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Student responsibility and classroom discipline in Australia, China, and Israel

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers’ classroom discipline techniques and students’ individual and communal responsibility in Australian, Chinese, and Israeli classrooms. The sample comprised 5521 students in grades 7–12 and 748 teachers. The participating Australian, Chinese, and Israeli schools included both larger and smaller schools, situated in a range of socioeconomic and geographic areas. Results showed that teachers who utilize more inclusive disciplinary techniques have students who take more responsibility for their own behavior and for the behavior of their peers. In general students appeared to act responsibly in class in all three settings, and their self-reported levels of responsibility were generally validated by their teachers’ perceptions. Implications for educators and further research are discussed.

Keywords: student values; responsibility; teacher–student interaction; classroom management

Introduction

Schools can never be value free, because in addition to any value curriculum, the transmission of values to students occurs through the content and materials of the explicit formal and informal curriculum, and implicitly in the hidden curriculum. This includes, policies, programs and practices, including teacher–student interaction (Lovat and Toomey 2007; Schaps and Lewis 1998).

In general, there appears to be two distinguishable approaches for teaching students responsible citizenship. One has as its goal the learning of values which characterize a fine character (Lickona 2004). The other relates to what it means to be a good citizen (Ahmad-Llewellyn 2003; Galston 2003).

The present paper examines teachers’ and students’ perceptions of how responsibly students act in classrooms in Australia, China, and Israel, and reports on the relationship between students’ perceptions of their teacher’s classroom discipline strategies and the students’ self-reported level of responsibility in that class. It also reports teachers’ perceptions of how responsibly their students behave in class.

The impetus for the present analysis was the publication of three recent studies. The first examined the relationship between classroom discipline and student responsibility and misbehavior in Australia (Lewis 2001), and notes that the use of more punishment and teacher aggression relates to less student responsibility, not more. It also reports that

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more responsible students are in classes where teachers involve them more in decision making and are seen to provide more non-directive hints, recognition for good behavior and discussion with misbehaving students to allow them to understand the impact of their behavior on others and to work out how to behave better. (2001, 312)

The present analysis will permit investigation of the extent to which these findings generalize to two other national settings. The second recent study, which reports the relationship between classroom discipline and student misbehavior in Australia, China, and Israel, notes that ‘students who reported greater levels of misbehavior were more likely to perceive Aggression by teachers, although no other strategy produced statistically significant univariate results’ (Lewis et al. 2005, 737).

The third study (Lewis, Romi, and Katz 2008) highlighted the impact of classroom discipline techniques on the level of student distraction, negative affect generated towards the teacher and the belief that the teacher’s disciplinary actions are warranted.

In considering these results, it became evident that greater use of some discipline strategies (e.g., discussion, reward, involvement) related to more positive reactions to the teacher (and more student responsibility in Australian classrooms), but not to a reduction in student misbehavior. Consequently, the relationship between responsibility and classroom discipline was deemed worthy of investigation in some other national settings, to see if the relationships reported for Australia (Lewis 2001) are sufficiently generic to apply in other cultures. Comparisons of relationships in different settings provide insight into how generic the findings reported for Australia may be.

**Student responsibility**

In general, interest in student responsibility is twofold. Some proponents emphasize students’ morals, character, and values (Fenstermacher 2001; Pring 2001). Others emphasize civics and citizenship education (Gearon 2003; Whiteley 2005).

Further division can be identified. First there are those interested in values, moral, character, or citizenship education as an addition to, or augmentation of the existing curriculum. Others, in contrast, argue that such education is intrinsic to all aspects of the curriculum:

Picking out citizenship as a subject in its own right fails to see that all teaching, when conceived as a moral practice concerned with values and conceptions of what it is to be human, necessarily is a preparation for citizenship broadly concerned. (Pring 2001, 110)

Consequently, ensuring that students behave responsibly in classrooms is a means of preparing them to take their place in society as responsible citizens, a significant aim of schooling (Rothstein 2000). This outcome is one of the primary purposes of classroom discipline. It is a function that can be referred to as an *educational function* (Lewis 1997). However, there is another reason for promoting student responsibility. Without satisfactory levels of student responsibility, the best planned and potentially most engaging lesson may fail to have the desired impact. Often, the success or failure of a well-planned lesson depends on no more than a handful of students behaving in a way that is distracting to students and frustrating to teachers (Barton, Coley and Wenglinsky 1998). The aspect of classroom discipline which focuses on efficiently maintaining order is the *managerial function* (Lewis 1997, 2008).

