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Choice theory: A review and trial use of a responsibility model of discipline

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Choice theory: A review and trial use of a responsibility model of discipline

Abstract

Student behavior and classroom discipline have been growing concerns for many years. This paper is a review of the literature relative to the Choice Theory model of classroom discipline and behavior as proposed by Glasser (1969, 1985, 1990) especially as compared to the traditional ways that schools have used to manage student behavior. (Choice Theory was known as Control Theory until 1996, when Glasser changed its name to better reflect its primary goal, which is to help children learn how to make better choices). The focus of this paper is a description of what Choice Theory is and how it can be implemented in schools. The causes that are generally acknowledged as contributing to discipline problems and how teachers address these using the traditional methods of discipline and using Choice Theory were discussed. Traditionally, schools have relied on behavioral approaches to discipline problems, such as Assertive Discipline or behavior modification techniques. Since these methods focus on what can be done to students, they are often referred to as Obedience Models. Glasser's Choice Theory describes how teachers can meet student needs while working with students and emphasizing that the responsibility for the misbehavior belongs to the students. Choice Theory teaches students how to choose more appropriate behaviors. Therefore, it is often referred to as the Responsibility Model. The conclusion addressed how children were helped to change their behavior by implementing Choice Theory principles in the author's third grade classroom.

Choice Theory: A Review and Trial Use

of a Responsibility Model of Discipline

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Division of Elementary Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

By

Cynthia L. Parsons

July 1996

This Graduate Review by: Cynthia L. Parsons

Titled: Choice Theory: A Review and Trial Use of a Responsibility

Model of Discipline

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree Master of Arts in Education.

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Abstract

Student behavior and classroom discipline have been growing concerns for many years. This paper is a review of the literature relative to the Choice Theory model of classroom discipline and behavior as proposed by Glasser (1969, 1985, 1990) especially as compared to the traditional ways that schools have used to manage student behavior. (Choice Theory was known as Control Theory until 1996, when Glasser changed its name to better reflect its primary goal, which is to help children learn how to make better choices). The focus of this paper is a description of what Choice Theory is and how it can be implemented in schools. The causes that are generally acknowledged as contributing to discipline problems and how teachers address these using the traditional methods of discipline and using Choice Theory were discussed. Traditionally, schools have relied on behavioral approaches to discipline problems, such as Assertive Discipline or behavior modification techniques. Since these methods focus on what can be done <u>to</u> students, they are often referred to as Obedience Models. Glasser's Choice Theory describes how teachers can meet student needs while working <u>with</u> students and emphasizing that the responsibility for the misbehavior belongs to the students. Choice Theory teaches students how to choose more appropriate behaviors. Therefore, it is often referred to as the Responsibility Model. The conclusion addressed how children were helped to change their behavior by implementing Choice Theory principles in the author's third grade classroom.

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Choice Theory: A Review and Trial Use

of a Responsibility Model of Discipline

During the past seven years that I have taught third grade at a school where a large number of students are considered at risk, discipline problems have been a fact of the teaching life. In the last few years, however, incidents and behaviors have occurred that leave me reeling and exhausted by the time the dismissal bell rings and feeling as if I have been through a war. I have often questioned my effectiveness as an educator because I have felt as if I were doing something wrong, or at the very least, not doing all that I could and should be doing. The children I work with seem so angry, defiant, and antagonistic much of the time. If you consider teaching as actually being "in the trenches," then in the last three years my field report would include:

**Getting hit in the stomach with a softball by one of my students when I was nine months pregnant. Students are not allowed to bring such items from home, so I had taken it from him at the beginning of the day. At dismissal time, he promised to put it in his backpack and not take it out until he got home, so I gave him the softball outside of the school. A few minutes later I felt a sharp pain as I was hit. I went into premature labor and was hospitalized overnight. I had to go on bed rest and take medication to suppress labor for the next four weeks until my son was born, thankfully unharmed.

**Being kicked in the shins by a student who was out of her seat talking to another student, and who subsequently threw a tantrum when I asked her to take her seat. I had bruises on my leg for over a week.

**Being head-butted and receiving a black eye when requesting a student to leave the room because of his disruptive behavior.

**Having blank checks stolen out of my purse by a student, who then scribbled out my name and information in the top corner, wrote out my check for forty dollars worth of books for a book order and signed his name and then

gave it to me the next day insisting it was his check. He flatly denied the fact that other students had seen him in my desk drawer and said, "They are a bunch of vicious liars who are just trying to get me in trouble."

These are the highlights of what seems to be an everyday occurrence of students displaying physically and verbally aggressive behavior, especially toward each other, but often at teachers and associates; throwing temper tantrums when they don't get their own way; and refusing to work or follow adult-given directions. During the last few years, the focus for myself and other teachers at my school has been mainly on how to maintain order in the classroom. We have been in a survival mode. A different approach to student behavior has been desperately needed.

There has been myriad amounts of books and journal articles written about classroom discipline in the last few decades, but student behavior continues to be an issue of concern for educators and the larger society as well. Recent opinion polls show that discipline (especially the perceived lack of it) in today's schools is a major concern for all segments of society, including parents, students, school personnel, and the business community (McQueen, 1992). Recent surveys of grades K-12 public school teachers show they rank restoring order in the nation's public schools as being a top priority: In a study done by the research group Public Agenda (cited in Associated Press, 1996), 88 percent of the public school teachers surveyed believe that academic achievement would improve substantially if chronic troublemakers were removed from their classes. Feitler and Tobar reported that teachers rank student misbehavior as the number-one cause of job-related stress (cited in Jones & Jones, 1995).

The literature on what teachers can do to manage student behavior is voluminous. Traditional discipline techniques are based on stimulus-response theory (Glasser, 1986), which holds that all behaviors are responses to the

external world around us. The behavioral approaches schools use focus largely on prescribing reactive teacher behaviors to discipline problems; the emphasis is on what teachers and schools can do to get students to obey. Because stimulus-response theory places the responsibility for solving behavioral problems on the teacher, these models are known as Obedience Models (Benshoff, Poidevant, & Cashwell, 1994; Mendler, 1992). The Obedience Models, including Assertive Discipline and behavior modification techniques, focus largely on doing things to students with the intention that they will respond with better behavior. The result is that student misbehavior is viewed as being something that can be changed and influenced by outside factors. The problem is the teacher's because she must figure out what to do to the student so that undesirable behavior can be changed so she can do her job of teaching. Assertive Discipline, which has been used widely in schools, defines student misbehavior as being an encroachment on a teacher's right to teach (Canter, 1988). The Obedience Models of classroom discipline maintain that students should adjust and conform to the classroom and the teacher. The behavioral techniques a teacher utilizes to manage behavior do little to teach students responsibility or actively engage them in addressing and using problem solving techniques to improve their behavior (Koenig, 1995). Also, although the traditional models of discipline give theoretical causes for student misbehavior, they do not address the specific reasons of why students misbehave, or focus on long-term solutions.

