

Does the Use of Conscious Discipline in Early Childhood Special Education Provide Emotional Support
to the Teachers and Instructional Staff, as well as the Students?

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of Conscious Discipline in an early childhood special education program provided positive social emotional support to the teachers and instructional staff as well as students. The measurement tool, a survey using a Likert scale was, distributed to 20 staff members at a separate public school in Baltimore County, Maryland; 16 surveys were returned. This researcher reviewed the findings to determine if Conscious Discipline had an impact on staff members social-emotional well-being and their feeling of connectedness with students. The results indicated that implementing Conscious Discipline does have a positive effect on staff members as only responses of *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, and *Neutral* were reported. Responses also targeted specific tenants of Conscious Discipline and how it supported a feeling of connectedness to students, staff members as only responses of *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, and *Neutral* were reported. Further research needs to be conducted to examine specifically how implementing Conscious Discipline supports the social-emotional well-being of staff members and how that relates to connectedness with students in an early childhood special education program.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gauge the impact that the implementation of Conscious Discipline has on the overall social-emotional well-being of educators working with students who receive special education services as well as those who do not.

Overview

In today's society young children are exposed to the ongoing media cycle, changing social climate, and instability of the world around them; these factors are associated with trauma (Bailey, 2015). Trauma comes from many sources and can be personally experienced or vicariously experienced. The role of educators (teachers, instructional assistants, therapy providers, and administrators) is changing as well. Educators now provide increased levels of social-emotional support to children in the classroom. Society is now addressing mental health issues in a positive manor and recognizing that social-emotional skills can be taught through interactions with others (adults and peers). The way adults deal with trauma directly correlates with the way that children in their care deal with trauma. One way to ensure students are able to effectively cope with trauma is to help them develop their abilities to regulate their emotions. This is the key to the success of students building resilience, so that they can deal with the everchanging world around them.

Statement of the Problem

The problem for this study is to determine if Conscious Discipline has a positive impact on the mental well-being of the educators implementing the strategies and whether these same educators believe that Conscious Discipline is positively impacting the students. The students in this study range from age appropriate cognitive abilities to students with physical and cognitive

impairments. Therefore, meeting the needs of all the students can place high physical and emotional demands on the instructional staff. The implementation of Conscious Discipline has been happening for three years at this study site, and during this time the staff has been provided monthly ongoing trainings.

Hypothesis

Since this study used a survey research design that was descriptive in nature, no hypothesis was formulated.

Definition of Key Terms

Caregiver Fatigue, a condition where mental and physical exhaustion is present and can lead to further mental health issues.

Likert Scale, a measurement instrument in which individuals respond to a series of statements by indicating levels of agreement using ranked categorical response with each statement.

Resilience, being able to recover emotionally from a difficult situation, or to handle a stressful situation.

Self-Regulation, is the process of taking control and evaluating one's own learning and behavior.

Students with Severe Disabilities, are students who have cognitive limitations that prevent them from participating in a general education setting, and require specialized instruction in a public-separate school.

Survey, a list of questions aimed at extracting data from a particular group of people.

Social-Emotional, this refers to one's ability to regulate their emotions during daily interactions with others and ability to form positive rewarding relationships.

Trauma, can be more than just physical; it can be emotional as well, experienced directly by the person or secondary from witnessing or hearing about deeply distressing or disturbing situations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What is Conscious Discipline?

Conscious Discipline, is a trauma-informed, brain-based self-regulation program rooted in neuroscience, child development research, and psychology. Conscious Discipline teaches adults to foster safety and how to create meaningful connections between people (adults and children), unleashing the ability to learn and problem-solve. Both children and adults learn to manage their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors which empowers them to reach their goals. By creating meaningful connections and addressing the needs of both the educators and the students Conscious Discipline provides a positive mental health support to everyone involved. Creating trusting positive relationships and diminishing the use of external rewards and punishments allows for children to develop self-regulation skills and problem-solving skills (Bailey, 2015). There are three core components of Conscious Discipline: a) safety, b) connection, and c) problem-solving. Each component lies within everyday interactions; this means that this is an integrated method of teaching social emotional regulation skills.

