Solving Group Discipline Problems Without Coercion: An Approach Based on Attribution Retraining

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to examine the effectiveness of an intervention based on attribution retraining with regards to student misconduct and coercive teacher behavior. An intervention would lead to a sustained decrease in misbehavior and coercive discipline without using any external control systems. In this case study, a male, veteran Grade 8 teacher and his students were involved in a long-lasting conflict characterized by an increase of disruptive student conduct and the teacher's coercive behavior. Inspired by the explanatory model of the *extended symmetrical escalation* (Lapointe, 2003), the researchers developed an intervention using attribution retraining to resolve the problem. Data collected from observations, questionnaires, and interviews indicated that this non-coercive intervention contributed to long-term general improvement of teacher-student relations and behaviors. The results highlight the importance of perceptions within conflicting interactions and lead to recommendations for interventions that could be used to reduce group discipline problems.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom discipline problems have become common, especially in secondary schools (Charles, 2002; Myers & Holland, 2000; Rose & Gallup, 2002). Since adolescents have a group spirit and tend to act collectively, secondary teachers encounter group discipline problems in particular (Emler & Reicher, 1995; Fontana, 1985). Though the large body of research on classroom management provides preventive techniques that teachers can implement (Emmer, Evertson & Worsham, 2000; Kounin, 1970), disruptive behavior still surfaces. Once misbehavior has spread to several students and persists for weeks, what can be done? Research on corrective strategies, especially those aimed at addressing severe group discipline problems, is still too insufficient to fulfill school needs (Estrela, 1994).

When group discipline problems remain unresolved, teacher-student relations degenerate into conflicts which open the door to the *extended symmetrical escalation* (*ESE*). The *ESE* is defined as a circular process of increasingly disruptive group behavior followed by teacher coercive behavior. As this pattern extends in a diffusive way from lesson to lesson, the teacher and disruptive students complain about each other's behavior, and the entire classroom climate becomes affected (Lapointe, 2003). Needless to say, teaching and learning become extremely difficult in this context.

Within the framework of a study on teacher-student relations and classroom management in real settings, we observed two male teachers of English and history respectively and their grade eight students during September, October, and January. From early September, the *ESE* developed between the history teacher and one of his classes. During the first eight weeks of the school year, data collected through observations (in-class and video), interviews, and questionnaires were analyzed in a way that is related to the *constant comparative analysis* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and led to the explanatory model of the *ESE* (Figure 1). The conflicting circle represents long-term teacher-student relations both throughout the *ESE* period and during brief interactions within a lesson. Arrows around the circle show links between the four main elements (teacher coercive behavior, students' perceptions of teacher behavior, students' misbehavior, and teacher perception of students' behavior), with any element on the circle being a point of departure. Generally speaking, disruptive students (pentagon) perceive a causal link from teacher coercion to students' misbehavior, but non-disruptive (quiet) students and teacher (triangle) form the reverse link. It is noteworthy that teacher and students do not tend to clearly conceive the other two elements related to perceptions in the circle (students' perceptions of teacher's behavior and teacher's perception of students' behavior). Peripheral elements (double rectangles) indicate that: 1) previous information about the teacher has an effect on how he is currently perceived by the students; 2) parental support influenced by perceptions of the teacher may facilitate misbehavior; 3) classroom belonging and cohesion tend to reinforce and maintain misbehavior. Further details concerning the development of the *ESE* can be found in