Methodology

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this review is to analyze one major discipline model which focuses on helping children as they work at changing their behavior patterns so that the model might be tried out in a classroom setting. The major focus of this review will be to determine why Choice Theory, as posited by William Glasser, is being advocated for use in schools, and how teachers can implement it. The analysis will be guided by the following research questions:

1. Why is the Responsibility Model, specifically Glasser's Choice Theory, better for students than the Obedience Models that have traditionally been used?

2. How can teachers implement Choice Theory in their classrooms?

3. What behavioral changes will occur as a result of implementing Choice Theory in an elementary classroom?

Limitations of the Study

There is a growing body of research that gives theoretical reasons and classroom applications that teachers can utilize in implementing the Responsibility Model of classroom discipline in their classrooms, but it is limited. There are very few empirical studies of the effects of this model on students, and how it impacts their behavior. The majority of schools and parents, because they were brought up this way, are ingrained in the Obedience Models of stimulus-response theory. Therefore, support for this new model is not forthcoming a lot of time; people do not know about it or understand how to use it. Also, the fact that change occurs slowly may inhibit the classroom teacher from personally seeing the total effects of this new model because it can take years for the desired behaviors to be internalized by students.

Definitions of Terms

The terms used in this study will be defined to mean the following:

Assertive Discipline--Cantor's approach to discipline that maintains that students have a choice to either follow the rules or face the consequences because teachers have a right to teach and other students to learn (Canter, 1988).

At Risk--students are considered to be at risk of dropping out of school if they possess certain identification factors, especially a combination of them, such as being behind in grade level one or more years, changing school often, being unmotivated or apathetic to learning, and/or exhibiting behavioral problems.

Authoritarian Discipline--the adult forces control and is dominating.

Behavior Modification--utilizing various techniques such as praise, negative consequences or punishment, giving tokens for appropriate behavior, to manipulate students' behavior.

Classroom Management--maintaining a positive learning environment that is conducive to learning.

Coercive Parenting--this approach is characterized by the parents dealing with the child through the use of threats, explosiveness, unrealistic expectations, and inconsistent consequences given for the misbehavior.

Choice Theory--states that all behavior is an attempt by every living thing to meet their needs based on their internal motivation.

Discipline Problem--Levin and Nolan (1991) describe this as multifaceted behavior that (1) interferes with the teaching act (2) interferes with the rights of others to learn (3) is psychologically or physically unsafe (4) destroys property.

Obedience Models--emphasize what teachers and the school can do to children to get them to obey.

<u>Reality Therapy</u>--an interactive questioning process that places the responsibility for the behavior, and how to solve it, on the student.

<u>Responsibility Model</u>--emphasizes how teachers and the school can work with students to guide and teach them better behavior.

<u>Stimulus-Response Theory</u>--explains that the behavior of all living things is their best response to external events in the world around them (Glasser, 1985).

Analysis and Discussion

My main focus in reviewing the literature about discipline problems was to see what current research had to say about what teachers can do to help students improve their behavior. Society is changing, and children are coming to school in today's world with a lot of problems coupled with few skills for coping with their frustrations and anger. Many students who in the past might have been referred for special education services are remaining in the regular classroom because the demand for these services is growing at an alarming rate, while budget cuts and funding shortages continue. I will have an estimated 32 students for the 1996-1997 school year. I wanted to learn through the literature review what current research demonstrates as being the causes of discipline problems, techniques for dealing with misbehavior, and specific ideas that I could implement in my classroom so that student misbehavior does not prevent these students and others from learning.

Traditional Views of Discipline Problems

Discipline problems and student misbehavior are primarily attributed to factors that can be categorized as those being within the direct control of the teacher (ineffective instruction, teaching style, and classroom management) and those outside of the teacher's direct control, such as societal factors. Societal factors that are generally acknowledged in the Obedience Models as contributing to a student's discipline problems in school include: the changing American family due to divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and teen pregnancy; the mobility of our culture precluding close family ties and support; the lack of positive adult role models; coercive and authoritarian parenting styles; and the impact of violence in the mass media upon children. The theoretical reasons given for why students misbehave in school and become discipline problems are important in (1) understanding how schools have traditionally dealt with discipline problems in the past, (2) determining

how teachers can most effectively help students improve their behavior, and (3) examining alternatives to the Obedience Models, specifically the Responsibility Model called Choice Theory that is based on the work of William Glasser.

Factors outside of a teacher's control.

Research studies agree that the changing American society has contributed to student discipline problems in school in a variety of ways. Levin and Nolan (1991) contend that today's students act and think differently than those of past generations. They claim that the explosion of the mass media into virtually every aspect of students' lives, especially the tremendous amount and forms of it, communicates such a powerful plethora of divergent attitudes and ideas that the direct influences of parents, the schools, and the community pale in comparison. Many researchers place great emphasis on the changing American family. Jones and Jones (1995) describe many studies that show how families have changed in recent years, and how these changes impact on students' behavior in school: Whitehead in 1993 postulated that 55 percent of students born in 1990 will experience the impact of divorce upon their families; that one of every four children growing up in the 1990s will live in a step-family, and hypothesized that by the time these children reach their teenage years nearly half of them will experience a second divorce as their step-family breaks up; and found that out-of-wedlock births grew from five percent in 1960 to 27 percent in 1990. According to Jones and Jones, "These figures clearly indicate the extent of the family breakup, disruption, and emotional turmoil experienced by students. . . Family stress clearly impacts students' ability to function effectively in school" (1995, p. 7).

