be distinguished from the broader area of classroom management in that the latter emphasises the provision of quality instruction as a means of minimising disruption in classrooms whereas discipline is generally represented as what teachers do in response to students' misbehaviour. The importance of classroom discipline is two-fold. Firstly, without the order provided by effective classroom discipline there is very little opportunity for teachers to instruct students in language skills, number skills, art, music or whatever. This aspect of discipline has recently been characterised as its managerial function (Lewis, 1997).

Secondly, the area of classroom discipline is integrally related to the issue of inculcating a sense of responsibility in students. Each time a teacher interacts with children in a bid to modify their behaviour, they are able to observe the distribution of power in the relationship, and to deduce what is being expected of them. In terms of McLaughlin's analysis (1994), students will discern if the aim of a teacher is student obedience to the teacher, solidarity with the rest of the students, or responsibility. It can be argued that of all the value-forming
"lived experiences" children have at school, classroom disciplinary interactions are among the most potent (Ingersoll, 1996).

In exercising discipline in schools, teachers select from a range of models and techniques. Some of the factors influencing their choice are associated with the assumptions underlying competing techniques, the impact of different models on students' attitudes, behaviour and achievement, and the relative extent to which the aim of the disciplinary interaction is to establish order or to teach values.

When deciding upon an approach to classroom discipline, teachers may experience, and have to deal with, tensions arising from their desire to utilise educationally justifiable models of discipline while still quickly and effectively gaining and maintaining the amount of order in the classroom that is essential if subject learning is to take place, and teachers and students are to feel protected from emotional threat. Consequently they may not be able to discipline classes in the way they would wish.

A number of other factors may also operate to cause teachers to be reluctant to implement their preferred approaches to discipline. First, what a teacher sees as best practice may be inconsistent, if not in opposition to the way he or she was treated during childhood (McDaniel, 1987).

A second factor which may be inhibiting teachers in their attempts to implement their ideas of best practice is perceived institutional pressure. For example, as stated by Martin (1994:326) "When headteachers openly support a policy, it is very difficult for other members of staff to challenge them". In also recognising this source of influence on teachers, Sykes et al (1985) note that beginning teachers are those most susceptible. They argue that the beginning teacher is forced to employ a variety of public and private coping strategies when tension exists between a personal metaphor and the institutionally preferred teacher-student relationships.

Nevertheless, according to Bullough (1994), such pressure on teachers' classroom behaviour may not be very significant in determining the way they behave.

Quite commonly the beginning teacher seeks in the privacy of her room to negotiate a teaching role that is personally satisfying and, at a minimally acceptable level, institutionally fitting (p6).

A third factor which may be significant in determining a teachers' approach to discipline may be students' beliefs (Lovegrove et al, 1983; Lewis and Lovegrove, 1987) or parents' beliefs
(Lewis and Lovegrove, 1989) about the way they wish to be treated. With increasing attention being paid to the rights of children and parents in schooling, the impact of their views could be of increasing significance.

Additional factors which may be partly responsible for teachers implementing approaches to discipline at variance with their own ideas of best practice could be parental expectations, Governmental recommendations, teacher training curriculum or staff development programs.

Regardless of the causes, any gap between teachers' ideas of best discipline practice and their current practice is likely to be of concern to them. In general, classroom discipline is a well documented source of teacher stress (Kyriacou, 1987; Borg et al, 1991; Blase, 1986; DeRobbio and Iwanicki, 1996; Friedman, 1995; Keiper and Busselle, 1996). It is the purpose of this study to document the extent to which any gap between preferred and practiced discipline is of concern to teachers, how they deal with concern which does arise and how effective they believe their coping strategies to be.

**Stress and Coping**

Interest in the area of stress and coping has been both substantial and accelerating for some time. Nevertheless, as recently observed by Green and Ross (1996), "only a few studies have been devoted to understanding the coping strategies used by teachers" (P.315).