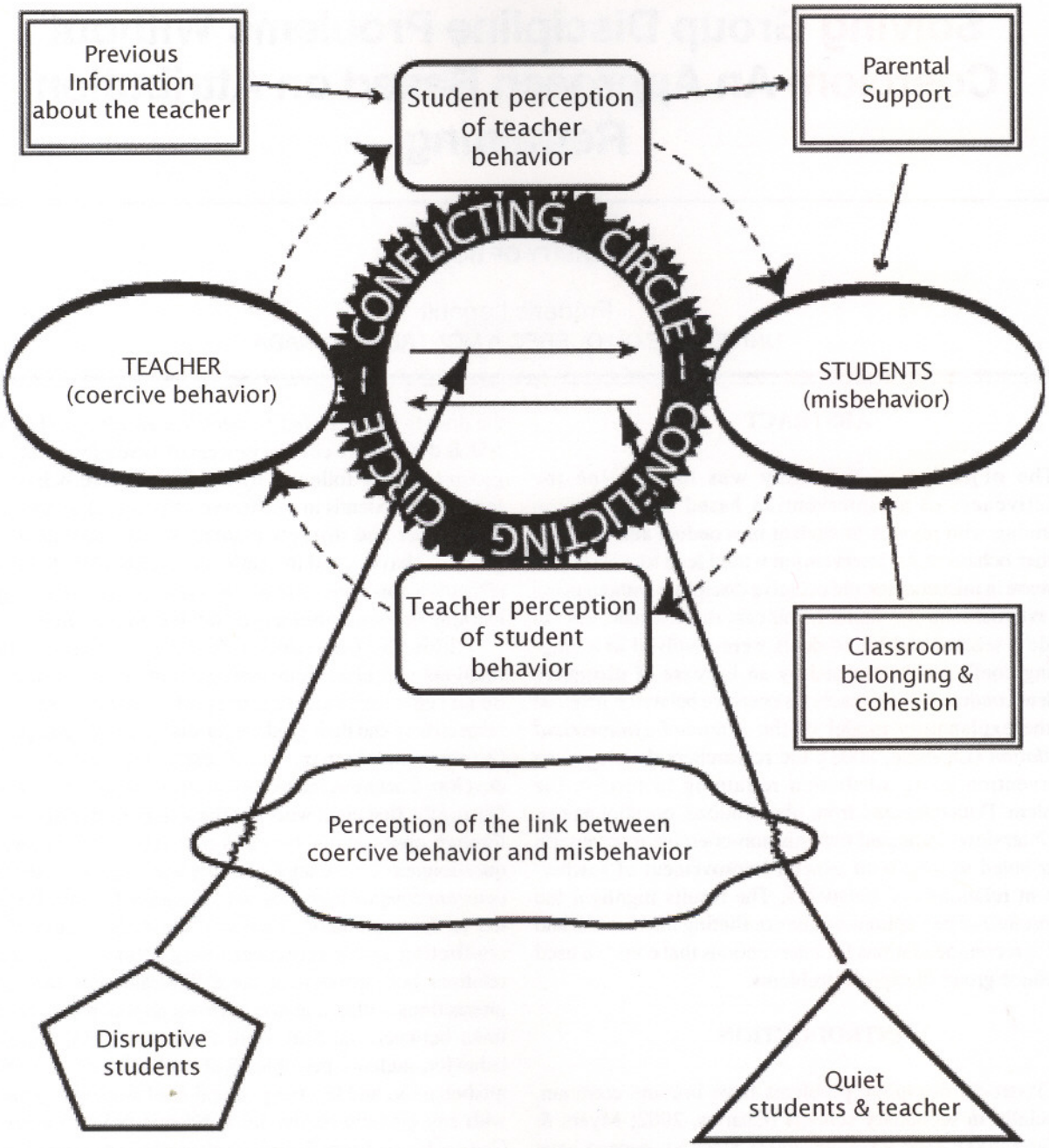

Figure 1

Lapointe (2003).

One cannot totally attribute the *ESE* to either the students' or the teacher's internal characteristics without taking into account the nature of existing teacher-student relations. Even the students who generally misbehaved with most of their other teachers were rather quiet with the English teacher. Conversely, the history teacher had no major discipline problems with his five other classes. Contrary to the history teacher's perceptions, however, some students were satisfied with the *ESE*. Research has shown when certain adolescents become convinced they are not good at learning, or once these students decide they simply don't like school at all, they begin to misbehave in order to satisfy their need for attention and power. Furthermore, they start to act in groups and, thus, incite each other to misbehave even more. In this way, their needs are fulfilled by mutual peer attention (Curwin & Mendler, 1988; Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982; Estrela, 1994). The history teacher had attempted several strategies aimed at restoring better teacher-student relations, such as seeking more opportunities to reinforce good behavior and allowing

students more autonomy and control during classroom activities. Nevertheless, the incidences of misbehavior kept increasing. The focus of this study is to explore strategies that could resolve classroom discipline problems such as the *ESE*.

At the beginning of October (the fifth week of the school year), four students from the *ESE* group complained to the school principal about their peers' misbehavior. Then, the principal met with the entire group, stating that he had received complaints from students and several teachers about discipline problems. He explained that disruptive students would have to improve their conduct, otherwise they would be punished. He set an example by expelling two of them for a few days. Consequently, the students showed an initial decrease in misbehavior, but the following week, discipline problems began to increase once again.

Teachers and principals use punishment systems regularly to handle discipline problems. However, while punishment may sometimes stop misbehavior quickly, it only provides a temporary measure and results in student anger. It diminishes positive attitudes toward school instead of building student self-discipline (Freiberg, 1999). According to Hyman (1997), the more adults use coercive behavior, the less adolescents will cooperate.

After the failure of the principal's tactics, as explained above, we planned an alternate intervention to stop the *ESE*. According to Freiberg (1999, p. 8):

> The research literature on classroom management tends to show that programs that emphasize student self-discipline over external controlling factors including an emphasis on punitive responses to misbehavior show greater promise in improving achievement and learning environments.

Instead of introducing punishment or extrinsic reinforcement systems, the researchers built the intervention directly from the *ESE* model. The model's two fundamental and interrelated characteristics are the circular nature of the process and the contradiction between the teachers' and the disruptive students' perceptions of the cause the *ESE*. These characteristics explain the sustainability of the conflicting situation, but are not explicitly recognized by the individuals involved.