For the purposes of the current investigation, *Responsibility* will be characterized by behavior which is as essential to definitions of good citizenship as it is to moral behavior or good character. *Student responsibility* will be defined in terms of the
extent to which students act to protect students’ and teachers’ rights. No distinction will be made between being responsible and acting responsibly. Clearly, they need not be the same. The former generally suggests an internal state that stimulates one to act responsibly without any external compulsion. In contrast, a student may choose to act responsibly because he or she feels compelled by others to do so. In summary, responsibility will be defined in terms of students’ willingness to exercise their own learning rights and to protect others’ rights to learn and to enjoy physical and emotional safety. Further, it is argued that students can protect rights in two distinct ways. First, they may act in a manner which is respectful of these rights. In this investigation, such a commitment will be termed Personal responsibility. In addition, students may take upon themselves the obligation of encouraging their classmates to be respectful of these rights. This will be termed Communal responsibility.

The purpose of the study
As discussed above, this study extends earlier published work by examining the relationships between six disciplinary strategies and student responsibility in different national settings. To examine how generic the relationships reported for Australian students were, replication studies were carried out in China and Israel. In addition to Australia, China and Israel were selected because of the cultural contrast that exists between the societies in the three countries. This provided an opportunity to examine the robustness of relationship between student responsibility and various discipline strategies in diverse national settings.

The researchers from China and Israel were senior, very experienced faculty members who had been involved in teacher training for many years. Given their interest in replicating the Australian study, the assumption was made that classroom discipline and student responsibility were issues of relevance to schools in their respective environments, as was the particular research design of the initial study (Lewis 2001).

Method
Sample
The three samples utilized in this study, and described below, were restricted to students in grades 7–12 in coeducational schools as these are generally the levels of schooling at which students’ behavior is most challenging. Although representative sampling was not attempted, the participating schools were chosen to ensure that the sample included both larger and smaller schools, situated in a range of socio-economic and geographic areas. In addition, schools which appeared ‘atypical’ were not included (e.g., extremely large, small, or isolated schools, or those with restrictive admission policies). In Australia, all secondary schools in the North Eastern region of Victoria and a small number in the Melbourne metropolitan region were invited to participate in the study. The response rate of 70% reflects the importance attributed to the topic of classroom discipline in secondary schools. In Israel, a sample of four high schools (grades 10–12) and eight junior high schools (grades 7–9) in central Israel were invited to participate in the study, and all accepted. In China, the sample of teachers and students was drawn from eight schools in Chengdu region, Sichuan Province. In each Chinese and Israeli school a random sample of
classes in grades 7–12 were selected. Mention should be made of the fact that only teachers and students who agreed to participate in the study served in the research sample. A research assistant administered questionnaires to the classes, and the teachers completed their questionnaires while the students worked on theirs.

Table 1 records the number of teachers and students in grades 7–8, 9–10, and 11–12 for the three participating countries.

Of the total of 5521 students, 48% are males, although the percentage of males varies from 38 to 60% by setting. The gender distribution of the 748 teachers is less even, with 11, 42, and 46% of male teachers in Israel, Australia, and China, respectively. It is of interest to note the small proportion of men in the Israeli sample, a proportion typically found in coeducational schools in Israel (Katz, Romi, and Qui 2005). As can be seen, the sample from Australia is much larger than the other two studies. Further, the samples from both China and Israel are quite small. Consequently, although the data allow for examining the replication of relationships among variables, cross-national comparisons will have to be treated with caution.