The first core component of safety addresses the school community creating a safe place both physically and emotionally for students to learn and for adults to work. The second component of connection is creating compassion for those in the school family, teaching children to engage in healthy conversation about relationships and helping to change the perception of conflict. Conflict is a useful teaching tool to teach problem solving and self-regulation skills. The third core component is problem-solving. Changing how conflict is viewed and responded to provide students and adults with the ability to grow their resilience (ability to adapt to situations as they are happening). Each of the components is associated with a part of the brain and different brain states (survival state takes place in the brain stem, emotional state takes place

in the mid-brain, and executive state takes place in the frontal lobe); as an adult interacting with children, it is critical that there is an understanding of how the brain processes information (Bailey, 2015). Using the knowledge of how the brain processes information, trauma, and emotions is an integral part of Conscious Discipline. Appropriate application of the Conscious Discipline techniques promotes healthy social emotional development for children and adults.

The Importance of Conscious Discipline and Other Related Strategies in Providing Emotional Support to Students and Educators

There are several social emotional learning support programs of thinking that can be used with students of all ages. Three of the most popular are; a) Conscious Discipline, b) Mindfulness and c) Restorative Practices. All have similarities and differences in providing emotional support to educators and students. Conscious Discipline is brain based and trauma informed rooted in science and child development, providing clear interventions on how to change interactions to promote positive emotional support for adults and children (Baily, 2015). Mindfulness is based more on a mind-body connection, relating actions and purpose within the individual in the school setting, for both adults and children (Eva & Thayer, 2017). Restorative practices are more focused on social responsibility, creating social connectedness by providing proactive and reactive responses that promote healthy relationship building among those in the school community (Macready, 2009). All of these interventions promote healthy relationship building and positive interactions between students and adults as well as the creation of a positive school community.

The use of Conscious Discipline supports the children and adults in the educational setting by giving guidelines of expectations that are clear and appropriate for the students. By providing continuous training to the adults who are implementing Conscious Discipline they will

continue to hone their craft and ability to support children in learning how to positively regulate themselves (Finn, 2016). Conscious Discipline provides the adults with techniques to regulate themselves before trying to help a student in need of guidance. As the adult becomes conscious of one's responses to a situation and pauses before responding to the situation, the adult can clearly see what support to provide to the child to help foster the development of resilience (Bailey, 2015). Using the techniques provided by Conscious Discipline adults change their mindset and it becomes a part of how they manage stress in their own lives providing positive ways to deal with stressful situations.

The use of Mindfulness techniques in the educational setting promotes a mind-body connection within the individual which then spreads to the school community. Mindfulness curricula promotes that adults in the educational setting have their own individual practice of Mindfulness to aid in stress reduction, so they are better able to set the tone in the classroom. By using Mindfulness techniques adults in the educational setting can be more responsive and less reactive, focused, and less stressed as they are better managing their own emotional state. Mindfulness activities include, a) yoga, b) breathing to calm oneself, c) meditation, and d) organization of personal space. Mindfulness can be more focused on the adults in the educational setting. By changing their mindset, it will in turn improve the adult student relationship promoting a more positive educational setting (Eva & Thayer, 2017). In studies where, whole school Mindfulness trainings took place, researchers found that both students and adults had lower stress levels and more positive outlooks on situations (Van der Gucht et al., 2018). Mindfulness can be used in a full school approach or in a teacher centered model both have shown to provide a positive impact on adult/student relationships in the educational setting. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce the effects of self-directed critical thinking which directly

decreases depression, anxiety and stress within the students and adults in schools where Mindfulness is being implemented (Van der Gucht et al., 2018).

Restorative Practices are rooted in restorative justice (from the criminal justice system) and adapted to use in the educational setting; with the goal of promoting social equality and connectedness within the school community (McCluskey, et al., 2008). The use of dialogue to diffuse a situation is key to Restorative Practice; by providing adults and students with dialogue scaffolding to develop their reactive and proactive dialogue; to create a positive conversation about a stressful situation (Macready, 2009). As the stress levels of adults and students within the school setting continue to escalate, due to increasing performance standards and decreasing scores, finding the balance using Restorative Practices can provide stress reduction in the school community (McCluskey, et al., 2008). Restorative Practices can use a series of meetings with the people involved and at times a mediator to promote positive dialogue and collaborative problem solving to address the issue and find a resolution (Gregory, et al., 2018). Restorative Practices aim at giving a voice to the victim in the situation by consulting with them first before discussing the situation with the aggressor (Macready, 2009). There are many facets to the use of Restorative Practices in the educational setting, thus proper implementation and clarification of expectations is necessary for an intervention of this nature to work in an educational setting.

