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Jewels of Wisdom: A Study of Perceptions of Discipline of Middle School Teachers, High School Teachers, Student Teachers, and Undergraduate Education Majors enrolled in Classroom Management Course (YOED 4000)

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School discipline is viewed as a national concern that is becoming more serious by the day. Practicing teachers, student teachers, and preservice teacher education students across the country are concerned with discipline-related problems in schools across the nation. Perceptions of discipline influence practicing teachers, student teachers, and preservice teachers in many different ways as they go about making decisions regarding management, discipline, and career choices.

Because teaching depends on habits and behaviors resulting from deeply held ways of seeing, perceiving, and valuing, perceptions are very important. This study used the basis of "perceptions" to examine response data on perception of discipline with regard to two main "Perception" groups labeled "Sub1/Democratic Perceptions" and "Substar/Autocratic Perceptions." Four "Status" subgroups labeled Middle School Teachers, High School Teachers, Student Teachers, and Undergraduate Education Majors enrolled in Classroom Management Course (YOED 4000) were surveyed. Perceptions of the four subgroups (Middle School Teachers, High School Teachers, Student Teachers, and Undergraduate Education Majors enrolled in Classroom Management Course YOED 4000) were surveyed for comparison purposes regarding their "Democratic Perceptions" and "Autocratic Perceptions" of discipline using the variables of "Status," "Gender, "Degree," "Years of Experience," and "Subject Area" (see Appendix B).

The survey (see Appendix A) questions asked both specific and general questions regarding the perception of discipline held by the four "Status" subgroups labeled Middle School Teachers, High School Teachers, Student Teachers, and Undergraduate Education Majors enrolled in Classroom Management Course (YOED 4000). Cronback Reliability Analysis indicated Reliability Coefficients of Alpha=.7626 (Total Respondents=110, N of Items=30) for total number of survey items, Alpha=.8041 for Sub1/Democratic Perceptions (N of Items=13), and Alpha=.7509 for Substar/Autocratic Perceptions (N of Items=13).

For statistical analysis, depending upon the respondent's choice, survey questions labeled with an asterisk (*) indicated the respondent's agreement with "Autocratic" perception of discipline and suggested disagreement with "Democratic" perception of discipline. "Substar" was the composite score resulting from the overall sum of the asterisk (*) items. Questions without an asterisk when scored indicated respondent's agreement with "Democratic" perceptions of discipline and suggested disagreement with "Autocratic" perception of discipline. "Sub1" was the composite score resulting from the overall sum of the items without an asterisk (*). The objectives of the survey were to ascertain and compare the respondents' various perceptions with regard to "Perception of Discipline" (Democratic/Autocratic) depending upon their status, gender, years of experience, degree, and subject area and then to determine if these perceptions of discipline changed significantly between groups according to these variables.

The Perception of Discipline survey instrument, consisting of questions 1-30 having a Likert scale response ranging form Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree/Nor Disagree, Disagree, to Strongly Disagree, (Appendix A) was designed and administered both onsite at six area schools and on campus at the teacher training university over the course of the Fall 2001 semester. Three public middle schools and three public high schools participated in the study. These schools had approximately 1,000 students per site and were located within a middle-sized city within a middle Tennessee county (population 175,000) school district. Survey was distributed to High School and Middle School Teachers, Student Teachers, and

college students enrolled in the Classroom Management Course YOED 4000 at the various sites and completed anonymously. Completed surveys were collected, tabulated, and analyzed. The sample included a total of 110 participants (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Survey Respondents

Participants/Status Subgroups	Number
Student Teacher	12
Middle School Teacher	21
High School Teacher	20
YOED 4000 Student	57
Total	110

Data analysis showed significant "Gender" differences in perception of discipline on the "Autocratic" scale with t (107)=2.292 and p-value<.025. Males had more "Autocratic" perceptions regarding discipline than females as reflected by their respective mean scores with no significant difference existing for "Democratic" perception (see Table 2).

Table 2: Perception of Discipline: Males/Females

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Autocratic				
Male		46	30.3261	6.94440	1.02390
	Female	63	33.1270	5.78790	.72921

Note: N= 109 as one respondent failed to mark gender.