In the presence of punitive or extrinsic reinforcement systems, students' perceptions of the problem generally receive little consideration. The adults only value their own views and believe students fail to acknowledge these views out of bad will. This becomes critical when misbehavior is strongly linked to teacher-student conflicts. According to Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson (1967):

> We can only speculate that at the root of these punctuation conflicts there lies the firmly established and usually unquestioned conviction that there is only one reality, the world as *I* see it, and that any view that differs from mine must be due to the other's irrationality or ill will. So much for our speculation. What we can observe in virtually all these cases of pathological communication is that they are vicious circles that cannot be broken unless and until communication itself becomes the subject of communication, in other words, until the communicants are able to metacommunicate. But to do this, they have to step *outside* the circle...We typically observe in these cases of discrepant punctuation a conflict about what is the cause and what is effect, when in actual fact neither of these concepts is applicable because of the circularity of the ongoing situation. (pp. 95-96)

Therefore, our intervention sought foremost to encourage the students and the teacher to think about their relations and interactions. The erroneous perceptions had to be modified in order to break the conflicting circle. We accomplished this through attribution retraining, a method of intervention in which participants' reorient faulty identification of a problem's cause(s) toward a more skillful processing of the information, allowing for a more accurate recognition of the problem's roots.

Researchers have used attribution retraining in different studies, mainly in areas such as motivation and academic achievement (Försterling, 1985; Menec & Perry, 1995). In these studies, participants identify behaviors considered as undesirable and believed to be caused by specific attributional predispositions. Then, in a training period, individuals learn to attribute the causes of problems more appropriately. For example, students, who previously attributed their failures to low ability, learn to attribute their failures to lack of effort (a controllable attribute) in order to encourage responsibility for shifting their own behaviors toward the desired direction.

According to the attribution theory, an attribution also occurs when an individual assigns a cause to the behavior of others within a social interaction (Weiner, 1992). Within the *ESE* model, evidence connecting the teacher's and the students' attributional biases to the *ESE* suggested that intervention based on attribution retraining could help stop the escalation. In this case, attribution retraining sought to show the participants, especially the disruptive students, that *their own* behavior caused the *ESE*.

Moreover, we situated the intervention in the framework of the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), stating that behavior is usually based on thought and reasoning skills, which are not always well developed or used effectively. Even considering the teacher's and the students' abilities to reason logically, they still either made biased judgments based on inadequate information or failed to consider the full consequences of their behaviors. The task of attribution retraining consisted of helping them to reason effectively by demonstrating the bidirectional links between teacher

coercive behavior and student misconduct in a manner readily understood by both parties.

The objective of the study was to examine the effectiveness of this intervention based on attribution retraining. We would consider the intervention effective if it led to a sustained (i.e. at least two months) decrease in misconduct and coercive behavior without using any external control systems.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This case study is based on data collected from a male teacher of grade eight history and his group of 28 students (12 girls; 16 boys) in a small French-speaking town in Canada. The teacher, a native of France, had taught history for over 20 years in this school. Eight of the students had repeated a year, and two had repeated two years, throughout their schooling. Thus, the sample included students from 13 to 15 years of age.

Description of the Intervention

The intervention with the students lasted one hour and took place in the classroom in late October (at the end of the eighth week of school). Both disruptive and non-disruptive students were present, but the teacher was absent. We played several videotaped examples of student disruption from previous lessons, which allowed everyone to acknowledge the presence of these behaviors with no possibility of denying them. The students first needed to become aware of how their misbehavior could lead the teacher to behave coercively.

However, the videotaping would not properly demonstrate the teacher's coercive actions that occured following the students' disruptive behaviors over a short period of time. Thus, we also found it necessary to use two concrete objects: water (representing misbehavior) and a pitcher (representing the teacher). As the videotape presented each disruptive action, we poured some water into the pitcher. We proceeded until the water overflowed, thus symbolizing the teacher's coercive behavior, which the students had previously considered abrupt and unfounded. From then on, students could reflect on the segment of the conflicting circle they had previously ignored: how the accumulation of disruptive behaviors had a negative effect on the teacher's perception of students and then either made the teacher get angry or incited him to initiate coercive behavior over several weeks.

Furthermore, the demonstration led to discussing student and teacher behaviors and questioning erroneous information about the teacher. This was intended to foster changes in causal attributions by opening the door to the development of a new collective interpretation of various key events which had taken place since the beginning of the school year. With support from the videotape of the intervention with the students, we could show the teacher how the changes had taken place over the period of the taping and, thus, modify his perception of them and change his behavior patterns, beginning with the very next lesson (i.e., eliminate anticipatory control, see Chapman, 1981). No other intervention took place between this intervention and the subsequent data collection in January.