Much research has been done showing how family dynamics and dysfunction negatively impact the success of children in school. Webb (1992) summarized studies that detail the problems a large number of American youth

encounter during their formative years. She refers to a study by Whitfield in 1987 that suggested that 80 percent of all American children come from dysfunctional families in which they do not receive enough love, nurturing, and support to enable them to form healthy and productive interpersonal relationships by the time they enter school, or that allow them to feel good about themselves. Research studies done by Cowan et al., Spivack and Swift, and Victor and Halverson (cited in Webb, 1992) show other effects on children from dysfunctional families. These include that these children often have problems taking responsibility for their own behavior, and are frequently characterized as having short attention spans, being easily distracted, and having difficulty following directions. Such students also display low academic performance, and have poor communication and social skills.

Fields and Boesser (1994) described how children from dysfunctional families often have few opportunities to develop strong interpersonal relationships in the home. They concluded that these children often exhibit a lack of self-control, high anxiety, aggression, or withdrawal. Along with the changing American family and its effects on children, much research has also been done on parenting styles and their interactive effects on children and their behavior.

Walker and Walker (1991) explored the factors of noncompliance in children. They found that the ways in which parents interact with their children are good predictors of the types of noncompliance their children will exhibit at school. Their study found marked contrasts between the children of parents who relied mainly on social reasoning and communication--including persuasion and feedback--and those parents who used harsh, coercive, punitive methods. The social reasoning parents were more likely to have children who demonstrated less aversive forms of noncompliance in school; they used simple refusal or negotiation of a task. The harsh, punitive parents

were much more likely to have children who used less acceptable forms of noncompliance such as defiance and oppositional behaviors like physical aggression and temper outbursts to resist a task.

Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, and Conger (1991) found that the consequences of a coercive parenting style can have serious ramifications for teachers and other students. They concluded that children of coercive parents had an increased risk of academic failure, created more disruptions in the classroom, and were involved in more fights and other aggressive behaviors on the playground. The reasons given for these findings include the fact that, since children are not exposed to other examples of behavior, they extend the coercive behavior style learned at home to their interactions with their peers and teachers at school. Simons et al. also described the studies by Patterson that show that children's aggressiveness becomes more pronounced when dealt with coercively by parents, and when more appropriate social skills are not modeled or reinforced at home. Not only were the attempts to control children's behavior ineffective, but the coercive parenting was found to increase the children's aggressiveness. Jones and Jones (1995) warned that these students also frequently face authoritarian discipline at school, which does little to improve their behavior.

> Unfortunately, many students today see authoritarian discipline associated with physical and psychological abuse and abandonment. Therefore, when confronted with authoritarian methods of student management, rather than comply, these students experience fear, anxiety, anger, and rebellion. This is exacerbated by the fact that they correctly believe that the authoritarian methods used by school personnel will not be as physically or psychologically damaging as those experienced at home. (p. 309)

Factors within a teacher's control.

A great body of research has been compiled about what teachers can do within their own classrooms to improve student behavior. This research has provided generalizations about what constitutes effective instruction, classroom management, and improved teaching style.

Good and Brophy (cited in McQueen, 1992) summarized research findings and listed five personal attributes that are mandatory for teachers to possess to be effective classroom managers. These attributes include:

1. Having the respect and affection of the students.

2. Being consistent, and therefore credible and dependable.

3. Assuming responsibility for the students' learning.

4. Valuing and enjoying learning, and expecting their students to do so, also.

5. Communicating their basic attitudes and expectations to students, and modeling them in their behavior toward students. (p. 17)

McQueen also describes research findings that demonstrate other aspects of effective classroom management. Studies have shown that teachers who resolve behavior problems when they do occur by involving the students in changing their behavior are judged to be more effective than teachers who do not involve their students (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981).

Levin and Nolan (1991) describe studies that show that teacher's personal feelings do influence their interactions with students. Studies by Walker and Buckley (cited in Levin & Nolan, 1991) found that teachers interacted differently with disruptive students than with nondisruptive students. The study concluded that teachers are much more likely to reprimand inappropriate behavior than to approve of appropriate behavior when interacting with disruptive students. This, of course, sends the message to the students that in order to get attention they have to misbehave.

The importance of how teachers manage their classrooms and their involvements with students is highlighted by the research of Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (cited in DiGiulio, 1995). They found that classroom management affected learning more than any other factors in the students' life, such as their home environment, cognitive processes, school climate, school policies, and parental support.

Jones and Jones (1995) describe five tenets of classroom management that improve student learning and behavior. These include:

1. Classroom management should be based on a clear understanding of current research and theory in classroom management, and on students' personal and psychological needs.

2. Classroom management depends on establishing positive teacher-student and peer relationships that help meet students' basic psychological needs.

3. Comprehensive classroom management involves using instructional methods that facilitate optimal learning by responding to the academic needs of the individual students and the classroom group.

4. Comprehensive classroom management involves using organizational and group management methods that maximize on-task student behavior.

5. Classroom management involves the ability to use a wide range of counseling and behavioral methods that involve students in examining and correcting their inappropriate behavior. (pp. 18-19)

Along with effective classroom management, research has shown how teachers can maximize their instructional effectiveness. There are research generalizations of effective teaching that can be controlled by teachers either directly or indirectly and lead to improved student learning and/or improved student behavior. Levin and Nolan (1991) stressed that teachers have great impact in their classrooms through the following: lesson design, ability to

motivate and involve students, providing clear teacher expectations, classroom questioning techniques, ability to maximize learning time, and communicating the criteria for evaluation.

Oftentimes, though, teachers who demonstrate the characteristics of effective instruction and classroom management still have problems with student behavior. Schools have responded to discipline problems in different ways; still adhering mainly to the Obedience Models, whose effectiveness is currently being questioned.

Criticisms of Traditional School Discipline (Obedience Models)

There are five types of misbehavior that teachers deal with in school, according to social scientists (Charles, 1992; Levin & Nolan, 1991). These include the following: aggression (physical and verbal attacks by students against the teacher or other students); immorality (lying, stealing, cheating); defiance of authority (refusal to work, not following directions); disruption of class (out-of-seat behavior, not raising hand to talk, bothering others); goofing off (being off task, not completing work). Schools have traditionally used a punitive approach when dealing with students who act in these ways, such as giving detention or suspending students from school.