It is important to use strategies like Conscious Discipline, Mindfulness, and Restorative Practices to create a positive working and learning environment, where adults and children feel that they can be open to discuss their emotional well-being in a safe place. The expectations for adults and children are ever changing with an increase in workload for all. Creating an environment that also nurtures emotional regulation is key to the success of the children and the adults. Teaching children how to appropriately deal with their emotions and learn to be part of a

community is a need that has been recognized by society as a necessity in schools. Teaching children to talk about their feelings and identify feelings so that they can positively emotional self-regulate is part of being an effective member of society. With heightened awareness of mental health issues, using positive emotional support strategies in educational setting should provide support to the children and the adults within the school community in order to thrive.

Implementing Conscious Discipline and How It Changes Educator's Perspective on Student Behavior and Providing Support

Implementing Conscious Discipline requires a paradigm shift in thinking for educators and the school community. It is transformational process that all adults within the school must go through in order for there to be lasting behavioral change. Changing from a system of dominance, rules that govern behavior and viewing conflict as something that interrupts the learning process. To a system that teaches controlling ourselves helps others, connectedness governs behavior and views conflict as an opportunity to teach important social skills (Bailey, 2015). Conscious Discipline requires the adults in the educational setting stop and collect themselves before reacting or intervening in a situation with children (unless there is eminent danger). Implementing Conscious Discipline takes training and support from administration. The administration needs to have a solid foundation in the core principles (Conscious Discipline Training 1), subscribe to continued training about the many facets of Conscious Discipline and commit to the journey of implementation across the school. This journey of implementation should include providing training to everyone who comes in contact with students throughout the day (Finn, 2016).

In the last few decades education has changed as the curricula has increased in difficulty, family structures have changed, and with the increased demands on educators; the one thing that

has not changed is classroom management strategies (Caldarella et al., 2012). As an educator, changing from the traditional mindset of classroom management can be difficult, and implementing Conscious Discipline is something that takes time and understanding or it will not be effective (Finn, 2016). Implementing Conscious Discipline and providing support to the adults in the educational setting is crucial to the success of the adults which then produces successful students. When the adult in the educational setting is going through the change in mindset it can be difficult and this is why it is so important to have good support from administration as well as other trained staff in the school: Conscious Discipline promotes “School Family,” this is important for the adults as much as it is for the students (Bailey, 2015). Conscious Discipline requires the adult to become aware of one’s own emotional state and what that brings to the classroom, as a teacher cannot teach what one does not know how to do (Caldarella et al., 2012). When teachers receive training on Conscious Discipline it is in stages as the expectation is that great change does not happen over-night, and training happens in a logical order. Most adults receiving training feel more connected with their peers, are more open about their feelings, and looking to support each other in the growth of their Conscious Discipline techniques. By creating connectedness among the adults in the educational setting, positive supports for social emotional health among the adults is created and then carries through to interactions with the students. Using Conscious Discipline strategies can help educators see what is truly on students minds when they are at school, learning this information from students leads to increased teacher empathy for situations, and makes teachers more conscious of how they handle situations with students. Teachers also state that once they have subscribed to the core beliefs and had the mindset shift, they are more in control of their own lives outside of the educational setting as well (Finn, 2016).

It is important to incorporate positive social-emotional strategies into early childhood education/special education because providing this type of support to children at a young age will promote building resilience in children. Teaching children the techniques to deal with their emotions in a positive manner builds resilience and positive social-emotional development. By providing a safe educational setting, with staff who are well trained in the tenets of Conscious Discipline, young children that struggle with emotional regulation can learn to be successful (Bailey, 2015). Children show strong interest in their communities and family relationships at a young age, so it is important as educators that we provide support to promote positive social skills and self-regulation (Hedges et al., 2018). Children are being exposed to more diversity within their educational setting and communities, it is critical that they are provided with positive social-emotional support as well as an education that provides varied means of expression (art, movement, language, etc.). Using positive social-emotional development strategies in early childhood classrooms provides novice teachers with support in classroom management (Haslip & Gullio, 2018).