In January, we asked the students one written, multiple-choice question in order to examine each student's understanding of the demonstrated link between misbehavior on videotape and the pitcher of water overflowing. There were three possible answers: 1) *The teacher was not very patient and when he got angry, he could not control himself*; 2) *The accumulation of disruptive behaviors of certain students made the teacher become more and more angry*; 3) *Other*. Twenty-seven students out of 28 responded to the question (one student was absent during the intervention). Also, the instruments described in the following sections were used to collect data before (in October) and after (in January) the intervention.

Observations

We developed a coding system to measure both students disruptive behaviors and teacher use of coercive behavior within classroom interactions. We made systematic video observations during the four lessons just preceding the intervention in October, as well as during four lessons in early January at the exact same hours. We videotaped every lesson and coded them in two teaching contexts exclusively: teacher lecture and seatwork.

Two observers independently coded disciplinary events (antecedent student behavior, teacher reaction and consequence) by means of a grid developed by Lapointe on the basis of in-class observations made during the first two months of the school year. First, observers had to wait until a teacher reaction could be classified in one of nine intervention types gathered in three general categories, from the least to the most controlling according to Wolfgang's teacher behavior continuum (1999): light (use of humor, non-verbal reaction, or questioning), direct ("shhh!", specific instruction, or announcing a consequence) or coercive (application of a consequence, raising the tone in an angry way, or expelling a student). Second, antecedent (student behavior which made the teacher react) was coded: getting up, talking, making the teacher repeat, opposition to the teacher, not working, or "other". Third, the result of the teacher reaction (behavior stops, behavior continues, or student argues with the teacher) was coded. Using Borich's (1990) formula (number of agreements / (n. of agreements + n. of disagreements)), independent observers reached agreements of 88% (antecedents), 82% (reactions) and 88% (consequences).

Questionnaires

Both the teacher and the students measured student behavior. The teacher classified each student in one of four

categories according to his/her behavior: 1) quiet (does not encourage misbehavior); 2) follower (encourages misbehavior, but rarely disrupts); 3) disruptor (encourages misbehavior and sometimes disrupts); 4) troublemaker (often initiates classroom disruption). Each student evaluated his/her own behavior likewise. Students' perceptions of teacher behavior were measured by four subscales of the Questionnaire for Teacher Interaction (Wubbels & Levy, 1993): helping (a =.90), understanding (a =.88), admonishing (a =.84), and dissatisfaction (a =.85). Internal consistency analyses (Cronbach's alpha) included 260 subjects.

Interviews

Ethnographical semi-structured interviews (Tierney, 1991) were conducted. Four students were interviewed in dyads so that they would generate more significant and spontaneous answers from discussions between them and they would more likely enjoy interviewing during lunch time. The first dyad consisted of a girl (Anna) and a boy (Anthony), both classified (given the categories above) as "quiet" by the teacher and themselves. In-class observations also confirmed this classification. The second dyad included two boys: Matthew and Michael. In-class observations soon revealed that these boys presented discipline problems, categorizing them at least under the "disruptor" category if not "troublemaker" before the intervention. Matthew described himself as a "follower" before and after the intervention, but the teacher differed in classifying him under the "troublemaker" category in October. Michael was perceived as a "disruptor" in October and as a "follower" in January by both the teacher and himself. In October, the first dyad was interviewed once and the second twice. Both dyads were interviewed once in January. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. The teacher participated in two twenty-minute interviews in October and one forty-minute interview in January. We asked interviewees to talk about many aspects of classroom life such as classroom climate, disciplinary events, and perceptions of teacher and student behaviors.

RESULTS

Students Understanding of the Intervention

At the beginning of the demonstration, the students expressed scepticism, and many of them questioned the truthfulness of the images they saw. However, they gradually accepted the reality shown by the videotape. After the intervention, we examined students' understanding of the demonstrated link between misbehavior on videotape and the pitcher of water overflowing. Three students out of 27 responded that the teacher was not very patient and when he got angry, he could not control himself, whereas 24 responded that the accumulation of disruptive behaviors caused the teacher's increasing anger. Therefore, it seems that 89% of the students understood the demonstration.

Teacher-Initiated Classroom Modifications

The teacher understood his coercive responses to discipline problems usually did not produce desirable results. After watching the videotape of student reactions, he concluded that his coercive behavior had also led to an increasing *detrimental effect* on teacher-student relations. Thus, in subsequent lessons, he decided to avoid the use of coercive behavior. He also noticed from watching the videotape, how students' attitude had changed. He did not want to miss this opportunity to implement three specific changes for the next lesson. First, students had to remain seated at their desks unless given permission to do otherwise. Second, to help students accept the first change, he allowed students five minutes to take care of various preparations (getting material, sharpening pencils, etc.) at the beginning of each lesson. Therefore, having less need to walk around, the students were (for the most part) seated more quietly and ready to work when the teacher began his lesson. Third, he reassigned desks to break apart the series of networks students had created to facilitate misbehavior throughout the classroom, thus creating a totally different classroom environment. Prior to this intervention, the teacher had only made desk reassignments for one or two disruptive students at the time, which made them angry. This time, a different desk was assigned to each student (disruptive or not) so that disruptive students were seated beside quieter students. Special care was taken to present these three changes to the students so as to support the need for a better functioning classroom and not for a punishment. In January, we asked Matthew and Michael about their satisfaction regarding the three changes initiated:

Michael: So far, it's great.
Interv.: Were you satisfied with the desk reassignment?
Michael: Yes. Desk re-assignment, [the teacher] said: "if you want to change, you just have to come to see me".
Matthew: Yes, but nobody went to see him.
Interv.: Why didn't you ask for a change?
Michael: Because it's going well.
Matthew: It's OK. I've good people around me.
Michael: I wanted to change, but I didn't want to either, because if I had changed, my behavior would have changed, too. What helps me is that my sister [Anna] is now seated next to me. Then, every time I say something, she says: "Shut up, Michael!".

Systematic Observations of Students' and Teacher's Behaviors

Systematic video observations made two months after the intervention showed a decrease in disciplinary events by 41% (October: $M = 49$ events/hour; January: $M = 29$ events/hour). Figure 2 shows antecedent student behavior frequencies before and after the intervention for the three most frequent

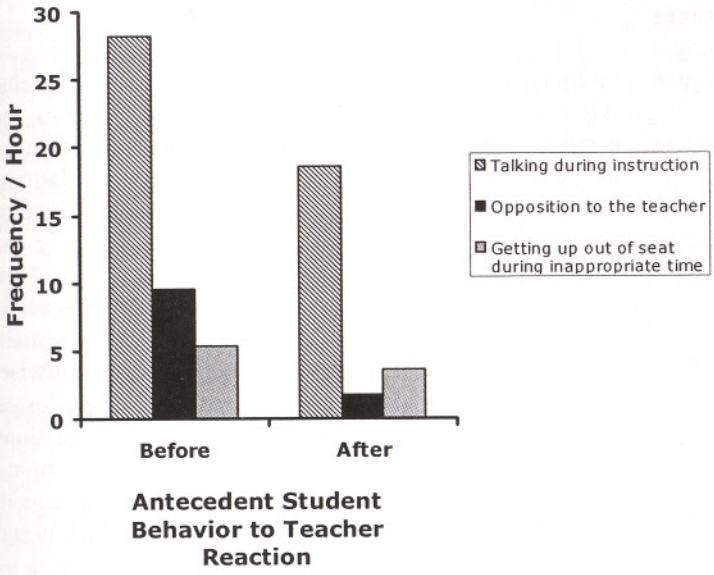

Figure 2

behaviors. Results revealed a decrease in talking (34%), opposition to the teacher (81%), and getting up (33%). By the same token, teacher reaction frequencies also decreased from October to January. Figure 3 shows a decrease in light teacher reactions (50%), direct teacher reaction (32%), and no teacher reactions labelled as "coercive" were observed after the intervention. Figure 4 indicates that the teacher's reactions were more effective as well. Overall, they were effective 41% of the time in October, which increased to 62% in January. Finally, the frequency of the consequence "student argues with the teacher" in response to teacher reaction decreased dramatically from 10 arguments per hour in October to one per hour in January.

Perceptions of Students' and Teacher's Behaviors

Table 1 lists the three types of students' behavior categories. According to both the teacher and the students, about half of the students were categorized as a disruptor or a troublemaker in October. After the intervention, the teacher placed none of these students under these headings, but eight students (29%) considered themselves as a disruptor. On the basis of Wilcoxon's test (Siegel, 1956), results showed improvement in both teacher's perception of students' behavior, z (3.30), $p < .01$, and students' perception of their own behavior, z (2.67), $p < .001$. In addition, students' perceptions of teacher's behavior changed significantly (Table 2). The mean for helping and understanding increased whereas that for admonishing and dissatisfaction decreased.

In October, students from the first dyad described the group's behavior: "It's total chaos!...They talk during teacher's explanations...they come in class noisily and sometimes talk until the teacher gets angry." In January, they described the classroom climate this way:

Anna: Discipline is not so bad. That could still improve a

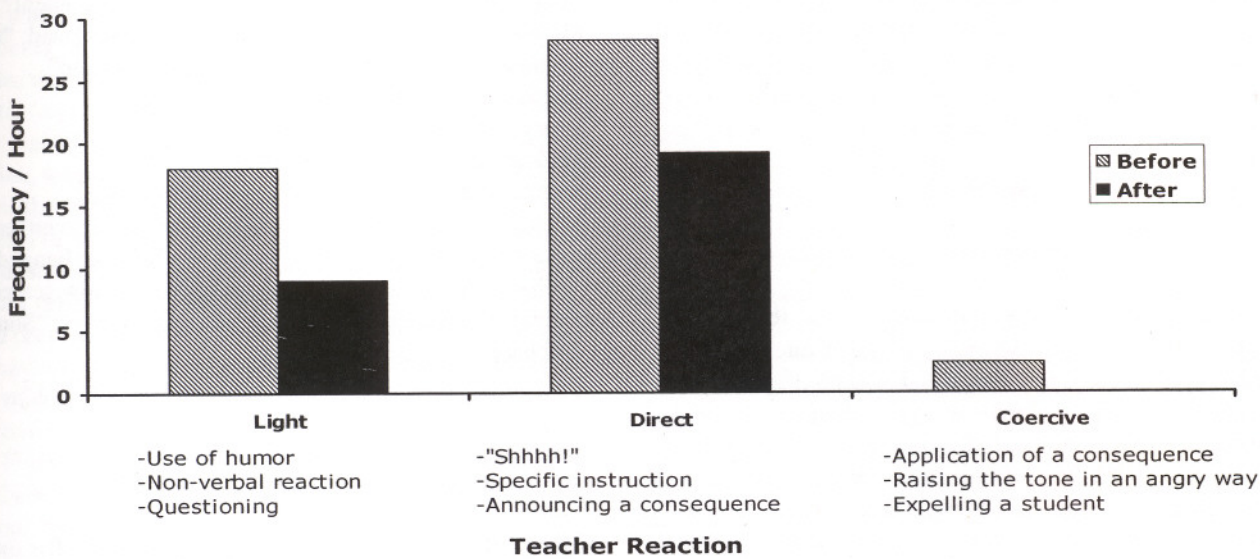

Figure 3

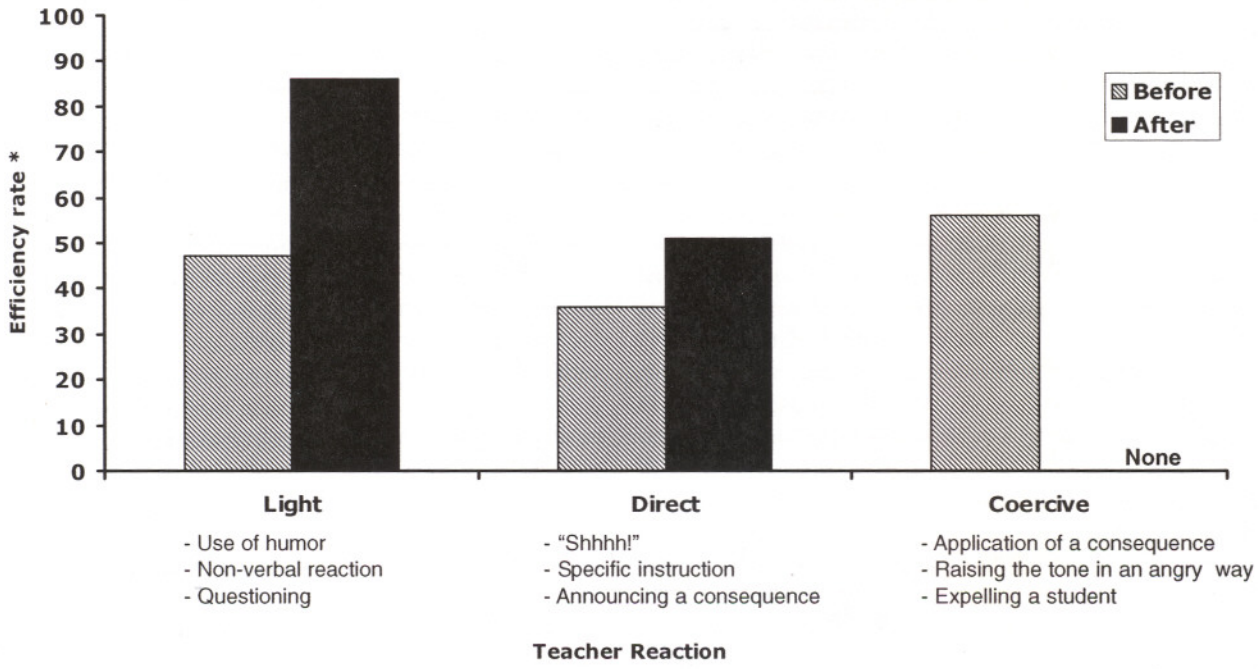

Figure 4

* % of teacher reactions followed by consequence "behavior stops"

little, but compared to the beginning of the year, we made progress. Well, *they* made progress. I count myself among them, but I shouldn't. It's quieter. When [the teacher] marks something on the board they go to get things right away... There are always students who want to show off, but they don't tease him like they used to before. Most of the students act decently.