The Obedience Models of classroom discipline are centered on doing things to children, especially invoking negative consequences or punishment, in retaliation for or to thwart further misbehavior. Since the main purpose is to ". . .maintain adult control over younger people. . . classroom discipline is a matter of teacher behaviors and not student actions" (McLaughlin, 1994, p. 76). Because the goals of discipline include stopping the disruptive behavior, getting students to adopt productive behavior and cooperate (Koenig, 1995), there has been much criticism recently of the traditional methods that schools have used in dealing with behavior problems.

Recent criticism suggests that: (a) techniques used do not allow students

to internalize the values inherent in the desired behaviors (Mendler, 1992);
(b) the underlying causes are not dealt with (Fields & Boesser, 1994; Wragg,
1995); (c) student needs are not being met (Jones & Jones, 1995; Mendler, 1992);
(d) praise and punishment, common techniques used, are harmful to children
(DiGiulio, 1995; Fields & Boesser, 1994; Hitz, 1988; Hitz & Driscoll, 1988; Wolfgang,
1995); (e) they do not teach students how to be responsible or effect long-term
behavior (Ayres & Hedeen, 1996; Gathercoal, 1989; Hitz, 1988).   Also, the
current problems that schools and society are having with children's
behavior sends a clear message that the Obedience Models are not working for
the children who need it the most; those who consistently act up in school
(Hyman, 1994; Wragg, 1995).

Responsibility Model of Discipline

Contrary to the behavioral approaches of the Obedience Models of
discipline, which hold that all behavior is a reaction to external factors in the
world around us, proponents of the Responsibility Model of discipline believe
that all living creatures are driven by internal motivators (Glasser, 1969).
Meeting these internal needs is the foundation of the Responsibility Model.   A
growing amount of research literature identifies unmet student needs as the
root of all conduct problems (Borich, 1993; Fields & Boesser, 1994; Mendler,
1992; Raffini, 1993; Wolfgang, 1995).

Glasser's Choice Theory is based on the belief that all behavior is our best
attempt to control five basic needs.   These internal needs are related, though
not driven, by what is going on around us.   When these needs are being met,
we feel good; when they are not met, we feel frustration, anger, and out of
control.   Choice Theory defines behavior, then, as being actions which satisfy
people at any given time.   Glasser identifies five basic needs that he maintains
are built into our genetic structure as "instructions for living."   One is
physiological (survival) and four are psychological: love and belonging,

power, freedom, fun.

The fulfillment of love and belonging is needed before the other psychological needs can be met. Newborn babies become bonded soon after birth when they learn that at least one person is there for them when their basic physiological needs for survival, such as hunger, must be met. When they signal their needs by crying someone, usually a parent, responds and helps them meet their needs by feeding them, changing their diaper, or giving them love by holding them and interacting with them. The need for love and belonging continues for a person's entire life.

Giving and receiving love and creating a sense of belonging is an important part of the teacher's role and is a basic tenet of using Choice Theory in the classroom. Discipline problems arise if this need is unfulfilled because other psychological needs are not met without it. It is the foundation of future psychological happiness because a student who has not experienced love as a child will have a difficult time growing up well-adjusted, let alone be able to give and receive love as an adult. Teachers need to be cognizant of the other basic needs as well and actively help students meet them. Although our genes are preprogrammed to tell us what we need to survive and function productively, students have to learn a variety of behaviors and strategies for that to happen because our needs are so complex; no one behavior will satisfy all of them. Because inappropriate behaviors are students' attempts at meeting their needs, Glasser thinks school is the ideal place for this learning to occur. There are problems, however, because schools are so entrenched in stimulus-response theory.

Glasser contends that, although stimulus-response theory has been accepted as "common sense" since formal education began it has, until recently, never been seriously questioned. He states that "Stimulus-response psychology does not work in schools or anywhere else because it treats living

people like dead things. . . .But all motivation of all living things is from within, while dead things, like machines, are controlled from the outside" (1985, p. 241). Although stimulus-response methods do not work in school-- unless as quick-fix temporary solutions--Glasser contends, the students, not the theory, are blamed when they fail to respond to the discipline methods used.

Choice Theory holds that all behavior is driven by our attempts to meet our basic needs. Therefore, problems arise when school is unfulfilling for a student. One of the most damaging and frustrating experiences for children in the learning process is failure. Students do learn from failure but not always in expected ways. Failure prohibits many of the psychological needs from being met and destroys the internal motivation these needs are based upon. Students who experience failure in school do not have a sense of belonging. Glasser cautions that the early years of school, from ages five to ten, are critical because students who experience failure during this time may never recover from it; they will identify failure as being all they are capable of accomplishing and may begin to hate school, thinking they are incapable of learning. He feels that attributing students' low academic skills, behavioral problems, and other difficulties to societal factors, as the Obedience Models do, misses the point for two reasons:

> (1) It removes personal responsibility for failure. (2) It does not recognize that school success is potentially open to all young people. If students can gain enough responsibility to work hard in school, and if the built-in barriers to success can be removed from all schools, many of the detrimental conditions can be overcome. (1969, p. 27)

Glasser attributes many discipline problems to the way students are evaluated and compared in school from their first day of kindergarten and on. He says that, even though many students come from homes that are less than

ideal, schools only heighten any problems that a student may bring from home. He is especially critical about the number of children who experience failure in school.

The Quality World

According to Choice Theory, life events and behaviors are our best attempts at satisfying our needs, which are driven by internal motivators. To help us meet these needs, we have pictures in our heads to help us judge and monitor our behavioral choices so we remember which ones make us feel good. Glasser calls these mental pictures our "quality world."