Within the "Status" group, Student Teachers held the strongest perceptions of discipline as being "Democratic"; whereas, High School Teachers perceived discipline as being the least "Democratic," with the YOED 4000 College Students and Middle School Teachers had perceptions of discipline scores falling between the other two subgroups as indicated by respective mean scores. Mean scores and standard error are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Mean Scores on Perception of Discipline Survey

	Perceptions					
	Democratic			Autocratic		
Subgroups:	**M**	**SD**	**n**	**M**	**SD**	**n**
Student Teacher	23.92	4.46	13	29.42	8.92	12
Teacher MS	28.45	5.40	20	31.24	5.65	21
Teacher HS	31.25	6.27	20	34.50	4.32	20
YOED 4000	25.30	5.46	56	31.77	6.52	57
Total	26.81	5.98	109	31.91	6. 40	110

Results from a univariate analysis of variance showed that no significant difference was indicated between the subgroups with regard to "Autocratic" perception of discipline. There was, however, a significant difference in perception of "Democratic" discipline between the three subgroups of Student Teachers, High School Teachers, and YOED 4000 Students as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Perception of Discipline Among Status Subgroups ANOVA

Perception	df	Mean Square	F
Autocratic	3	73.11	1.82
Democratic	3	227.83	7.52*

* indicates $p < .05$

Multiple comparisons with regard to "Status" subgroups and perception of discipline indicate combinations for subgroups of Student Teachers and High School Teachers, and combinations of High School Teachers and YOED 4000 Students were significant at the .05 probability level for "Democratic" perception. Student Teachers exhibited the most "Democratic" perception of discipline; YOED 4000 students followed with their "Democratic" perception of discipline, and High School Teachers' perceptions of discipline were least "Democratic" as shown through responses to survey items on the "Democratic" perception of discipline scale and resulting mean scores. (see Table 5).

Table 5: Mean Differences: Perception of Discipline Survey among Subgroups

Student Teacher Group	Democratic		Autocratic	
Subgroups	**MD**	**Std. Error**	**MD**	**Std. Error**
Teacher MS	4.53	1.96	1.82	2.29
Teacher HS	7.33*	1.96	5.08	2.31
YOED 4000	1.38	1.69	2.36	2.01
Teacher Middle School				
Student Teacher	4.53	1.96	1.82	2.29
Teacher HS	2.80	1.74	3.26	1.98
YOED 4000	3.15	1.43	0.53	1.62
Teacher High School				
Student Teacher	7.33*	1.96	5.08	2.31
Teacher MS	2.80	1.74	3.26	1.98
YOED 4000	5.95*	1.43	2.72	1.65
YOED 4000				
Student Teacher	1.38	1.69	2.36	2.01
Teacher MS	3.15	1.43	0.53	1.62
Teacher HS	5.95*	1.43	2.73	1.65

Note: MD= mean difference; * indicates that MD= $p < .05$

Results from a univariate analysis of variance showed that no significant difference was indicated between the "Degree" subgroups with regard to "Autocratic" perception of discipline. However, data showed significant difference existed between "Degree" subgroups of BA, Master's +, and Undergraduate subgroups with regard to "Democratic" perception of discipline as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6: Perception of Discipline among Degree Subgroups ANOVA

Perception	df	Mean Square	F
Democratic	2	207.05	8.07*
Autocratic	2	7.07	0.17

* Indicates $p < .05$

Multiple comparisons with regard to "Degree" subgroups and "Democratic" perception of discipline indicate all combinations for BA, Master's +, and Undergraduate subgroups were significant at the .05 probability level as indicated in Table 7.

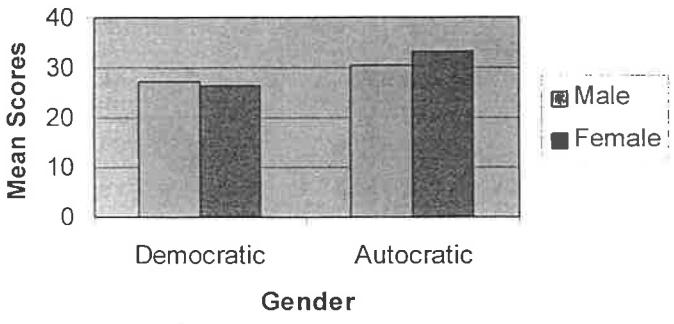
Table 7: Democratic Perception of Discipline by Degree

Degree Subgroups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BA	20	22.25	4.89	1.09
Master's +	14	27.79	5.35	1.43
Undergraduate	25	27.88	5.04	1.01

Data analysis indicated no significant difference indicated between "Years of Experience" and perception of discipline, nor was there a significant difference between "Subject Areas" with regard to perception of discipline.

As might be surmised, in response to survey questions, "Gender" did emerge as a significant variable in one instance. Males held more significantly "Autocratic" perception of discipline than did females, although interestingly enough, males and females were similar in their responses to survey questions regarding "Democratic" perception of discipline. Mean scores of "Gender" subgroups according to Perception of Discipline are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Perception of Discipline