As the global community changes and children are exposed to more information at a young age it is important to provide support in the development of positive social-emotional skills so that they may handle the information and feel included in the community. In order to provide the proper social-emotional supports to students it is important to know that trauma comes from first-hand and second-hand sources. The first-hand sources of trauma could include but are not limited to child abuse, loss of a parent, divorce, and poverty. The second-hand sources of trauma could be but are not limited to the television, social media, community incidents (riots, school shootings, and child abductions) and events that occur around the world (earthquakes, flooding, typhoons); children are not prepared to deal with this information and it

causes trauma that teachers and educational staff need to be prepared to provide support to students (Urban, 2015). Using Conscious Discipline can provide the tools to students to help them engage in conversations and identify how they are feeling so they can get the social-emotional support that they need.

How the use of Conscious Discipline is Making a Positive Impact for Educators and Students

The use of Conscious Discipline in the early childhood education setting has provided the adults with a support system within the school and provided a new sense of purpose to the education being provided. When educators take the time to stop and regulate themselves before reacting to a situation this carries over into their home life and community life providing a greater understanding for those around them (Finn, 2016). As an adult in an educational setting that is transitioning to the use of Conscious Discipline the following skills are necessary: increasing empathy, being assertive, becoming skilled in encouragement, learning to compose ones-self, providing meaningful choices, using positive intent to see the best in others, and learning that consequences does not mean punishment. The before mentioned skills will lead to better overall health and well-being for the adults and the children in the educational setting (Bailey, 2015). The overall school climate shows change after the implementation of Conscious Discipline, the creation of the “School Family” provides a safe place for adults and students to grow and develop their social-emotional well-being (Finn, 2016). As the changes occur it is important to remember that Conscious Discipline is a journey for adults, changing the mindset and honing the craft takes time; in the long run the results are positive for the adults and the students (Bailey, 2015).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The design of this study was descriptive. Staff members' perceptions of the impact of Conscious Discipline on their social-emotional well-being was measured by staff responses to a Likert scale survey; the survey also included a section for comments. The scale used had 10 statements and participants were asked to choose one of the following responses: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree*. The data received from the survey was analyzed to record the educational staff members' perceptions of how Conscious Discipline is affecting their resilience at work and outside of work, and determine if any trends were evident.

Participants

Convenience sampling was used for this study at a public school placement separate school for children with special needs in Baltimore County, Maryland. The survey was administered to a group of educators that included: four Teachers, six Para-educators, eight Related Service Providers (Occupational Therapists (2), Physical Therapists (2), Speech Language Therapists (2), Assistive Technology Specialists (1) and Orientation & Mobility Specialist (1)), and two Administration staff of an early childhood special education center; in the end 16 of 20 surveys were returned. In this center the students range from typically developing to students with a variety of special needs including multiple impairments. The students range in age from three years old through kindergarten. The team of educators consists of an even mix of veterans (five or more years) and novices (less than five years). This center has been fully implementing Conscious Discipline for three years and the staff receives ongoing training.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a survey (Appendix A) that included statements about how the implementation of Conscious Discipline has provided emotional support to the educators implementing the tenants of the program and how Conscious Discipline provides a way for students and educators to connect and learn together. The purpose of the survey was to gain information from the educators using Conscious Discipline and how it affects their ability to cope with the stress of educating students with special needs. The survey targeted each staff member's interpretation of how using Conscious Discipline supports their emotional well-being, ability to connect with students, and examines specific tenants of Conscious Discipline as a means of support. The survey consisted of 10 statements that the educators were asked to reply using a Likert Scale of *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree*; the survey also included a place for educators to write open comments. The goal of this survey was to determine what, if any tenants of Conscious Discipline most support the emotional well-being of educators and their ability to connect with students.

Procedure

During Fall of the 2017 - 2018 school year, the Early Childhood Program staff decided to fully implement Conscious Discipline. Conscious Discipline takes time and understanding to implement and an intensive training was provided to the educators prior the students return to school. Conscious Discipline was designed by Dr. Becky Bailey; it is a trauma informed and brain based instructional method to help teach children how to become resilient. The physical and educational needs of the students enrolled at this center are dynamic which creates a high stress work environment and can make it difficult to educate the students. Conscious Discipline offers a shift in thinking about how to approach education focusing more on the soft skills (social

interactions, emotional regulation, and connectedness), with the academic outcomes increasing based on the students and staff building resilience and meaningful relationships. In the process of the implementation of Conscious Discipline, several parent events were hosted to encourage carryover at home and provide support for what is happening at school. This is an ongoing process and staff has a minimum of one professional development a month and parents are offered workshops quarterly.