Pictures in our quality world include people. Glasser says that if students experience failure in school, especially during the critical years between the ages of five and ten, they take school (and their teacher) out of their quality world. He says students, particularly those from less-advantaged homes, experience failure repeatedly in school--especially when they are compared to students from advantaged homes. Discipline problems then result because students' needs, especially belonging but also those of power, freedom, and fun, are not being met. Students choose inappropriate behaviors because they see them as more need-fulfilling than experiencing failure in school. They disrupt class, refuse to try to learn, and employ different avoidance techniques. Glasser blames these problems on the schools:

> Such students have learned fewer needs-satisfying behaviors than children from advantaged homes, and they come to school both less willing and less able to do the work. They are, therefore, more easily frustrated. This means that almost from the start they do not do as well in school, even though they are inherently just as capable as the advantaged students who do better. Second, less advantaged students are bossed more by people who assume it will "motivate" them to do better. In this oppressive (to them) atmosphere, they refuse to work even more;

as they continue to be pushed and punished they learn to hate school, which is the only place outside of their homes that they can learn significant ways to meet their needs. (1990, p. 50)

According to Choice Theory, if a student does not have a picture of school in his quality world because he identifies with failure, (or if he finds school boring, irrelevant, or coercive), then he is no longer thinking logically with his brain to fulfill his needs at school. He reverts to behavior which is directed by his emotions and how he feels (his physiology). Although Choice Theory defines total behavior to include the four components of acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology, a person who acts mainly from his emotions is not behaving rationally. Glasser maintains that teachers whose students do not have a picture of them in their quality worlds are not fulfilling their task of educating those children.

The goals of education are to give people the mental tools to deal effectively with new situations, to place fewer restrictions on their lives caused by fear of difficult problems, and to enable people to deal with new situations or difficult problems rationally rather than emotionally. (1990, p. 43)

Glasser says that, because no one can learn to think logically instead of emotionally when he is failing, it is crucial that the teacher provide successful experiences in school that meet students' needs. Experiencing success and listening to a person who is already in their quality world because they have their love and respect are the only two reasons that people replace a previously removed picture back into their quality world. Glasser contends that if teachers can get students to place confidence in them by meeting at least some basic needs in the classroom, students will be able to cope with any frustrations that occur in school. He argues, however, that schools and student behavior will not improve as long as the Obedience Models of discipline and

learning continue to be used.

Developing Quality Schools

Achieving schools of quality is an important issue in Glasser's work and is critical in the Responsibility Model. He feels that currently schools are, for the most part, achieving little in trying to teach students what they need to know to function productively in the world because of the curriculum and the ways that teachers teach. He estimates that only around 15 percent of students do work worthy of their potential or that can be judged as their best. Students are not involved in their schoolwork because of the following reasons: it is either not relevant to their lives or the relevance is not taught to them; schoolwork is comprised largely of meaningless memory-oriented fragmented learning tasks instead of critical thinking skills; they experience too much failure; they rebel or refuse to do work that does not satisfy their basic needs.

The way that teachers use the Obedience Models of discipline give them all of the power (one of the basic needs) and students little, if any. Teachers tend to rely on coercive tactics to get students to do what they want because only the teachers' needs are considered. Glasser calls this form of teaching "boss-management." Students are the workers who must do as the boss says. He gives four elements of the boss-management style that teachers have traditionally employed:

1. The boss sets the task and the standards for what the workers (students) are to do, usually without consulting the workers. Bosses do not compromise; the worker has to adjust to the job as the boss defines it.

2. The boss usually tells, rather than shows, the workers how the work is to be done and rarely asks for their input as to how it might possibly be done better.

3. The boss inspects (or grades) the work. Because the boss does not involve the workers in this evaluation, they tend to settle for just enough

to get by.

4.   When workers resist, the boss uses coercion (usually punishment) almost exclusively to try to make them do as they are told, and in doing so, creates a workplace in which the workers and managers are adversaries. (1990, pp. 25-26)

The problem, he points out using this work-place analogy, is that these workers cannot be fired and rarely quit as they used to if their needs were not being met because they cannot earn a decent living nowadays (to meet their survival needs) without at least a high school diploma.   So most of them stay in school because they do not have to do quality work in order to graduate, but do little work and take up space and engage in unproductive attempts to get their needs met, which often includes retaliation against the bosses in the form of discipline problems.   This leads to the students and teachers becoming adversaries engaged in continuing, degenerative power struggles.

Glasser says that the "boss-management" form of the Obedience Models does not work because students are not involved in their learning and are unable to relate what they do learn to anything in real life.   He blames this on the "measurement principle" embraced by schools that emphasizes facts and information that can be measured and assigned a numerical value, especially the knowledge measured by standardized testing.   Glasser asserts that the reliance on and importance given to standardized testing, which has only right and wrong answers that measure thinking only at the knowledge level, leads to instruction that is memory-oriented, fragmented, and meaningless.   He thinks that the function of education has become giving students correct answers instead of teaching them critical thinking skills.

The boss-management style of teaching can be replaced by teachers becoming what Glasser calls "lead-managers."   He cites four elements of the lead-manager teaching style that teachers should implement:

1.   The leader engages the workers in a discussion of the quality of the work to be done and the time needed to do it so they have a chance to add their input. The leader makes a conscious effort to fit the job to the skills and the needs of the workers.

2.   The leader shows or models the job so that the workers can see exactly what is expected of them. At the same time, the workers are continually asked for their input as to what they believe may be a better way.

3.   The leader asks the workers to evaluate their own work for quality, with the understanding that they know how to produce high quality work, and that the leader will listen to their input.

4.   The leader is a facilitator in that he shows the workers he has done everything possible to provide them with the best tools and workplace, as well as a noncoercive atmosphere in which to do the job. (1990, pp. 31-32)

Glasser maintains that discipline is only a problem when students are not getting their needs met and experiencing the satisfaction that comes from that. Schoolwork is often comprised of tasks that do not appear immediately satisfying to students so it is the teacher's job to convince students that it is in their best interest to do the work even though the satisfaction has to be delayed. Ways teachers can do this include using the factors within their direct control, such as the use of effective teaching strategies, that allow students to meet at least some needs immediately and feel good. Giving students choices allows the needs of power and freedom to be met. Cooperative learning is one example of a method that allows students to feel a sense of belonging and have fun.

Another method that Glasser advocates is the use of classroom meetings to meet students' needs by establishing a strong sense of belonging and involvement. He advises that students meet at regularly scheduled times

during the week. The length of time depends on how old the students are. Elementary students, for example, would meet around three times a week for about 10-30 minutes. In the meetings, students discuss the problems of the whole class or those of individual students in the class. He emphasizes that class meetings are as important as reading, math, or other curricular areas because, although they are normally initiated to solve discipline problems, they can be used effectively to gain and sustain educational relevance.

There are three types of classroom meetings: open-ended, educational/diagnostic, and problem-solving. Glasser gives the following guidelines to be used during any class meeting:

1. All problems relative to the class as a group or to any individual in the class are eligible for discussion. They can deal with school or home problems, and be problems that are brought up by the teacher or the students.