The manner in which coping is addressed in the literature varies. Consequently there is the possibility for terminology such as "coping strategy" to be used in contradictory ways. Coping actions (what an individual feels, thinks or does) are often grouped into coping strategies. For example, a related number of actions such as 'worry about what will happen' and 'worry about what I have done' will be argued to comprise a strategy called 'Worry'. The number of strategies measured varies from two or three broad conceptual groupings (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Green and Ross, 1996) through to a range of eighteen specific strategies (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1997). Strategies are in turn grouped, according to associated usage or conceptually similar actions, into coping styles. For example, the strategies 'talk with friends', 'ask a professional for help' and 'come to meetings' might comprise a style called "Refer to Others'. However, sometimes the terms coping actions and coping strategies are used interchangeably, while coping styles may refer to the actions or strategies that are used consistently by an individual to manage stress. Other associated terms used include coping tactics and coping resources. These two terms also appear to be used interchangeably with coping strategies.

In this investigation, the concept of coping will be based upon the work of Richard Lazarus and his colleagues who state "we define coping as constantly changing cognitive and
behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p.141). They argue that in evaluating any potential stressor a person uses both primary and secondary appraisal. The former aims at determining to what extent a situation is seen as challenging or threatening whereas secondary appraisal involves an estimation of the resources and alternative responses available.

In summary therefore, coping refers to a set of cognitive and affective responses which arise in response to a particular concern. They represent an attempt to restore the equilibrium by solving the problem, minimising it, accommodating to it, or attempting to avoid it. Coping is essentially a dynamic phenomenon whereby the individual and the environment are engaged in an interactive process. Generally it is acknowledged that coping responses can be usefully dichotomised into problem and emotion focussed strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) although more recent work has identified the need for finer grained analysis (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1996; Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996).

In this study coping responses comprise specific feelings, thoughts and actions. Such responses are grouped into coping strategies like Wishfully thinking or Blaming Oneself. These strategies are in turn grouped into coping styles. Styles are characterised by a number of conceptually and empirically related strategies. For example, a style of "Nonproductive coping“ will be argued to include strategies such as Keep to Self, Self blame, Ignore, Worry and Get sick.

Methodology

To assess teachers' level of concern about discipline, they were asked about their current approach and also about their preferred approach. Lewis' characterisation of 3 competing discipline models of Control, Group Management and Influence was employed for this purpose (Lewis, 1997). Within the questionnaire there were brief descriptions of each of these 3 alternative models to classroom discipline.

First, the model of Control was defined in the following terms.

"Teachers choose to control the students' behaviour at school. They ensure that students act in their own best interests. Therefore teachers determine a clear system of rules, rewards and consequences which they apply to the students."

The second of the models, Group Management was characterised as an approach whereby Teachers manage classrooms by organising students to make their own decisions. They choose to allow power to reside with the students and teacher as a group, where all have
equal rights to contribute toward the determination of behaviour standards. Rules and consequences are defined at classroom meeting in which the teacher is a group leader: but the teacher chooses not to employ any more power to decide classroom policy than any other group member. Once policy is established, the teacher carries it out.

The final model, that of Influence was described as follows.

Teachers influence each student so that he or she decides to behave well. They encourage students to learn their own way of behaving with minimum adult control and negotiate with students on a one to one basis, but choose not to force their views on them. They allow students to experience the natural consequences of their behaviour, so that they can choose to modify the way they behave.

Teachers were invited to reflect on these 3 models and to identify the extent to which they were currently using, and would prefer to use, each approach in their present school at either year level 7 (students aged 12-13), year 9 (14-15) or year 11 (16-17). For each of these questions the response alternatives 'Nearly all of the time' 'Most of the time' 'About half of the time' 'Little of the time' and 'None of the time' were coded as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Teachers were then asked to reflect on their answers to these questions and to indicate if any inability to discipline classrooms exactly as they would prefer, is, for them, a major or minor issue, or not an issue.

Having indicated their level of their concern, teachers were asked to indicate the way in which they coped with it. The Coping Scale for Adults (CSA) (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1997) was used for this purpose. The CSA provides for measurement of 19 coping strategies and 4 coping styles. The Long Form comprises 73 items which form the basis of 19 scales, each containing between 3 and 7 items. Combinations of these strategies form styles. The Short Form, which was used in this study for reasons of efficiency, contains 19 coping items, each of which is an empirically defensible indicator of the scale of which it is part. On average the correlation between the Short Form, single item measures of coping strategies and the respective Long Form scale is 0.84 (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1997, p.34).