In order to gather information on how the implementation of Conscious Discipline is impacting educators' and students' resilience in the early childhood education center at a public-separate school in Baltimore County for children with special educational needs, this survey was administered. An opening letter (Appendix B) was included with the survey to describe the purpose and procedure. The researcher administered the survey during the third quarter of the 2019-20 school year. The data was collected, organized, and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of Conscious Discipline on the social emotional well-being of the educators implementing the tenants. The research findings are presented in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Below, are a series of tables and graphs that represent the response data broken down by perception of the effectiveness of Conscious Discipline on staff members' well-being, and perception of what techniques are most effectively helping staff connect with students. Table 1 shows the statements staff were asked to respond to regarding Conscious Discipline.

Table 1*List of Statements*

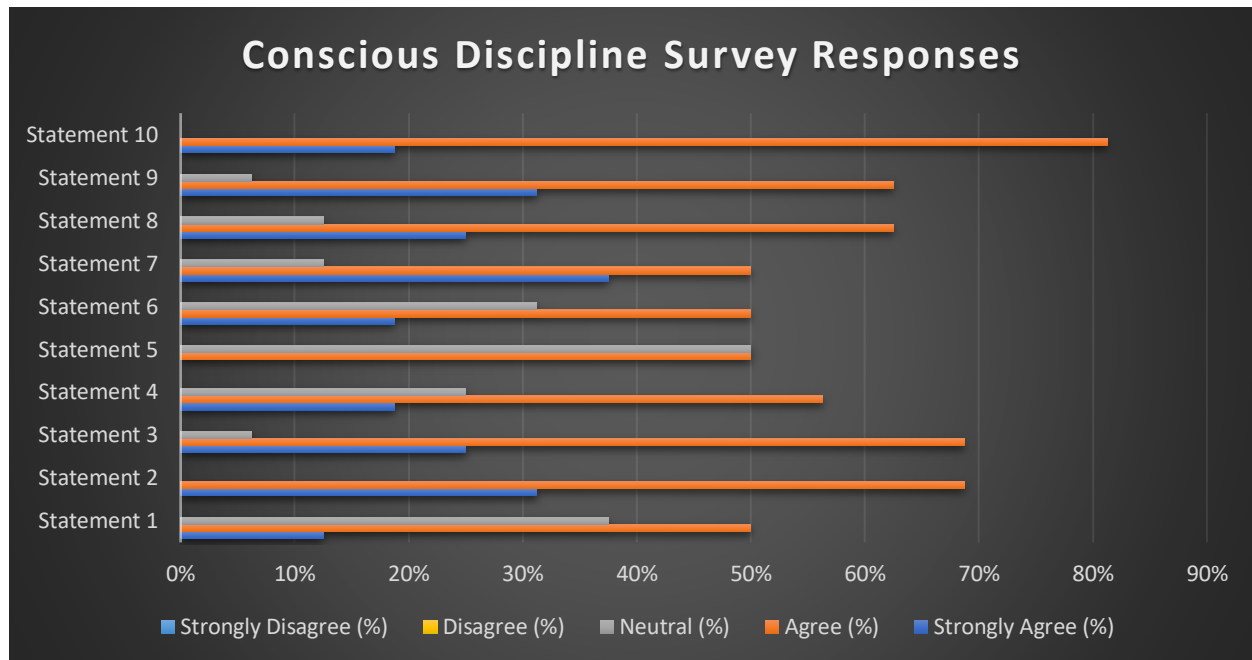
Statement 1	Since implementing Conscious Discipline, I feel more resilience during my workday.
Statement 2	Teaching students Conscious Discipline techniques provide me with coping strategies I can use outside of work.
Statement 3	I find myself feeling more emotionally supported and connected to my students because of Conscious Discipline.
Statement 4	My ability to regulate my personal emotions in stressful situations at work has improved due to using conscious Discipline strategies.
Statement 5	Using <i>Brain Smart Start</i> activities helps me to prepare for teaching students.
Statement 6	Using <i>I Love You Rituals</i> helps me create a more positive relationship with the students.
Statement 7	Using the <i>Language of Safety</i> has helped to create an environment of respect between staff and students.
Statement 8	Using <i>Positive Intent</i> , helps to shift my thinking about a situation and provides a positive outlook.
Statement 9	Providing <i>Positive Choices</i> for students has helped me to maintain a positive structure within my workday.
Statement 10	Providing <i>Encouragement</i> to students has helped me to become a more positive person during my workday.