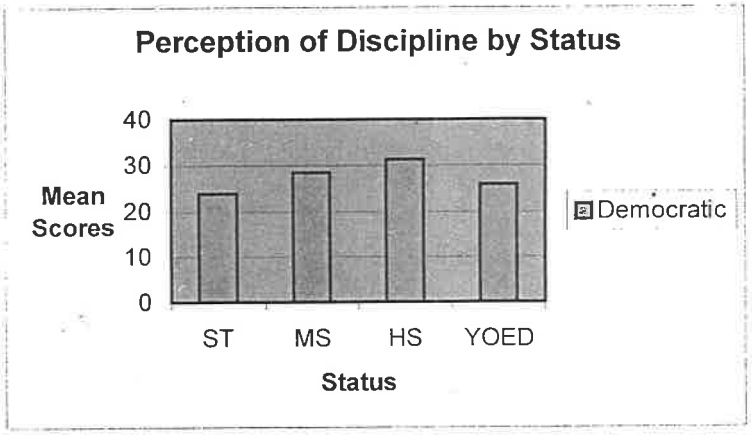


Surprisingly though, "Years of Experience" did not prove to be a significant factor in the various subgroups' perceptions with regard to either "Autocratic" perceptions of discipline or "Democratic" perceptions of discipline. Although differences in years of experience were decidedly present, results from data analysis indicated no significant difference existed in responses of subgroups to the "Autocratic" or "Democratic" discipline scales.

Similarly, the respondents' "Subject Area" did not play a significant role in response to survey questions regarding perception of discipline. One might have assumed, however, that a relationship would exist between mathematical and/or scientific areas of study and "Autocratic" discipline perception or exist between the humanities and "Democratic" discipline perception. Further research involving gender, subject area taught, perception of discipline, and the addition of personality type might make an interesting research project.

Three "Status" subgroups did exhibit significant difference in their responses with regard to perception of "Democratic" discipline. The less experienced and maybe more idealistic subgroups of Student Teachers and YOED 4000 Students were subgroups indicating more "Democratic" perception of discipline in contrast to High School Teachers that indicated in their responses more "Autocratic" perception of discipline. Mean scores of "Status" subgroups regarding perception of discipline according to category "Democratic" perceptions of discipline are represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Perception of Discipline

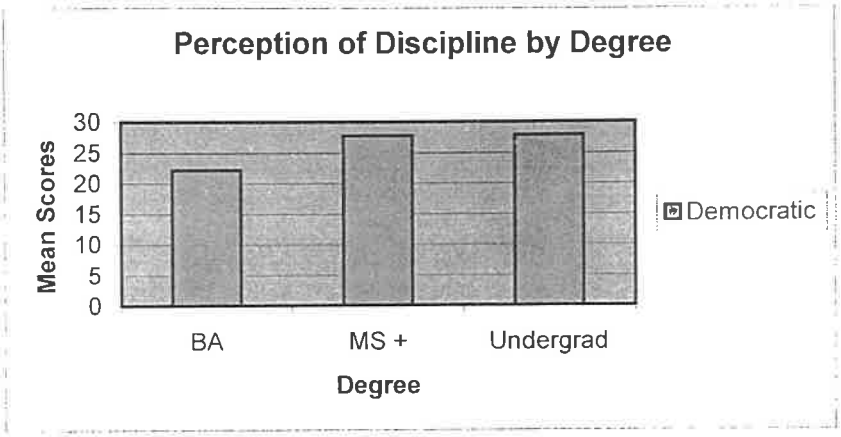


Although "Years of Experience" were not shown to be significant, maybe the fact that the Student Teachers and YOED 4000 Students were still immersed in "university" experiences as opposed to actual "classroom" experiences played a part in that these respondents did not, or could not, see themselves as "authority" figures as did the practicing teachers, hence, the difference in responses. Student Teachers and YOED 4000 Students also were closer "psychologically" to students in high school, and this might have influenced their responses to be more along the lines of "Democratic" with regard to discipline perceptions. Further research investigating when this shift in perspective occurs would be interesting.

"Degree" status and perception of discipline differed significantly in relation to "Democratic" perceptions held by BA and Master's+ subgroups and BA and Undergraduate subgroups. Those holding the BA degree indicated more "Democratic" perceptions of discipline on the scale than did those holding Master's+, and the Master's+

degree holders indicated more "Democratic" perceptions than did the Undergraduates. This was surprising in that one might assume that the younger, less experienced Undergraduates would be more likely to hold more "Democratic" perceptions of discipline than would the older, more experienced BA and Master's+ degree holders. Mean scores of "Degree" subgroups with regard to "Democratic" perceptions of discipline are represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Perception of Discipline by Degree



These data seem to be at odds with data indicated in some of the other comparisons made and the differences that emerged as a result of analysis. It would be interesting to further study degree status and subgroups such as Expert Teachers, Novice Teachers, and Student Teachers with regard to perception of discipline.