To indicate their level of usage of each of the 19 strategies (items) on the Short form of the CSA, teachers selected from a five point response format where Almost none of the time or Never, A few of the times, Sometimes, Many times, and Almost every time, were coded as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Because teachers were being asked to address the issue of discipline the Specific Form of the CSA was chosen, in comparison to the General Form which addresses General coping behaviour.
In addition to indicating level of usage of each of the 19 strategies, teachers were also requested to use the same response format to rate how often they found each coping strategy to be helpful.

**Sample**

A total of 294 teachers participated in the study. The mean age of respondents was 39.53 years (std dev = 9.44), and 60 percent were women. These teachers represented 78 % of 377, sampled from 15 metropolitan schools in Melbourne Australia. The teachers were provided survey questionnaires by a research assistant who briefly explained the study to all staff prior to placing anonymous questionnaires in every second staff post box (50%). Completed questionnaires were collected in person after one week. Duplicates were issued if the original had been misplaced. The high response rate was taken as an indication of the relevance of the research to the participating teachers.

**Results**

**Current and preferred styles of discipline**

Table 1 records the proportion of teachers indicating various levels of usage of, and preference for, each of the three styles of discipline considered. These data indicate that teachers are generally using an approach to discipline based on clear rules, punishment for misbehaviour and recognition and reward for good behaviour. Seventy three percent of respondents were claiming to use a model of Control at least most of the time compared to 7 percent and 10 percent for the models of Group management and Influence respectively.

Table 1. Teachers' current and preferred discipline models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% recorded</th>
<th>Nearly all of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>About half of the time</th>
<th>Little of the time</th>
<th>None of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current usage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preferred usage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inspection of teachers' preferred styles shows that between approximately one quarter and a third of respondents wish to use each of the models at least most of the time.

To determine if the year level at which discipline was being considered, or a teacher's sex is associated with the extent of the gap between best practice and current practice, a number of analyses were undertaken. For each model of discipline a two way repeated measures ANOVA was computed where teachers' current and preferred level of usage was included as the repeated measures component (called "Gap") and the teacher's sex and the schooling level (year 7, 9 or 11) were the independent measures. The results of these 3 analyses are reported in Table 2 which records the relevant F values and the level of statistical significance of each finding.

Table 2. Teachers' usage of, and preference for each model of discipline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Gap</th>
<th>Gap by Sex</th>
<th>Gap by Year Level</th>
<th>Gap by Sex by Year Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>39.73***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Management</td>
<td>108.07***</td>
<td>9.69**</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>75.84***</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p<.001 ** p< .01

The results in Table 2 show that for each of the models of discipline, the magnitude of the gap between best practice and current practice is well beyond chance.

The data also indicate that with one exception, teacher's sex and the level of schooling at which discipline is being considered do not influence the gap between current and preferred practice. The exception relates to the fact that although female teachers' current usage of a model of management (mean=3.72, sd=.76) is very similar to that of males (mean=3.75, sd=.77), their preference for it (mean=2.90, sd=.94) is greater than that of males (mean=3.20, sd=.94).

Overall, the findings indicate less preference for a model of Control and more support for both Management and Influence than is the self reported current practice, and suggests that in general, teachers' ideas of best discipline practice involves significantly more empowerment of students than is currently the case in classrooms.
Level of Concern about classroom discipline

The proportion of teachers indicating that their inability to discipline classrooms exactly as they would prefer, or more explicitly, to empower students to the extent that they would desire, is a major or minor issue, or not an issue were 14, 54 and 32 percent respectively. Consequently it can be argued that the gap between best and current discipline practice is, on average, of only moderate concern to teachers. The magnitude of this finding would seem quite moderate given the relevant research literature.

To determine if the teachers’ current or preferred approaches to discipline were associated with their level of concern about an inability to employ their own idea of best discipline practice, or their sex, respective chi square analyses were undertaken. The results were examined to see if there were any statistically significant linear associations between extent of usage of, or preference for, each of the 3 particular models of discipline and teachers' level of concern.

The results indicate that there is no significant linear associations between level of concern and current usage of any of the models or teacher sex. In contrast however, teachers' level of concern about discipline has a significant positive linear association with a desire for more usage of a model of class management (linear chi square= 16.83, p=.003) and less usage of a model of control (linear chi square= 7.86, p=.005).