Figure 1 shows the staff members response percentage to each of the statements from Table 1 based on the strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree scale. The

survey results only rendered responses that were strongly agree, agree, or neutral; there were no responses for disagree or strongly disagree. Statement one referred to staff members' resilience due to implementing Conscious Discipline strategies: 13% strongly agreed, 50% agreed and 38% responded neutral to the statement. Statement two referred to staff members' using Conscious Discipline strategies outside of the workday: 31% strongly agreed and 69% agreed. Statement 3 contained two parts and referred to staff members feeling more emotional supported and connected to the students due to implementing Conscious Discipline: 25% strongly agreed, 69% agreed, and 6% responded neutral. Statement 4 asked if staff members found it easier to regulate themselves now that they are implementing Conscious Discipline in stressful situations at work: 19% strongly agreed, 56% agreed, and 25% responded neutral. Statement 5 asked if using *Brain Smart Start* activities helps staff members prepare for teaching students: 50% agreed and 50% responded neutral. Statement 6 referred to the use of *I Love You Rituals* and creating a better connection with students: 19% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, and 31% responded neutral. Statement 7 asked if using the *Language of Safety* promotes an environment of respect between staff and students: 38% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, and 13% responded neutral. Statement 8 referred to using *Positive Intent* to help to shift the staff members thinking about a situation and to see a positive outlook: 25% strongly agreed, 63% agreed, and 13% responded neutral. Statement 9 asked if by using *Positive Choices* staff members felt that this technique helped to maintain positive structure: 31% strongly agreed, 63% agreed, and 6% responded neutral. Statement 10 referred to the use of *Encouragement* with students has helped the staff members to be a more positive person during the workday: 19% strongly agreed and 81% agreed.

Figure 1

Conscious Discipline Survey Responses



These findings and their connection to prior research, current practices, and future implications for education will be discussed in Chapter V. The results of the data collected indicate that further research is necessary in the implementation of Conscious Discipline with students with special needs and how it affects the well-being of the staff members implementing the tenants.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine if implementing Conscious Discipline with early childhood special needs students had an impact on the overall social-emotional well-being of the staff members and the staff members' abilities to create deeper emotional connections with students to foster learning. To assess the implementation of Conscious Discipline and the impact of its tenants on staff members working in a public school placement separate school for children with special needs a convenience sample was used. This descriptive study used a 10-statement survey with a five response Likert scale to prompt staff members responses, as well as an open comments section. Based on the data collected, quantitative results are presented, interpreted, and discussed. Due to the nature of the descriptive research method, there was no hypothesis tested in this study.

Overall the findings showed that implementing Conscious Discipline has had a positive effect on the staff and their ability to connect with students. A few staff members responded with open comments on their feelings toward implementing Conscious Discipline and how it affects their social- emotional well-being. Staff members reported that they feel how they interact with students, parents and other staff has become more positive and provides a feeling of emotional support during the workday as well as outside of work, due to reduced stress at work. Comments from staff stated several Conscious Discipline techniques have carried into their personal lives as they now use these strategies with their children and loved ones. Conscious Discipline has provided staff with tools to change their mindset as to how a situation is viewed and how-to best support children in labeling and recognizing their emotions to improve social emotional regulation. The information staff members reported implies that they are feeling

better equipped to handle emotional situations with the students and provide the appropriate support.

Implication of the Results

The findings of this study show that there is some connection to the use of Conscious Discipline as related to staff member social-emotional well-being and their feeling of connectedness with students. None of the staff members answered *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree* to the statements. This shows that staff is either neutral or feels that Conscious Discipline has impacted their social-emotional well-being or connectedness with students. In all 10 statement responses 50% or more of the respondents agreed that Conscious Discipline and its tenants are providing social emotional support as well as increased connectedness with students.

Statements one through four asked about staff members' social-emotional well-being at work and outside of work, the implications of their responses follow. Statement one asked if staff members felt more resilient during their workday since implementing Conscious Discipline 13% strongly agreed and 50% agreed for a total of 63% of staff members feeling more resilient during their work day; implying that staff is feeling more emotionally ready to deal with situations throughout the day. Statement two asked specifically if teaching students Conscious Discipline techniques provides coping strategies that can be used outside of the work day, 31% strongly agreed and 69% agreed; implying that Conscious Discipline is providing social-emotional support to those implementing the tenants with students outside of work. Statement three referred to staff members feeling more emotionally supported and connected to the students because of Conscious Discipline, 25% strongly agreed and 69% agreed for a total of 94% of staff members feeling more emotionally supported and connected with students during their work day; this implies that staff members are feeling emotionally supported and are more available for the

students. Overall the results show that implementing Conscious Discipline has provided some social-emotional support to the staff members as well as it has supported their connection to students.