**Measuring student responsibility**

The level of responsibility displayed by students in classrooms was assessed by both teachers and students. For this purpose, the 39 statements utilized to assess student responsibility in the earlier Australian study (Lewis 2001) were considered by the colleagues in China and Israel for relevance to their respective students. Clearly, what it means to be responsible is especially problematic in a cross-cultural study, because conceptions of responsibility and appropriate social behavior are very likely to vary amongst social groups and cultures. Nevertheless, as a result of discussions between the participating academics, 12 items were omitted and 17 were accepted as providing a culturally relevant measure of student responsibility. As perceived in this study, responsibility was limited to students’ willingness to protect the rights of teachers to teach, students to learn, and both to feel physically and emotionally safe in the classroom. Six of the 17 statements were designed to assess the extent to which students in a class act to preserve and protect students’ and teacher’s rights. The scale comprising these items was labeled Personal Responsibility. It included items such as: Try your best to do well; Treat other students with respect; Respect the property of others; and Speak respectfully to teachers. The remaining 11 items comprised the Communal Responsibility scale. They assessed whether students try to ensure that their classmates act in a way that protects rights. Relevant items included: Try to see that other students in the class treat their classmates with respect; Encourage classmates to keep their hands off the property of other students in the class unless they have their permission; and See that classmates help other students who are having trouble.
To enable a sample of classes to be described without identifying any individual teacher by name, questionnaires specified one of six subject areas (Mathematics; English [Chinese, Hebrew]; Science; etc.). Students were then requested to concentrate on one class in that subject area when completing the questionnaire.

To complete the questionnaire students rated how well each of the items characterized the way they behaved. Responses were rated on a six-point scale indicating how much the item was ‘like them’ (6 – Exactly; 5 – Very much; 4 – Mostly; 3 – A little; 2 – Mostly not; 1 – Not at all).

Teachers were presented with the same items and rated how many of the students (in the first class he or she would teach next week) would behave in the responsible ways described. Teachers rated each item on a five-point scale (5 – Nearly all students; 4 – Most; 3 – Some; 2 – Hardly any; 1 – None).

Measuring classroom discipline strategies
To measure classroom discipline, a shortened, 24-item version of the 35-item questionnaire used by Lewis (2001) was administered to students in China and Israel. Rather than identify individual teachers, questionnaires specified one of six subject areas (English [Chinese, Hebrew]; Science; etc.). Students were then requested to concentrate on one class in that subject area when completing the questionnaire.

As explained elsewhere (Lewis et al. 2005), the original 35 items were reduced to 24 by including only items accepted by all three authors as culturally relevant to the measurement of six frequently discussed discipline techniques. These six include Rewarding; Punishing; Involvement in decision-making; Discussion and negotiation; Hinting; and Aggression. Combinations of one or more of these strategies comprise most of the available approaches to discipline (Charles 2004; Tauber 2007; Wolfgang 1995). For example, use of reward and punishment is characteristic of Assertive approaches, whereas hinting and negotiation are central to less interventional approaches.

Students were asked to indicate the extent to which their teachers:

- Recognize appropriate behavior of individual students or the class (e.g., reward individual students who behave properly).
- Punish students who misbehave, increasing the level of punishment if necessary (e.g., increase the level of punishment if a misbehaving student stops when told, but then does it again).
- Discuss with students the impact of their behavior on others, and negotiate with students on a one-to-one basis (e.g., get students to understand why their behavior is a problem for others by discussing it with them).
- Involve students in classroom discipline decision making (e.g., organize the class to work out the rules for good behavior).
- Hint about students’ unacceptable behavior without making a demand (e.g., describe what students are doing wrong, and expect them to stop).
- Use aggressive techniques (e.g., yell angrily at students who misbehave).

Each of the 24 items required a response on a six-point scale to indicate how frequently the teacher acted in the described manner ‘when trying to deal with misbehavior’. Responses ranged from 6 – Nearly always to 1 – Never. The answers reflected students’ perception of their teacher’s use of each classroom discipline
strategy. However, as the teacher was identified only in terms of the subject taught, his or her anonymity was preserved.

The introduction to the questionnaire was brief and indicated that the questions to follow focused on ‘classroom discipline and how you feel about it’. There was no indication as to the research questions being addressed.

As argued elsewhere (Lewis et al. 2005), to measure constructs such as classroom discipline or student responsibility in three national settings was problematic.