In summary it may be argued that the teachers who profess more of a desire to involve students in classroom decision making and less of a desire to control them are the ones reporting most concern about their inability to discipline classes in the way they would want.

Teachers' Coping Strategies

Table 3 records the mean perceived frequency of alternative coping strategies used by teachers as well as their perceived helpfulness. Standard errors of the mean are also included. Since 32% of the sample of teachers indicated that discipline was not of concern to them it is not surprising that 78 did not respond to questions about what they did to cope with their concern. What is a little more difficult to understand is that 24 teachers indicated how they responded to their concern about discipline even though they professed to have no concern about it. Their responses were considered valid on the assumption that they had underestimated their level of concern and although it was less than minor, some concern still existed. Consequently, after allowing for missing data, this part of the analysis is based on the responses of 198 teachers.
Usage and usefulness of coping strategies.

Inspection of the data in Table 3 indicate that the most common response of teachers to any stress associated with an inability to discipline classrooms as they would like, is to put more time into their work and to seek support from others. The former is done on average very often, with 89% of teachers reporting that they did it "many times" or "almost every time". The latter was done a little less frequently with 59% of teachers reporting its very frequent use (many times or almost every time).

Table 3. Frequency of usage and helpfulness of Coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Helpfulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Talk to others and give each other support</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a plan of action</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Put effort into my work</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Worry about what will happen to me</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Improve my relationship with others</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Find a way to let off steam: for example, cry, scream, drink, take drugs</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Daydream about how things will turn out</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Go to meetings which look at the problem</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Consciously block out the problem</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Blame myself</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Don't let others know how I am feeling</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Ask a professional for help</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Make time for leisure activities</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Play sport</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Work on my self image</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Try to be funny</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Get sick</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers also regularly reflect on a plan of action while putting more effort into their relationships with others and making time for leisure activities. These two strategies are used either 'many times' or 'almost every time' by approximately 50% of teachers.

There is occasional use of six other strategies, namely focussing on the positive, maintaining a sense of humour, playing sport, working on one's self-image and attending relevant meetings. In general, between 24% and 35% of teachers used these responses many times or almost every time.
The least commonly used strategies, with the exception of seeking professional help are those which have been described elsewhere as Dysfunctional (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1991). These are used only rarely and include Worry, Letting off steam, Ignoring the issue, Blaming oneself, Keeping the concern to oneself, Wishfully thinking and Getting sick. Strategies in this group are used many times or almost every time by only 4% to 6% of teachers. Nevertheless, they are used Sometimes by approximately 20 to 30 percent of teachers.

Inspection of the mean helpfulness of strategies in Table 3 shows that teachers’ relative use of coping strategies is closely associated with their appraisal of its effectiveness. A Spearman Rho correlation coefficient, based on the rank order of usage and helpfulness is 0.93 (p<.001). Although the finding that teachers devote most of their coping time and energy to strategies which they appraise as effective is hardly surprising, there are nevertheless a few strategies where such a pattern is not so apparent. To investigate for each strategy the association between appraisal and usage, Pearson correlations were computed between these two variables for all strategies. Although only one correlation coefficient was not statistically significant (p<.001), another four were below 0.4 and could best be described as moderate. To further investigate the extent of the association for these 5 strategies, cross tabulations were computed, and consideration given to the proportion of teachers who were using a strategy rarely yet appraising it as often helpful, or were using a strategy very frequently even though they appraised it as unhelpful. Tables 4 and 5 record the strategies for which over 10% of respondents provided data of this kind.

### Table 4. Teachers' use of strategies appraised as unhelpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Helpful only a few of the times or not at all, yet used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame myself</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't let others know how I am feeling</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about what will happen</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5. Teachers' use of strategies appraised as helpful.

Proportions recorded
Strategy | Helpful many or most of the times, yet used | None of the time | A few of the times | Sometimes
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Go to meetings which look at the problem | 4 | 3 | 9

Inspection of the data in Table 4 shows that there is an appreciable proportion of teachers who are frequently worrying, trying to ignore the problem, and blaming themselves for the situation and keeping their concern from others even though they believe that such responses are at best helpful only a few of the times.