Anthony: For sure, there are more people behaving well, but for sure, they wanna be clowns, teasing the teacher is funny. They want to show their friends that they are capable.

Anna: It's always the same people in all classes [no matter the teacher].

Anthony: Some don't care about the teacher's feelings. They think about themselves and don't care about anything else...Some seem not so bad because it's not the whole group anymore. They act alone. In history, students don't follow the clowns as easily as before.

Regarding the teacher, "He seems to be in a better mood, less on the edge" said Anna. Anthony added:

> He doesn't get angry like he used to [before the intervention]. It happened once that he took a student to the corridor, to talk to him. The student came back and laughed at him in his back. Because he didn't wanna look like a fool... Finally, he was the fool and not the teacher. Nobody picked on it... it's like the teacher gained a little [too] much power, I guess.

In October, although students from the second dyad used to disrupt the class themselves, they attributed misbehavior to other students using the pronoun "they" ("*They* are talkative... *they* fool around.") or to the teacher ("He keeps on whining, for the pleasure of whining."). In January, we asked them to describe their own behavior in class. Michael made a link between his grades and the new situation:

> I work more, I'm paying more attention. I like to work more than before. In the former classes, I hated that, I wasn't listening in class because I hated the teacher. Everything went 40 feet over my head and I got 56%. Since it's settled with the teacher, I got 78% on my report card. It looks like I understand the topic better because things have changed.

Matthew simply responded, "I tease [the teacher] less than before because he's OK. When a teacher is OK, I don't tease him." In October, talking about the teacher, Matthew and Michael repeated during interviews, "He's the worst teacher you can have." In January, they drew another picture:

Michael: We like his class more than before. He [the teacher] is more attentive to us, patient. It looks like he tries

Perceptions of students' behavior in October and in January

Category	Time	Number of students in each category	
		According to the teacher	According to the students
Quiet	October	13	11
	January	14	12
Follower	October	2	3
	January	14	8
Disruptor	October	6	11
	January	0	8
Troublemaker	October	7	3
	January	0	0

Table 1

to understand us, as we do for him. We try to understand him.

Matthew: A better mood.

Michael: Yeah...you come in class, if you don't say, "Hello," to him, he won't care, but if you do, he's gonna jump to the ceiling, he's gonna be happy. At the beginning of the year...

Matthew: He looked mad all the time.

Michael: Yeah... At the beginning of the year, when you came in class, he was just doing "shhh!", "shhh!", "shhh!" for five minutes.

Matthew: He hasn't even got angry for two months now.

Before the intervention, the teacher explained how things were with the group involved in the ESE:

> I never know what they'll be like when they come in class: they come in all excited, there's always one talking, one getting up, one not listening to the explanations...I try to intervene...but there are too many...there's a group spirit...When it doesn't please one, then ten are also upset.

By contrast, during the interview in January, the teacher claimed:

> After the intervention, the group changed. I allowed them to work in teams during some classes and it went well. Because students have a positive attitude, I don't have to explain things for a long time. There are three or four students trying to fool around, but this is the case in all groups...I still have to intervene, but it is nothing compared with the situation before. Now, there are some isolated cases. It's easier.

DISCUSSION

These results indicate that the attribution retraining intervention was effective. It led to a sustained decrease in students' misbehavior and teacher's coercive behavior without relying on external control systems. The systematic video observations made two months after the intervention revealed a reduction of disciplinary events. Teacher reactions were more effective as well. It is noteworthy that in January, when the teacher asked the students to stop disruptive behavior, student arguments with the teacher were much less frequent. As for the teacher, he completely stopped such behaviors as applying a consequence, raising tone of voice in an angry way, and expelling a student. Thus, we clearly observed an improvement in teacher and student behaviors.

Results also revealed improvements in students' behavior according to both teacher's and students' perceptions. Non-disruptive students as well as the teacher claimed that disruptive behaviors appeared in a more isolated way in January, and when they occured, the group was less supportive. Generally speaking, the new climate seemed to satisfy the teacher and the students, but non-disruptive students stated that though there was progress, the situation could still improve. In January, the teacher did not describe any students as disruptors or troublemakers, but about one third of the students described themselves as disruptors. This agrees with the literature: secondary school students tend to be more aware of

Students' perceptions of teacher behavior in October and in January

Variable	Mean (Standard Deviation)		t (p<.001)
	October	January	
Helping	1.86 (.74)	2.99 (.58)	-8.18
Understanding	1.98 (.78)	3.02 (.63)	-7.76
Admonishing	2.85 (.87)	1.69 (.50)	7.59
Dissatisfaction	2.74 (.94)	1.55 (.55)	7.24

Table 2

disruptive behavior than their teacher (Dawoud & Côté, 1986).