Constructs measured in Australia cannot be assumed equivalent to those in Israel or China. Although it would have been possible to apply Structural Modeling to statistically examine the extent to which one particular conceptualization applies equally to all settings, the main purpose of this study was to examine relationships that existed between disciplinary techniques and student responsibility in each setting. Had different measures been utilized in different countries, comparisons would have been methodologically prohibited. Consequently, it was determined to proceed with the comparisons, using a translated questionnaire comprising identical items in each setting. This was done despite our awareness that students’ interpretations of the meaning of a questionnaire item may vary by national setting, in part systematically related to respective cultural understandings. Nevertheless, given the ready acceptance of the items utilized in this study by senior teacher educators in each national setting, it was assumed that the use of the agreed items permitted useful comparisons. However, further research needs to be done to gain insight into variation in students’ conceptualization of both discipline practices and responsibility in differing national settings.

**Procedure**

Following approval from the Ministry of Education of each country, copies of the letter and a description of the study were sent to principals of participating schools. Questionnaires were distributed to students by the researchers and research assistants during class time (with permission of the principals). The teachers received them in the teacher’s staff room. The length of time required to respond to the questionnaires ranged from 25 to 35 minutes.

**Results**

**Responsibility scales**

Table 2 reports the scale means, average item means for the items comprising respective scales (AIM), standard deviations (SD) and Cronbach alpha coefficients for the two responsibility scales. Table 3 notes the corresponding data for the teachers’ ratings.

Inspection of the alpha coefficients in Tables 2 and 3 shows that responses to items in all respective scales have acceptable internal consistency. With the exception of one item which was removed from the Involvement scale, no respective alpha could be increased by deleting an item. The means recorded in Table 2 indicate that students report it is at least very much like them to manifest Personal Responsibility. However, to display Communal Responsibility is somewhere between a little like them and mostly like them. In general, Chinese students report greater levels of responsibility than do those in Israel and Australia.

The data in Table 3 show that the Chinese and Australian teachers believe that slightly fewer than most students display Personal Responsibility in class, and
Table 2. Students’ self-reported responsibility by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th></th>
<th>China</th>
<th></th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>AIM</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>AIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>24.60</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>26.46</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Responsibility</td>
<td>36.41</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>43.78</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AIM: average item mean.
Key: 6= Exactly like you; 5= Very much like you; 4= Mostly like you; 3= Means a little like you; 2= Mostly not like you; 1= Not at all like you.

Table 3. Teachers’ ratings of student responsibility by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th></th>
<th>China</th>
<th></th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>AIM</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>AIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>22.64</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>33.03</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Responsibility</td>
<td>38.62</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>38.83</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AIM: average item mean.
Key: 5= Nearly all students do it; 4= Most students do it; 3= Some students do it; 2= Hardly any of the students do it; 1= None of the students do it.
between some and most are likely to act in a Communally responsible manner. Israeli teachers report the lowest levels of student responsibility. The proportion of students they expect to be Personally responsible in their classes is about halfway between Some and Most. They also indicate that fewer than some students encourage responsible behavior from their peers. In general, with the possible exception of the Israeli teachers’ assessments, the students in this study appear to be quite responsible and their self-reported levels of responsibility appeared validated by their teachers’ perceptions.

As mentioned above, previous research indicates that more usage of some discipline strategies has been shown to relate to student responsibility but not to student misbehavior. To permit examination of the relationship between responsibility and misbehavior, the latter was measured by asking students to indicate ‘How often do you misbehave in this teacher’s class?’ To respond, they chose from the alternatives, Almost never; Only a little; Sometimes; and Often, which were coded 1–4, respectively. Table 4 reports the mean levels of Personal and Communal Responsibility for students reporting their level of misbehavior as Never; Only a little; Sometimes; and Often. Inspection of the Australian and Israeli data indicates that although Personal Responsibility is strongly related to reported level of misbehavior, the same cannot be said for Communal Responsibility. For example, well-behaved students in Australia and Israel, that is, those who report that they misbehave only a little or not at all, indicate that it is only somewhere between a little and mostly like them to encourage other students to behave responsibly. These findings justified investigating the relationships between discipline and responsibility on the assumption that these need not parallel those already reported for discipline and misbehavior (Lewis et al. 2005).