A similar analysis of the data in Table 5 shows a considerable proportion of teachers who rarely go to meetings which address their concerns about discipline, even though they often find such meetings helpful when they do attend.

Summary of data

Interpreting the data in Tables 3 to 5 allows the observation that teachers most commonly respond to concern about the gap between current and preferred classroom discipline practice with productive coping strategies. These include dealing directly with the problem while staying socially connected, fit and relaxed. They are least likely to utilise strategies characterised as less productive, if not counterproductive, such as self blame and ignoring the problem, and very unlikely to get sick in response to their concern. Finally, teachers are generally selecting strategies that they have found to be most helpful, although there is a recognisable minority who seem to persist with strategies such as Self blame, Keep Self and Worry, despite acknowledging these strategies' lack of helpfulness.

Coping strategies by teacher sex and level of concern

To continue the investigation into teachers' coping with concerns about discipline, it was decided to determine the extent to which coping responses were associated with the teachers' level of concern and their sex. A 2 way manova was therefore computed, whereby the 19 coping strategies were utilised as the multiple dependent variables and the respondents' sex and level of concern were the independent variables. Although no statistically significant interaction effects were recorded, both Level of concern \[F(36,266)=1.46, p<.05\] and Sex \[F(18,132)=1.82, p<.05\] were significantly associated with the coping strategies utilised by teachers.

Inspection of the univariate F values for respective strategies indicated that teachers' sex was significantly \(p<.05\) related to the usage of 3 strategies. Table 6 records the relevant means, standard deviations and \(F\) values.

Table 6. Strategies by Sex of the respondent.
Inspection of the data in Table 6 indicates that in response to a concern about an inability to discipline classes in a desired manner, women teachers respond by working hard, and sharing their concern with others. Men on the other hand are more likely to ignore the problem than are women.

Table 7 reports the relevant means for the 6 coping strategies that were significantly related (p<0.05) to teachers' level of concern. Inspection of these data indicates that greater concern about an inability to discipline classrooms as desired is associated with greater use of a range of dysfunctional coping responses. These include worrying, letting off steam by crying, screaming, drinking or taking drugs, blaming oneself, not letting anyone know about the issue, daydreaming about how things might turn out and getting sick.

As mentioned earlier, the short form of the Coping Scale for Adults provides a way of combining items into scales which can act as measures of coping styles. The CSA identifies
4 such Styles, namely Non productive Coping, Sharing, Optimism and Dealing with the problem. Figure 1 records the item numbers (refer Table 2) of the strategies comprising each style.

**Figure 1. Coping strategies comprising styles.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Strategy item number as per Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deal with the problem</td>
<td>2, 3, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonproductive Coping</td>
<td>4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>6, 12, 13, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>1, 8, -11, 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To investigate the extent to which each of these styles characterised the coping responses of teachers, scale scores were computed according to the instructions provided in the CSA manual (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1997). Table 8 reports the teachers’ average item mean for each Style together with the scale’s respective mean, standard deviation and cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability (internal consistency).

**Table 8. Coping Styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Dev</th>
<th>Average Item mean</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deal with the problem</td>
<td>22.78</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Productive Coping</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>9.76</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>12.55</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The low reliability indicator for Optimism was not surprising given the figure of .45 reported in the CSA manual. However inspection of the teachers’ data indicated that the reliability of the Optimism scale could be increased to .51 if the Relaxation item were omitted. This was done and the resultant scale mean and average item mean became 6.41 and 2.14 respectively. In summary of these data it can be argued that three of the four coping styles promoted in the CSA can be usefully applied to the teachers in this study. The two styles most commonly used by them are Dealing with the problem and Sharing. Both of these are on average used Sometimes.
Having established the value of conceptualising the coping of teachers in terms of coping styles, the relationship between these styles and teachers’ sex and level of concern over discipline was considered. To achieve this, a 2 way Manova was computed with the 4 styles as outcomes and Sex and Level of concern as predictors. Inspection of the multivariate F values showed that both Sex \[F(4,147) = 2.48, p<.05\] and Level of Concern\[F(8,296) = 3.27, p<.001\] were statistically significant predictors of coping styles, although there were no significant interaction effects. Inspection of the univariate F values showed that women teachers were significantly \( (F=7.29, , p<0.001)\) more likely to use the Sharing coping style than were men, and teachers more concerned about issues of discipline were significantly \( (F=11.07, p<0.001)\) more likely to resort to a nonproductive coping style. Table 9 reports the relevant means.