Statements five through ten of the survey referred to specific tenants of Conscious Discipline and how it supports the outlook, structure, and relationships of staff members and students. When staff members were asked to respond to the use of *Brain Smart Starts* and if it helps to prepare them for teaching it had the highest neutral response at 50% and 50% agreed that it did help prepare them for teaching; this implies that these activities help but are not seen as the most useful tool to prepare for teaching. When responding to the use of *Positive Intent* and providing a shift to a positive outlook on situations, staff members responded that 25% strongly agreed and 63% agreed; implying 85% of staff members feel that *Positive Intent* provides support in order to shift their thinking in a situation. Staff members responded the use of *Encouragement* has helped them to be a more positive person during the work day 19% strongly agreed and 81% agreed; this implies that 100% of the staff feels as if they are more positive people during work, this leads to a healthier work environment and overall well-being. When providing *Positive Choices* for students' staff member feel that it helps to maintain a positive structure throughout the day 31% strongly agreed and 63% agreed, meaning 94% of the staff feels their daily routines and structure are being maintained due to the use of *Positive Choices*.

The findings of this study imply that using Conscious Discipline tenants and techniques provide some level of positive social-emotional support to the staff members during their work day; some staff members reported that Conscious Discipline also carries over into their personal lives. By providing staff members with ongoing training and continual support they will

continue to feel emotionally supported during their work day and increase their connectedness with students. Providing positive social-emotional support increases the overall well-being of the staff members which then provides the students with a positive learning environment.

Theoretical Consequences

There are several theoretical differences between Conscious Discipline and other instructional core values/ behavior management techniques. Traditional behavior management techniques are based on “good and bad,” “right and wrong,” and “control and power”; in all of these situations the student has no ownership of their behavior and how it affects others in the classroom, these systems are built on rewards and punishments (Caldarella, et. al, 2012). Typical behavior management is reactive and generally is based on punishment of the student by the teacher/adult, this leads to a negative perception of the teacher and the student being unavailable to learn (Shook, 2012). Conscious Discipline is based on the adult being present for the students, providing positive social-emotional support, and a safe school environment; this is a departure from traditional behavior management strategies (Bailey, 2015). When traditional methods are used it puts the teacher in power and renders the students powerless; this causes students to have more behavioral issues and less time learning (Shook, 2012). When providing students with more opportunities for success by having them be active in the classroom/ school culture development there is less negative behavioral interactions between students and teachers (Moore Partin, et al., 2010). When students are faced with negative reinforcement or negative attitude they tend to act in a negative manner, meaning they have a poor outlook on school and a lack of desire to learn (McCluskey, et al., 2008). Conscious Discipline challenges traditional thoughts on the teacher student relationship, placing responsibility on both the teacher and the students. Both the McCluskey (2008) and Shook (2012) articles discuss that teacher retention

was low in schools that had students with high behavioral needs and were using traditional methods of student discipline. Conscious Discipline uses methods that have the students and educators working together to address students' needs, providing the staff members with positive emotional support.

Threats to Validity

There are several limitations to this study's validity. The first limitation is the staff members' understanding of the terminology for the survey. For example, using the technical terms for specific tenants of Conscious Discipline could have been misunderstood as this survey was not administered with the researcher present for questioning. Conscious Discipline is used as the all-around model for staff and student behavior at this center. Staff may have forgotten the technical terms for the activities they participate in, this would be an internal threat to validity. This center has several staff that are related service providers and work with other programs, so they may not participate in all activities throughout the day. As a result, they may not use certain tenants that were included on the survey producing another internal threat to validity. Due to the nature of the study, staff member honesty was an internal threat to validity as well. The size and demographic of this study was small and narrowed to a specific field of educators, this means that the results cannot be translated to a larger school or program setting which creates an external threat to validity.