**Discipline strategies**

The classroom discipline strategies used in the three countries, and their relationship to gender, level of schooling, and misbehavior have been examined in detail in a recent paper (Lewis et al. 2005), and will not be repeated here. Briefly, however, the patterns of usage of the various classroom discipline strategies appear relatively similar in Australia and Israel. Teachers in these settings generally let students know when there is a problem, so that their behavior will improve. At least some of the time they also punish students who are misbehaving, discuss with them the impact their misbehavior has on others, and recognize their appropriate behavior. Less frequently they become aggressive, or have students determine the class rules and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australia Personal</th>
<th>Australia Communal</th>
<th>China Personal</th>
<th>China Communal</th>
<th>Israel Personal</th>
<th>Israel Communal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: 6=Exactly like you; 5=Very much like you; 4=Mostly like you; 3=Means a little like you; 2=Mostly not like you; 1=Not at all like you.
consequences for misbehavior. In China, students report more frequent use of all strategies except Aggression and Punishment (Lewis et al. 2005).

International comparison of student responsibility

Before comparing the relationships between classroom discipline and student responsibility in Australia, China, and Israel it was decided to conduct international comparisons of the levels of students’ responsibility. Consequently, both teachers’ and students’ ratings were analyzed to determine whether they were related to national settings. Although teachers did not indicate the grade of the classes they were rating they did report their gender, therefore it was decided to statistically control for the effect of this variable when examining differences due to national setting. A MANOVA was performed where the two scales assessing responsibility were the dependent variables, and Country and Teacher’s gender were the independent variables. For this analysis, a type III sum of squares calculation was utilized because of the uneven group sizes. Inspection of the multivariate $F$ values showed that the only statistically significant effect was for Country ($F_{(4,998)}=13.12$, $p=0.000$). The $F$ values for separate effects (Univariate $F$ values) indicated significant differences for both Personal Responsibility ($F=10.12$, $p=0.000$) and Communal Responsibility ($F=20.94$, $p=0.000$). Post hoc comparisons of means (Scheffe) showed that for both scales the Israeli teachers perceive significantly fewer of their students to be responsible when compared to teachers in Australia and China, who did not differ significantly in their ratings.

In examining the students’ responses, it was decided to statistically control a number of variables which may have the potential to influence their responsibility in class. These included the gender of the student, the gender of the teacher, and grade level (7/8, 9/10, or 11/12).

Consequently, a four-way MANOVA was conducted in which the two measures of Responsibility served as the dependent variables and Student gender, Teacher gender, Grade, and Country acted as the independent variables. Table 6 reports the statistically significant ($p<0.01$) effects.

Inspection of the data in Table 5 shows that three main and three interaction effects were statistically significant. Consideration of the relevant univariate and Scheffe tests for post hoc comparisons ($p<0.05$) for Country, revealed significant differences for both Individual ($F=60.92$, $p=0.000$) and Communal Responsibility ($F=82.70$, $p=0.000$). Post hoc analyses showed that students in China reported being significantly more responsible than those from the other two settings. Students in Israel rated themselves more highly on both scales than did those in Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>$F$ value</th>
<th>Hyp df</th>
<th>Error df</th>
<th>Significance level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>44.38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year level</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student sex</td>
<td>11.48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4510</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year level × Teacher sex</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9022</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country × Year level</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9022</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country × Teacher sex × Year</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9022</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both scales also show significant univariate effects for grade (\(F\) [Individual Responsibility] = 12.51, \(p = 0.000\); \(F\) [Communal] = 9.60, \(p = 0.000\)). In each case, students in grades 11 and 12 report significantly greater responsibility than do those in grades 9 and 10, although there is no significant difference between students in grades 11 and 12 and those in 7 and 8.

The final main effect for student gender shows that girls report that it is more like them to act responsibly in class (\(F = 5.76, p = 0.000\)), although when it comes to encouraging others to be responsible the difference between boys and girls is not statistically significant.

Some elaboration of these main effects comes about when interaction effects are considered. For example, the interaction effect for Country by grade for Personal Responsibility shows that it is the Australian data which primarily cause the lack of difference between the youngest and oldest secondary school students reported above as the main effect for grade. In Israel, and to a lesser degree in China, seventh and eighth graders report themselves as more responsible than do 11th and 12th graders. In Australia, there is no difference between these older and younger students.

This finding is further clarified when the Country by Grade by Teacher gender interaction effect is examined, because younger students in China rate themselves as more responsible than older students only when in classes with male teachers. When the teachers are female, Chinese 11th and 12th graders report greater levels of responsible behavior than do 7–10th graders. This is consistent with findings from Australia.