Table 9. Coping style by teacher sex and level of concern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Male Mean</th>
<th>Male Std Dev</th>
<th>Female Mean</th>
<th>Female Std Dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Concern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a concern</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results recorded in Table 9 show significant and substantial differences in the degree to which male and female teachers share their concern about discipline issues, the difference between means being almost a within group standard deviation. More substantial still is the difference between teachers who express different levels of concern, with those least concerned about their classroom discipline averaging over one standard deviation less usage of the Nonproductive style than those most concerned.

Discussion.

Teachers' current and preferred models of discipline

The data reported earlier support an argument that teachers are predominantly employing models of Control, with some usage of Management and Influence. The findings also reflect a desire by teachers to decrease their dependence on a search for student obedience and to increase their reliance on the alternative approaches. The tension between current and preferred discipline practice is generally not of substantial concern to teachers although those for whom the gap is largest report most stress. As suggested earlier, teachers support for Control may relate to an immediate need for order in the classroom. In contrast, their
desire to increase usage of models of Management and Influence may be a product of their concern for the inculcation of responsibility and self-discipline in students. Such a position would be consistent with the increasing interest in the relationship between schooling and the development of appropriate citizenship attitudes and skills. In various countries, there is talk of the need for school curriculum to facilitate a sense of democratic responsibility in students (Kennedy, 1996; Print, 1995; Anderson et al, 1997; Bickmore, 1997). The general basis of concern is the realisation that schools could do more to promote a sense of student self-discipline and to facilitate the development of democratically responsible values (Osborne, 1995).

Teachers' Coping Styles

Previous research which has aimed at characterising teachers' coping styles has identified either 2 styles (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), 3 styles (Kyriacou, 1980; Green and Ross, 1996), 4 styles (Latack and Havlovic, 1992), or 5 styles (Dewe, 1985). This study provides part support for the 4 style categorisation proposed by the developers of the CSA (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1997). In doing so it highlights the developing awareness of the usefulness of dividing emotion-focused coping strategies into those which attempt to share the concern and to gain emotional support, and those which are potentially maladaptive (Stanton et al, 1994).

In this study, three problems with the emotion and problem focussed dichotomy emerged when attempting to apply it to the 19 strategies measured by the CSA. The first is conceptual in that the area of emotion focussed coping includes conceptually conflicting coping strategies. For example, consciously block out the concern and wishfully thinking of how things will work out well, or keeping the problem to oneself and seeking social support from others.

The remaining 2 difficulties are empirical manifestations of the conceptual problem outlined above. First, to talk empirically of emotion focussed coping using the CSA is to add the effects of opposing variables, thereby disguising their effects. Secondly, comparisons of subsamples by reference to emotion focussed coping results in Type I errors of another sort. For example, in this investigation, male teachers are more likely than female teachers to ignore their inability to discipline classes as they would like. However female teachers are more likely to seek social support. Consequently, any addition of these 2 strategies as part of an emotion focussed coping score disguises real differences.

There are some styles of coping similar to those reported in this study in the research literature. For example, Gaziel (1993) bases the development of some very similar styles on an integration of the emotion and problem coping dichotomy of Folkman and Lazarus (1984) and the cognitive appraisal and situation management dichotomy of Moos and Billing (1982). Unfortunately however, no indicators of reliability are reported, so it is difficult to assess the level of empirical support for such a conceptualisation. Similarly, Latack and Havlovic (1992) conceptually generate 4 approaches by considering the interaction of the problem and emotion focused dimension with a cognitive versus behavioral response.
Another, more recent, attempt empirically identifies styles similar to those discussed in this paper. In their factor analytical investigation into the coping styles of teachers, Green and Ross (1996) present an impressive argument in support of 3 styles which they call problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance. In summarising their results they state "overall, our results supported the conclusion held by some researchers........ that avoidant coping strategies tend to be maladaptive across many situations" (p. 324). To the extent that the avoidance coping style approximates what the CSA defines as a non productive one, it would appear that the situation of being unable to discipline students in the way you would wish is one of those situations.