2. The discussion itself should always be directed toward solving the problem. The solution should never include punishment or fault-finding.

3. The meetings should always be conducted with the teacher and the students seated in a tight circle. This provides a feeling of "coming together," a feeling of closeness, and enables good eye contact to be established and maintained. (1969, p. 127)

The open-ended classroom meetings should be used most often, according to Glasser. During this type, the students are asked to discuss any questions or problems they have that are related to their lives, or to explore imaginary problems. The goal of the teacher is to stimulate the children to think. Students should feel free to voice their opinions and conclusions. The teacher should not bring value judgments into the discussion.

The educational/diagnostic class meetings are always related to what the

class is currently learning. The teacher uses these to make instructional decisions--what the students know and don't know about the subject, and to determine students' additional interests related to the subject. The teacher can also see if previously used instructional methods were effective by students' knowledge and answers during the discussions.

During the problem-solving class meetings, the class discusses problems that effect the group or individuals within the group. They define the problem, determine solutions, and commit to a plan of action. According to Glasser, this type of class meeting teaches the students that ". . .although the world may be difficult and that it may at times appear hostile and mysterious, they can use their brains individually and as a group to solve the problems of living in their school world" (1969, p. 124).

Using Choice Theory in the Classroom

Glasser's Choice Theory is referred to as the Responsibility Model of classroom discipline because it places the responsibility for misbehavior on the student. It is the teacher's role to help meet students' needs and stay firmly ensconced in their quality worlds by providing instruction that is relevant in an interesting way, to make sure students experience success and feel a sense of belonging, to give them choices so they feel a sense of power and have freedom, but students are ultimately responsible for their own actions. To aid in students taking ownership of their behavior, teachers using Choice Theory have discussions with their students on what rules they need.

After the discussions about rules, students and teachers collaboratively determine the classroom rules that will allow them to function productively as learners. Glasser advises that the rules be minimal because when rules are broken teachers run the risk of becoming adversaries when they enforce the them. Special attention in the rule-making discussions should be placed on what consequences the students think should be given if the rules are broken.

The focus should be on ways the problem can be solved if a rule is broken. Glasser advises that after the rules and consequences are agreed upon the students should sign them, stating that they have read and understand them and that, if they do break a rule they will try, with the teacher's help, to solve the underlying problem. If problems later arise, teachers should use an approach that Glasser calls "Reality Therapy" to focus the student's attention on solving the problem and taking responsibility for his/her behavior.

Reality Therapy

Glasser states that "the worst behaviors we see are chosen by people who have lost control" (1985, p. 245). It is the function of school personnel (especially teachers because they are hopefully in the students' quality worlds), to help students face the reality that their misbehavior is unproductive and interfering with their learning. Misbehavior is not meeting their needs. But in order to convince students of this reality, students must first identify with their teacher as a person.

Reality Therapy says that teachers and students must become involved; that when students are involved with responsible teachers, people who themselves have a success identity and can fulfill their needs, the students are then in a position to fulfill their own needs. Students are responsible for fulfilling their needs, they are responsible for their behavior, they are not mentally ill but are making bad choices when their behavior is deviant; nevertheless, they can't make better choices, more responsible choices, unless they are strongly and emotionally involved with those who can. (1969, p. 19)

Glasser describes Reality Therapy as consisting of three separate components--first, involvement so the student can face reality and see how her behavior is unrealistic; second, the teacher still accepting the student and maintaining his involvement with her; third, the teacher showing the student

how to better fulfill her needs within the confines of reality.

Reality Therapy leads students through questioning into judging their behavior. Glasser emphasizes that unless students evaluate their behavior they will not change it. Therefore, "What" questions are asked to the misbehaving student. "What are you doing?" "In what way is that helping you or the class?" "Why" questions, such as "Why are you doing that?" are never asked because it gives the student a chance to justify the misbehavior. If students respond to the questioning by stating they do not know what they were doing, or that the behavior is helping them because it made them feel good to hit someone, or that another person made them do it, the teacher should reiterate for them what they were doing or say "It's not working for me," according to Glasser. After the student makes a value judgment through the questioning, he commits to a plan. Glasser says "It is from commitment that we gain maturity and worthwhileness, and an understanding of real love. But no excuse is acceptable for not following through with the plan" (1969, p. 22).

Glasser acknowledges that some students are more difficult to deal with than others because of their unmet needs and the pictures in their quality worlds. He advises more stringent approaches to these children, such as putting them in a timeout room until they are ready to think rationally and agree to commit to plan. If a student misbehaves there, schools should send the student home. The student should remain there until she is willing to present a written plan on how she is going to change her behavior. Glasser states that this will teach students that, although the school is willing to help them meet their needs, it will not tolerate disorder. The responsibility for students' behavior ultimately belongs to them. It is hoped that eventually, with the school's continued, unwavering support, the students will be able to make better behavioral choices.

Using Choice Theory in My Classroom

Before learning Choice Theory I always marveled at the kindergartners and first graders at my school. So many of them were filled with such anger! They went scowling down the hallways in school and, if an adult other than their teacher tried to correct them on the playground, it was not uncommon for them to tell that adult "Shut up!" and run away defiantly or stand their ground and look on with great hostility while that adult pried their fingers from around another child's neck. I remember the joy that I felt when I was in first grade, the great anticipation in which I waited to learn to read like my older sister in second grade. I would not have dreamed of speaking to an adult like that, or acting how some of these children act. No, I could not begin to guess why these children seemed to hate school already.

Now I think I have a better understanding: school was not in their quality worlds. Many children in my school live in a housing project where drug dealing is all around; where they often hear gunfire blasting in the night; where their parents, if they are fortunate enough to live with a parent (some live with their grandparents or other relatives) are struggling just to survive. Also, I think school is not in many of the parents' quality worlds because they had unpleasant experiences when they were in school. A large number of parents at my school did not complete high school. If parents do not have school in their quality worlds they will have a hard time putting it in their child's; it is up to the teacher to put it in there.