For Communal Responsibility the main effect is once again due to the Australian data. In both Israel and China, students in grades 7 and 8 report greater levels of responsibility than do those in grades 11 and 12. Once again the three-way interaction explicates the findings a little further by showing that this pattern of findings is more pronounced in China in classes with male teachers. As mentioned above, however, due to the restricted and unrepresentative sampling, particularly in Israel and China, the above comparisons are tenuous.

The final part of the analysis addressed the main aim of the investigation, namely to examine the relationship between students' classroom responsibility and the discipline techniques they perceived being utilized in their classrooms. Table 6 reports the correlations between the six discipline techniques investigated in this study and the two measures of responsibility. Since the aim was to identify replicated patterns of relationships, all statistically significant correlations were considered, even though some were very small in magnitude (0.15).
Inspection of the correlations shows a similar pattern in each national setting. Teachers who are more likely to discuss misbehavior with their students, involve students in decision-making, hint when students misbehave, and recognize appropriate behavior, have students who are more responsible. In contrast, teachers in China and Australia who use more Aggression in response to misbehavior have students who are less likely to act to protect the rights of students and the teacher. Teacher aggression, however, does not relate to whether students exercise Communal Responsibility by encouraging their classmates to be responsible. Finally, Chinese teachers who are more likely to punish their students have fewer students willing to act responsibly, although once again there is no relationship with whether they encourage others to act responsibly.

The correlations described above do not allow causal interpretations, therefore there are at least two main alternative explanations: either teachers’ disciplinary techniques influence the levels of student responsibility within the classroom, or teachers choose their discipline strategies in response to how responsible their students appear. It would seem most likely that both explanations apply. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that use of Aggression and Punishment fails to increase students’ levels of responsibility, and in the case of Aggression may make students less responsible over time.

Further, if teachers were to discuss misbehavior with their students, involve them in decision making, hint when students misbehave and recognize appropriate behavior, their students may learn to be more responsible, both for their own behavior and the behavior of others.

Discussion

There is a widespread belief that it is the duty of schools to facilitate in students the kind of attitudes and behaviors that are consistent with democratic citizenship, pleasant character, values or morals. Fortunately this study revealed that it is the perception of teachers and students that students are generally quite willing to protect learning and safety rights in the classroom. Nevertheless, our findings show that Chinese students may be more responsible than Australian or Israeli students. The respect students accord teachers may be related to this finding (Li et al. 1998).

Even the best behaved students in Australia and Israel appear hesitant to encourage others to act responsibly. They describe such behavior as about halfway between a little and mostly like them, and the Israeli teachers report that only a few of their students encourage their classmates to do the right thing. Among the Chinese students sampled, by comparison, such behavior is more common, with students, on average, reporting that such behavior ‘Mostly’ characterizes them.

The effects of grade, and country by grade are a cause for concern, as 11th and 12th graders are no more willing to protect students’ and teachers’ learning, and emotional and physical safety rights than are seventh and eighth graders. In China and Israel, the situation may be a little worse, as the younger students, aged between approximately 12 and 14, appear more respectful of rights than those aged 16–18.

Secondary schooling appears to be failing to increase students’ commitment to respecting and protecting the rights of all members of the school community. The relatively low scores for Communal Responsibility show that schools need to
emphasize not only the requirement that students respect rights, but more particularly their obligation to ensure that their classmates act responsibly.

In summary, in three national settings, despite the fact that the least responsible children do not always proceed to grades 11 and 12, older students feel no more responsible for learning and safety rights than those entering secondary schools. This is the situation after five to six years of exposure to curriculum, which at least theoretically aims to develop democratic citizens.

Differences between girls’ and boys’ levels of responsibility are not surprising, as boys are more likely to state that they misbehave in school (Lewis 2001). It was somewhat surprising to find that girls are nevertheless quite similar to boys in the degree to which they do or do not encourage their classmates to behave responsibly. This was unexpected, as it could be assumed that girls, who see themselves as more likely to behave responsibly, would be more likely to try to get classmates to act likewise. Perhaps the similarity is due to the level of peer pressure acting against such behavior in secondary schools.