Connections to Previous Research

The findings of this study are connected to and supported by previous research in reference to positive behavior management strategies; however, the majority of the research does not look at how these strategies affect the staff members implementing the programs. This study looked at the social-emotional well-being of the staff members not the students. Caldarella et al.

(2012), completed a study that examined the social validity of Conscious Discipline in a preschool setting, this study asked questions that pertained to the implementation and the effectiveness for the students, the researchers stated that most participants agreed that the program (Conscious Discipline) had a positive effect on them as well as their students. A study completed by Finn (2016), has several teachers stating that their disposition toward teaching became more positive, interactions with staff and students was more positive, and their life outside of work was easier to deal with since implementing Conscious Discipline. Finn's (2016) study also stated that teachers felt empowered and refreshed by a new way to interact with students, giving them a fresh outlook on teaching. As found in these related studies, Conscious Discipline appears to have a positive social-emotional impact on the educators using it in their daily lives.

Implications for Future Research

The ever-changing landscape of teaching and supporting the mental health of educators and students is on the forefront of educational research and formulating best practices. Research pertaining to the mental health of educators and how it affects teaching and learning will continue to be important. Researching specific tenants of Conscious Discipline would produce more information on the most effective tenants for supporting instructional staffs' emotional well-being or help to illuminate training needs of staff. This study could be replicated with a larger group of instructional staff, staff who have been implementing Conscious Discipline for over five years or more, or used as part of a larger study to examine the social-emotional well-being of educators implementing other teaching and learning strategies that promote social-emotional learning; such as Mindfulness, Restorative Practices, or Response To Intervention (RTI). Further research could include looking at different types of teachers and educational staff

in different settings such as, separate day schools, public schools (rural, urban, and suburban), public separate day schools, and private schools.

Conclusion

The researcher found the results of this study to be beneficial and timely. The goal of the research was to evaluate if implementing Conscious Discipline provided positive social-emotional support to the staff members and increased their connectedness with students. The results showed that the majority of staff members are feeling more socially-emotionally supported at work, that using Conscious Discipline tenants outside of work improved their well-being, and an increased connectedness with their students; this implies that the staff and students are more available for learning during the school day and in their personal lives. This research supports that Conscious Discipline has supported staff members in their personal lives by supplying positive strategies to handle difficult situations and a more positive work environment. This implies, that they are taking less stress from their work lives into their personal lives. The research showed that specific activities seemed more helpful in supporting student staff connectedness such as *I Love You Rituals* and *Language of Safety*. Further research is necessary to examine more specifically how the use of Conscious Discipline and the tenants affect staff members social-emotional well-being and if that support increases or decreases more over time.

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APPENDIX A

Please respond to the following 10 statements regarding Conscious Discipline by selecting the one of the following:

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

At the end of the survey please feel free to comment on how you feel Conscious Discipline has affected your emotional well-being.

1. Since implementing Conscious Discipline, I feel more resilience during my work day.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. Teaching students Conscious Discipline techniques provide me with coping strategies I can use outside of work.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I find myself feeling more emotionally supported and connected to my students because of Conscious Discipline.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. My ability to regulate my personal emotions in stressful situations at work has improved due to using conscious Discipline strategies.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Using *Brain Smart Start* activities helps me to prepare for teaching students.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Using *I Love You Rituals* helps me create a more positive relationship with the students.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. Using the *Language of Safety* has helped to create an environment of respect between staff and students.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. Using *Positive Intent*, helps to shift my thinking about a situation and provides a positive outlook.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Providing *Positive Choices* for students has helped me to maintain a positive structure within my work day.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Providing *Encouragement* to students has helped me to become a more positive person during my work day.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

APPENDIX B

This was sent in an email to all of the early childhood staff and a copy was placed on the staff breakroom table.

March 10, 2020

Dear Early Childhood Team,

As you all know I am completing a Master Degree program at Goucher College and I am completing the research portion of my course work in order to graduate in May of 2020. I am researching different aspects of Conscious Discipline and have designed a 10-item survey and a section for comments that I would like for you all to complete. The survey is attached to this email.

There are several options for completion:

- Electronically reply to this email with a completed survey (no anonymity)
- Electronically fill out the survey and print it; then place it in the large green box in the staff lunch room.
- Print the survey, complete it by hand, and place it in the large green box
- Hard copies are available next to the large green box and can be completed by hand and then placed in the box.

I will collect the large green box on 3/17/2020.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this survey and being a part of educational research.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Erica Lynn Drake