Some of my students entered third grade during the 1995-1996 school year with pictures of school in their quality worlds. Many did not, or it was the wrong picture. These students seemed very defiant and oppositional, and they were crying out for attention, any attention, no matter how negative it might be. Fights in my classroom were practically an everyday occurrence. My school has a zero tolerance policy for discipline. This means that district

referrals are written up when students are fighting and trying to hurt each other. Referrals are also written up on students who exhibit great defiance.

My school marks time by trimesters; we have three 12-week trimesters in a school year. I think that the numbers of referrals for the first and second trimesters show clearly the impact of using Choice Theory in my classroom. During the first trimester I wrote a total of 53 referrals for fighting and/or severe student defiance. These were written for eight out of my 20 students. One student had 13 referrals during these twelve weeks, one student had 12, two had 9, two had 3, and two had 2. This averages out to almost six referrals a week--at least one serious disruption of our classroom every day.

If I were to speculate on the amount of instructional time lost due to student misconduct, the time lost would include not only that needed for dealing with the misbehaving student(s), such as breaking up fistfights and getting students out of the room because they refused to go willingly roughly 80 percent of the time. Instructional time was also lost by the time it took to write up the district referrals because students could not be sent to the office without the prerequisite paperwork. I would have to immediately stop what I was doing in order to fill out at least one, oftentimes two, rather lengthy forms to document what happened, student statements, warnings given to students, and prior actions taken by me to prevent the misbehavior from occurring. The time lost also would include that needed to refocus the rest of the class afterward.

If each of the 53 incidents that required a district referral took an average of 10 minutes, almost nine hours of class time was used. More time was spent in the first twelve weeks of school dealing with discipline problems than students spend in school one day! This does not include the student misconduct that I dealt with in the room and was not serious enough in nature to require a written district referral. During the first twelve weeks of school, I left school

exhausted, stressed out, and feeling as if I'd been through a war because so many students seemed to see me--and each other--as the enemy.

I began implementing many of the Choice Theory ideas at the beginning of the school year with my class. These included having the students help determine the rules for the classroom and the consequences for misbehavior; using class meetings, and activities meant to build group cohesiveness; and using Reality Therapy questioning techniques when students had a problem. I also taught my students social skills training and anger control techniques. The students who had frequent behavior problems were very reluctant and frustrated over this new discipline system. I think they were used to using negative and disruptive behaviors for power plays, to get out of work, and for attention. Choice Theory and the use of Reality Therapy made the students accept responsibility for their own behavior. No excuses for the behavior were allowed. The focus was on what the students were going to do to make better choices. Often, the poor choices my students made had to do with the classroom rules.

My students and I had a class discussion at the beginning of the year to come up with a belief statement which they signed that reflected what they thought school was for. Questions I asked included, "Why do you go to school? What are you supposed to learn? How will this knowledge help you?" The students were eager to share their ideas and views about school, although a few said they had no idea; they just went because they had to. The class belief statement read: "We believe we go to school to learn. We need to be able to read well, write well, do math, and have skills that will help us live. We learn best when we follow directions and the rules because school is our job, and it's important."

We also had a class discussion to determine what rules we needed to help them learn well. The rules they created are: "My job as a student is to do the

following: get my work done, listen, be polite, sit in my seat, raise my hand to talk or if I need help, follow directions." We also discussed what they thought my role as a teacher should be. I told them that I became a teacher because I like learning, and helping other people learn. I said I get frustrated and feel like I'm nagging sometimes when students don't follow the rules. The students decided: "Our teacher's job is to do the following: speak calmly, quietly help people who raise their hands, like us even when she doesn't like our behavior, help us make good choices, help us understand things."

Along with our belief statement and the job descriptions, the students also created T-charts that showed what the school/life rules of our school would look like and sound like. The school/life rules are what every student should be able to do by the time they finish fifth grade. They are "Be Committed, Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Positive, Be Safe."

The T-chart for "Be Safe," for example, stated that it would look like students walking in the hallways and it would sound like teachers not having to say "Walk!" It would also look like students not kicking or hitting each other, and it would sound like pleasant voices instead of crying or yelling. These were posted in the classroom as reminders of appropriate behavior.

The students had a hard time determining consequences for misbehavior. I reminded them that it was my job to help them choose better behavior and keep them safe, but they were very punitive-thinking. They came up with things like having to stay after school for a week or missing recess for a month. We finally, after much discussion, agreed upon the following sequential steps as consequences for misbehavior: a warning; going to the "Think Table" to plan better behavior if misconduct continued; making a written plan; and finally, a phone call home to stay after school to talk to me and complete missed work. If a problem still persisted, the student would be sent to another classroom for the rest of the morning or afternoon.

(Sending students home as Glasser advised was very unworkable for the most part). Also, students understood that the zero tolerance rule still applied to certain behaviors, like fighting and trying to hurt someone else, and called for a trip to the office.

During the second trimester, I wrote a total of 15 referrals involving six students. One student had 6 (down from his previous 12), one student had 4 (up from his previous 3), one student had 2 (down from her previous 9), one student had 1 (down from his previous 13), one student had 1 (down from her previous 2). One student got 1 who did not get any the first trimester. Three students who had previously gotten referrals didn't get any during the second trimester.

The behavioral steps were not written in stone because a student could get a phone call home or be sent out of the room to plan better behavior if attitudes were negative or if the student did not appear committed to changing the misbehavior. But when there were behavior problems, the sequential steps and the use of Reality Therapy questioning went well. I think they really made students more responsible for their own behavior. The focus was on solutions to problems, what I could do to help, what the student thought would help him/her, and what plan would be implemented by the student to change the behavior, and how the student would know that the plan was actually working. The problems belonged to the students.

Glasser's recommendation of holding class meetings was also utilized in my classroom. My students were very involved during the class meetings. We met every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for about half an hour right before lunch. I suggested topics, but students also brought up things to discuss. Some even planned a topic before the meeting. I think the use of these meetings made us come together more as a group. We shared common goals, the topics were relevant to what was happening in the classroom either academically or

socially, and students liked the meetings because they were listened to. They also thought of them as getting out of schoolwork. The meetings were an important part of the curriculum.