It is clear from the findings of this study that teachers generally cope productively with the stress of being unable to produce self-defined best practice in the area of classroom discipline. In doing so they generally rely most on a range of productive strategies they recognise as the most helpful. It is also clear however that those teachers who are most stressed are more likely to include in their coping repertoire maladaptive strategies which may contribute to, or at least maintain their high levels of stress. This may be happening because such dysfunctional strategies undermine or negate the benefits that accrue from the use of more adaptive strategies such as being problem focussed and keeping fit and relaxed. The more stressed teachers are also more likely to get sick in response to their concern. It is of relevance to note that this occurs despite the fact that they are using a range of productive strategies as often as their less concerned peers. Further, although teachers generally appraise dysfunctional strategies such as Selfblame and Keepself as rarely useful, a sizable minority continue to use them.

In summary of the gender related findings it can be argued that female teachers' greater likelihood of sharing their concerns with others is not an unprecedented finding, both with regard to adult populations (Etzion and Pines, 1986; Greenglass, 1993) and groups of adolescents (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993).

There would appear to be some implications for teacher support which arise from the findings reported above. The most important of these addresses the likelihood that teachers experiencing the most discipline-related stress potentially exacerbate matters by not letting others know about the stress. A number of studies have cited the causal relationship which exists between teacher isolation, and teacher stress and burnout (Hollingsworth, 1990; Strarnaman and Miller, 1992). It is not only colleagues who can be of assistance by sharing the concern. Consequently, there are many relevant educators highlighting the importance of peer and administrative support as one of the significant means of coping with job stress (Scaros, 1981; McGrath, 1995; Luckner, 1996).

One recent piece of research (Hart et al, 1995), underscores the value of teacher support by reporting the results of an investigation involving over 4000 Australian teachers in 32 primary and 52 secondary schools. These teachers were involved in discussions leading to the development and adoption of a schoolwide discipline approach. Even though the teachers in their evaluation study reported, on average, as much student misbehaviour as ever, as a result of feeling supported by their peers, "student misbehaviour is not overtly stressful for most teachers" (p 44). Consequently it can be argued that even when student misbehaviour
disrupts teachers' attempts to instruct students, the teachers' level of stress is reduced when they feel part of, and supported by their community.

Finally, in addition to providing support for teachers experiencing stress from discipline related concerns it would be valuable to provide staff development of two kinds. The first could focus on reducing the perceived element of risk for teachers interested in involving students in classroom discipline decision making by adequately preparing them through professional development. Such activities could include time for teacher reflection, role plays, the development of skills, such as the issuing of reality checks to students and the conduct of classroom meetings, and input sessions which link educational and disciplinary theory and classroom practice. As an initial step in encouraging teachers to take the risks associated with conducting classroom meetings, a number of relatively insignificant issues, which need to be determined, could be identified (for example, how students enter and leave the room, whether they can chew gum at school, and the composition of learning groups). Such minor issues could form the focus for initial class discussions so that teachers could gain confidence with the process before tackling more substantive classroom management issues.

The second focus for staff development could be the provision of experiences capable of ensuring that teachers reflect upon the usefulness of, and thereby reduced reliance on, nonproductive coping behaviour. The labelling of strategies such as Ignoring the problem, Self-blame and Tension reduction as nonproductive stems not only from the findings of prior research (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991). It can be based on teachers' own appraisal of respective strategies' usefulness as reported in this study. Consequently reflection by teachers on such coping responses together with discussions of alternative strategies may be of great assistance in reducing their usage of what can generally be described as maladaptive or dysfunctional strategies. The opportunity for, and potential usefulness of, such reflection has already been argued for both experienced (Woodhouse et al, 1985) and beginning teachers (Esteve and Frachia, 1986).
References


Hollingsworth, P. M. (1990) Reading teacher burnout and stress. Reading Improvement. 27(3):196-199

Ingersoll, R. (1996). Teachers' decision-making power and school conflict Sociology of Education. 68 (2), April, 159-176.