Although further studies, especially those providing longitudinal data, however, are needed before concluding that secondary schooling may be failing to develop students’ respect for rights and a willingness to see that these rights are protected, the findings of this study are disturbing. This is because in Australia (Lovat and Toomey 2007), China (Ministry of Education of China 2004) and Israel (Ministry of Education of Israel 2003), there are voices calling for students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, respect for others, and caring and concern for others in public schools.

There are claims by some educators, however, that even when values such as ‘respect for the rights of others’ are promoted in schools through the use of curriculum materials, the preferred method of instruction is ‘indoctrination’, with students being ‘drilled’ in specific behaviors instead of being taught how to reflect about and experience appropriate ways of being (Kohn 1997, 429). It is further argued that the transmission of values to students occurs implicitly, as a result of the hidden curriculum, and most relevant to the current discussion, as a result of teacher–student interaction (Halstead 1996; Murphy 1998; Powney et al. 1995; Ryan and Bohlin 1999).

As reported earlier, one of the most potent classroom interactions that students will experience is in the area of discipline. The relationship between disciplinary strategies and student responsibility noted in this study may explain why levels of student responsibility vary significantly by national setting. In each of the three national settings more responsible students have teachers who are seen as more likely to discuss misbehavior with their students, involve students in decision-making, hint when students misbehave and recognize appropriate behavior.

However, a recent publication (Lewis et al. 2005), found, using data from this study, that students in China perceived the least use of Aggression and the greatest use of Recognition, Discussion, Hinting, and Involvement. In the same study, Australian students reported less use of Discussion and Recognition than did the Israeli students. Consequently, it may be argued that the greater use of strategies such as Discussion, Recognition, Hinting and Involvement in China has resulted in more student responsibility. In addition, the greater use of Discussion and Recognition in Israel compared to Australia may account for the difference in students’ responsibility in these two settings. It is interesting to note that although greater use of Discussion, Recognition, Hinting, and Involvement is associated with greater levels of student
Personal and Communal Responsibility, they have been shown not to relate to levels of student misbehavior (Lewis et al. 2005).

In attempting to interpret the findings of this study it may be posited that it is the level of student responsibility that affects teacher behavior, instead of the teachers’ behavior influencing student responsibility. If so, the correlations between discipline strategies and student responsibility may be an outcome of techniques being chosen by the teachers because they are suitable for their students. Thus, in China, where children are more respectful of the teacher’s authority, teachers may make greater use of Hinting, Discussion, and Involvement to provide them a voice, since teachers in China can rely on the students’ sense of Communal Responsibility. They are also more likely to acknowledge students’ behavior because students who are more responsible act in a more praiseworthy manner. In addition, there is little need for recourse to Aggression in China because the more responsible students do not confront teachers’ authority. Perhaps this also explains why in Israel there is more Discussion and Recognition than in Australia.

Additionally, less responsible behavior on the part of students may frustrate teachers, who may even feel threatened by their own lack of ability to ensure that all students are overtly respectful of rights. According to the levels of Aggression reported earlier teachers may even become angry and hostile towards less responsible students.

The most likely explanation for the reported relationships between teachers’ disciplinary practices and students classroom responsibility is that both explanations apply. That is, teachers react to students just as students react to teachers. Nevertheless, the assumption that discussion with and involvement of students will facilitate more responsible behavior on their part is consistent with the views of experienced educators who recommend discussion and involvement as the only effective way of producing responsible students (Metzger 2002; Roeser, Eccles and Sameroff 2000; Ryan and Patrick 2001). In addition, teacher Aggression and, to a lesser extent, Punishment appear ineffective in fostering student responsibility in each setting.

In reflecting on the significance of the results of this investigation, we need to note that:

Valuing good character and seeking the development of personal responsibility determine the school’s response to discipline problems. Discipline is not primarily a matter of keeping things under control by making choices for students … it is a matter of helping students learn to make good choices and be responsible for those choices. (Pastor 2000, 657)

In conclusion, therefore, it may be argued that teachers may want to consider increasing their use of inclusive techniques such Discussion, Involvement and Recognition, while decreasing their use of Punishment and Aggression. By doing so they may not only promote respect for some democratic values, and more orderly classrooms, but also provide a model of behavior that students will accept as ‘a standard for how things will be’ (Fenstermacher 2001, 644).

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