Another teacher at my school and the guidance counselor gave me several great books that have activities that are based on Choice Theory. One is Teach Them to be Happy by Robert A. Sullo (1993). The other is Quality Time for Quality Kids by Glenn Smith and Kathy Tomberlin (1993). Both list activities that teach students what their basic needs are, ways to fulfill them, discussion ideas, and group-building games. Along with these, I taught social skills techniques such as "How to disagree appropriately" and "How to get the teacher's attention." Anger control strategies students learned included counting to ten, taking deep breaths, walking away, talking to that person later, writing their angry thoughts down on a piece of paper and then tearing it up to symbolize throwing away the anger, and picturing something funny mentally when they recognized they were getting angry. We practiced these often in role play situations, along with the use of "I feel" statements. The focus was on what students themselves could do to solve problems. They knew they could get adult help if needed, but they had to try first to solve the problem on their own.

There were five students in my classroom who consistently displayed disruptive, aggressive behavior in the classroom, during specials, at lunch, and on the playground. These students did weekly goal-setting, which was recorded on special forms. They each decided what specific aspects of behavior they would focus on for the week, such as sitting in their seats, completing their work, controlling their temper, when asked to do something to "Think okay, do it right away." I kept the goal sheets on a clipboard, and at scheduled times during the day the students would briefly meet with me and self-evaluate how they were meeting their goals and fill in their goal sheet

with things like stars or happy faces if they were meeting their goal, or making an "X" if they were not. The goal sheets were taken home every day for the parents to sign. At the end of the week we graphed their total goal points. Students could earn five points a day and 25 points a week. Over time, the graphs showed improvement in behavior for every student. All except two eventually went off of their goal sheets because we felt they didn't need them anymore. The two who stayed on them all year felt the goal sheets helped focus them on what they needed to do in their jobs as students.

Along with these specific techniques, I tried hard to make my instruction relevant to the students' lives, or let them know exactly why we were learning something when the relevance was not readily apparent. Students were also exposed to quality samples of work, such as examples of writing that were similar to what I wanted them to be able to produce. Discussions centered on "Is this a quality piece of writing? What makes it quality?" Students engaged in higher-level thinking skills as they judged the samples I showed them. They soon began to apply the concept of quality to their own schoolwork.

As a result of implementing Choice Theory into my classroom, I can honestly say that, although we still have behavioral problems in my classroom, the students and I are all dealing with them better. The students seem to like each other more. It is as if they have called a cease-fire and become allies, with each other and with me, in the learning process.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this review was to analyze the literature that describes the Responsibility Model of classroom discipline so that the model might be used on a trial basis in a classroom. The focus of the review was to determine why the model is being advocated for use in schools, and how teachers can implement it in their classrooms. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. Why is the Responsibility Model, specifically Glasser's Choice Theory, better for students than the Obedience Models that have traditionally been used?

2. How can teachers implement Choice Theory in their classrooms?

3. What behavioral changes will occur as a result of implementing Choice Theory in an elementary classroom?

Summary

A growing quantity of research literature identifies unmet student needs as the root of all conduct problems. Glasser's Choice Theory is based on the belief that all behavior is our best attempt to control five basic needs. This view differs diametrically from the stimulus-response theory characterized by the implementation of behavioral approaches to manipulate student behavior that schools have traditionally embraced.

Glasser maintains that discipline problems arise when students are failing and have given up, are frustrated because they can't do the work, or do not find it interesting or relevant to their lives. Students then choose inappropriate behaviors because they see them as better meeting their needs. Therefore, Glasser contends that a teacher's fundamental job is to help students try to meet their needs in appropriate ways. Quality work and learning will not occur otherwise. He focuses on utilizing factors within a teacher's direct control, such as implementing cooperative learning, class

meetings, and ensuring that students experience success and are actively involved in the learning process.

Choice Theory places the responsibility for misbehavior on the student. Students are also involved in determining what classroom rules and consequences for misbehavior will work for them. The teacher becomes more of a facilitator and guide in helping students make good choices. Students come to see the teacher as a helper and not an enforcer because the focus is on solutions to problems.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the current problems schools are having with student behavior point to the fact that something different is sorely needed. Society is changing, and children are coming to school in today's world with a lot of problems coupled with few skills for coping with their frustrations and anger. Teachers need to be directly involved with their students, and to teach them in ways that ensure they experience enough success so they can deal with the normal pitfalls and setbacks that occur in the learning process. Learning is not easy, but teachers can make it happen more naturally by incorporating Choice Theory techniques into their instruction and interactions with their students. Children need to see school and learning as something that will enable them to have a better life. Teachers who teach in a need-fulfilling way will have more involved students while at the same time equipping them with needed life skills.

Recommendations

The review of the literature and the implementation in my classroom of the ideas advocated by Glasser lead to the following recommendations for implementing Choice Theory in the classroom:

1. Start to implement Choice Theory by living it. Think of how your basic needs are being met, or not met. What choices do you have? For

example, I was doing what Glasser would call "choosing to depress" about my class this year and really browbeating myself because I couldn't "make" my students behave. Using cooperative learning groups was not fun this year for me because my students would always refuse to work if they did not get to pick who they worked with, and just about everyone could only stand to work with just one other person instead of groups of four as I wanted for certain activities. Even if it was a choose-your-own-partner activity, hitting, name calling of each other's mothers, and goofing off were common behaviors. The cooperative learning problem was greatly improved when students realized they could choose not to work in their assigned group and just sit, do nothing, and not receive credit, or they could choose to participate, be respectful of others and their feelings, and listen and follow the directions. Meeting the students' need for power made all the difference.

2. Teach Choice Theory to your students. There are activities in the two books previously mentioned, Teach Them to Be Happy and Quality Time for Quality Kids, that are easily implemented in the classroom. There are many activities expressly directed at building group cohesiveness; I found these especially good in developing the need for love and belonging in my students. Other activities are intended for teaching the other needs and how students can make appropriate choices in meeting their needs. Class discussion suggestions are also provided.

3. Implement Choice Theory ideas in your classroom. The collaborative development of classroom rules and consequences created a sense of ownership and responsibility for their behavior in my students. The use of the classroom meetings and the Reality Therapy questioning techniques allowed us to focus on solutions to the problems, not on excuses or fault-finding.

4. Teachers need to be cognizant of the fact that behavior changes

slowly because it takes time--sometimes a lot--to internalize the change.
Teachers need to be consistent and patient when implementing Choice Theory
because students are used to the quick-fix solutions, such as detention,
frequently used in the Obedience Models.   Learning to act responsibly does not
happen overnight!

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