Analysis of respondents' perceptions of discipline may be shared and incorporated within teacher preparation classes. Also, knowledge of the differing perceptions of the discipline issue may provide the student teacher, classroom teacher, and practicing/cooperative teacher with a valuable perspective as he/she interacts within various educational experiences. Teacher education students need assistance with lesson planning, classroom management techniques, discipline systems, field placements, and student teaching experiences, but they also need guidance in the area of development of a philosophy of teaching that includes a philosophy of discipline. Furthermore, knowledge and discussion of the differing perceptions of the discipline issue may provide a teacher education student and student teacher with an enlarged perspective as he/she starts the process of developing a philosophy of teaching including perspectives relating to discipline.

Appendix A

Perceptions of School Discipline Survey

Please read the following carefully and select one answer from the scale below.

SA=Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neither Agree nor Disagree
D = Disagree
SD=Strongly Disagree

1.	Teachers must have knowledge of group dynamics.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2.	Teachers need to have background information when dealing with rule infractions.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3.	Teachers are responsible for knowing everything that goes on in the classroom at all times. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
4.	Teachers should create a "democratic" classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5.	Teachers should 'invite" student cooperation.	SA	A	N	D	SD
6.	Teachers are responsible for "shaping" desired behavior in the classroom.*	SA	A	N	D	SD
7.	Teachers should use the reward/punishment system in the classroom. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
8.	Teachers must take student needs into consideration.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9.	Teachers are responsible for controlling the behavior of their students. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
10.	Students are able to control their behavior.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11.	Conflict resolution should be employed in the school setting.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12.	Teachers must deal with all students in the same manner when using disciplinary measures. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
13.	A "sense of belonging" needs to be created by the teacher within the classroom setting.	SA	A	N	D	SD
14.	Class meetings can be used effectively as a means of problem solving for a class concern.	SA	A	N	D	SD
15.	Because students' thinking is limited, rules need to be established for them by mature adults. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
16.	Groups of young children can, through a facilitated class meeting, decide what rules they need to govern themselves.	SA	A	N	D	SD

17. What students must learn and the tasks to be performed must be determined by the teacher, and a specific sequence of instruction to accomplish these goals must be followed. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
18. If books in the class are being misused, I would remove or limit books available and observe closely to see whom was misusing the books in order to punish the offender. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. If books were being misused, I would hold a class meeting and ask the class for suggestion as to what action might be taken.	SA	A	N	D	SD
20. If a student disrupts class, I would ignore the disruption if possible and/or remove the student to the back of the room as a consequence for his behavior.	SA	A	N	D	SD
21. If a student disrupts class, I would express discomfort to the student about being disrupted from my task and then continue on with the lesson. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
22. Rules are never written "in stone," and can be renegotiated by the class; consequences will vary with students.	SA	A	N	D	SD
23. Each student needs to realize there are some school rules that need to be obeyed, and each student who breaks them will be punished in the same fair manner. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
24. Teachers should intervene quickly when misbehavior occurs.	SA	A	N	D	SD
25. Inner thoughts and feelings of students are more important than overt behavior.	SA	A	N	D	SD
26. Individual student differences are as important to the regular education teacher as to the special education teacher.	SA	A	N	D	SD
27. Consequences and punishment are one and the same. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
28. Corporal punishment is an effective method of discipline. *	SA	A	N	D	SD
29. Student autonomy is very important in the classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
30. Extrinsic rewards may decrease intrinsic motivation.	SA	A	N	D	SD

31. Please mark (a) Student Teacher Middle School (b) Student Teacher High School
(c) Teacher Middle School (d) Teacher High School
(e) MTSU Student/YOED 4000

32. Please mark (a) English/Lang. Arts/Foreign Lang. (b) Math/Science (c) History/Social Studies
(d) Health/Wellness/Physical Educ. (e) Speech/Drama/Music/Art

33. Please mark (a) Male (b) Female

34. Teaching Experience (a) 0 (b) 1-5 yrs. (c) 6-10 yrs. (d) 11-15 yrs. (e) 16+ yrs.

35. Degree Earned (a) BA (b) Master's (c) Ed S (d) Doctorate (e) Undergraduate

Appendix B

For purposes of this study, **"Autocratic"** was defined as believing in, relating to, or characterized by obedience to authority, rather than emphasizing individual freedom of judgment and action, indicating a more behavioristic and less flexible perception of discipline.

For purposes of this study, **"Democratic"** was defined as believing in, relating to, or characterized by an emphasis on individuality, indicating a more humanistic and more flexible perception of discipline.

For purposes of this study, variables of status, gender, years of experience, degree, and subject area were divided into subgroups as follows:

Status:	Student Teacher (ST), Teacher Middle School (MS), Teacher High School (HS), and MTSU Student (YOED 4000)
Gender:	Male/Female
Experience:	0, 1-5 yrs, 6-10 yrs., 11-15 yrs., 16+ yrs.
Degree:	Undergraduate, BA, Master's+ (EdS/Doctorate)
Subject Area:	English/Language Arts/Foreign Language, Math/Science, History/Social Studies, Health/Wellness/Physical Education, and Speech/Drama/Music/Art