On the basis of group perception, the teacher became more helpful and understanding and less dissatisfied and punitive. From interviews in January, students described him as being in a better mood, less on the edge, more patient and attentive to them. Both dyads interviewed underlined that the teacher had not once been angry since the intervention. However, even though undesirable behaviors decreased, both teacher and disruptive students kept making external attributions during interviews, although to a lesser degree. Following these results, it is interesting to highlight processes and conditions under which the intervention based on attribution retraining took place.

The intervention focused on perceptions. First, we helped students reinterpret disciplinary events and teacher behavior, leading them to consider the segment of the circle they once ignored: the link between misbehavior, teacher's perception of students' behavior, and teacher's coercive behavior. We also focused on student perceptions of another element: previous information about the teacher. Once students could understand that disruptive behavior could cause teacher coercive behavior, and that previous information, as opposed to real teacher behavior, had an incidence on their own behavior, they began to improve their behavior by collectively regulating themselves.

Two factors supported this collective self-regulation: 1) a number of students wished their peers' disruptive behavior would stop. After the intervention, the strategic re-assignment of students' desks in the classroom helped to sustain appropriate behavior; 2) strong group cohesion contributed to influence individual behaviors to meld with the group. Certain students had possibly preferred the previous conflict. However, given the collective turnaround, they went with the flow and followed the new group norms. Furthermore, even if some students did not understand the demonstrated link between misbehavior on videotape and the pitcher of water overflowing, they were influenced by the group's majority. Thus, cohesion was a major element in maintaining the desirable effects of the intervention: this same element that had contributed to the development of the ESE also had an implication in the restoring of the situation.

We intervened on a last element, teacher's perception of students' behavior, by showing the teacher the videotaped intervention. After realizing his coercive behavior engendered detrimental results, he modified his own behavior and made a few changes in class. These were not very different from those he had tried before the intervention. However, given that perceptions of teacher-student relations had improved, these changes could be presented in a helping and diplomatic manner, and as students' attitudes were more positive, they were more willing to accept teacher's requests.

Interactions are bidirectional, thus we conducted the intervention on both the students and teacher. Given that the situation had become difficult to manage, the teacher was very open and inclined to cooperate. Therefore, it was easier to lead him to change his behavior. In contrast, the intervention proved more complex for the group of young adolescents. Even though video feedback reported facts in an objective manner, the students resisted for several minutes before accepting and acknowledging the images they had seen. This, plus the external attributions that persisted during interviews in January, confirms that perceptions are very resistant within the model. The video feedback technique has already been used in modeling contexts with the aim of inciting students having discipline or behavioral problems to adopt more socially acceptable behaviors overall (Kehle, Clark, & Jenson, 1986; McCurdy & Shapiro, 1988; Shear & Shapiro, 1993). However, our study is different in that it emphasizes certain *specific* disruptive behaviors. To our knowledge, there is no research reporting the use of video feedback as we presented it.

The ESE involves a group discipline problem closely related to teacher-student conflicts. Despite its severity, the ESE can still be resolved through the use of help provided by a third party outside the "vicious" circle (Watzlawick et al, 1967) or the conflicting circle (Figure 1). In similar contexts, this party could be another teacher, a school psychologist, or any other professional able to make those involved in the ESE reflect on teacher-student interactions rather than applying punishment systems. For long-term, more positive results, the instructor must leave the decision to stop misbehaving to the students instead of forcing his wishes upon them. Without being directly accused, students have to be shown how their behavior worsens the situation, the extent to which they control the problem, and how they can stop it. Students have to believe they can make the final decision. Intervention may be more powerful when applied to the entire group rather than only the most disruptive students. This may help to sustain group behavior improvement thereafter. Furthermore, if the entire group is included, some students will generate solutions and these will be more powerful because they originate with peers.

This research is based on a case study with a single teacher and his students. Consequently, as in all case studies, results cannot be quickly generalized to a larger population. Attribution retraining will have to be used in other contexts, with other participants. Like every group involved in the ESE, each had its own idiosyncratic characteristics. First, students involved in the ESE were part of a regular class even though during their schooling about 30% of them had repeated one or two years. Moreover, some had expressed dissatisfaction towards their peers' misbehavior. This dissatisfaction was insufficient to reverse the conflicting situation, but without these same students, the results might not have been completely the same. Finally, it is worth noting that the conflicting situation had reached a peak at the time of the intervention. Had the ESE been less advanced, it is possible that a similar intervention would have had a less striking outcome.

This study highlights knowledge that could prove useful in resolving severe group discipline problems such as the

extended symmetrical escalation. Teacher-student perceptions of their interactions offer the first key into instituting change. The intervention described in this paper does not propose to be a unique model for solving discipline problems: the chosen method of intervention depends on each context. It does, however, appear that attribution retraining can be an effective method in changing teacher and adolescent perceptions of classroom interactions. It is important to intervene in such a way that students and teachers realize that their own behavior can have detrimental results on others and on themselves. When they realize this, and then understand their capacity to resolve the problem, a basis for a long-lasting change exists.

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