ABOVE THE LINE PERFORMANCE

RESEARCH REPORT

Effects of the Above the Line Performance training on teacher-student connectedness, discipline management, work attitude/staff morale, and emotional/social/physical health of school personnel.

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of the *Above the Line Performance* training on teacher-student connectedness, discipline management, work attitude/staff morale, and emotional/social/physical health of school personnel.

SUBJECTS: A total of 59 subjects from a middle school in Connecticut were randomly assigned to participate in the *Above the Line Performance* training and received weekly, follow-up correspondence and review for seven weeks after the training. The subjects consisted of 28 males and 31 females. Thirty subjects participated in the intervention and completed pre, post and 8-week follow-up questionnaires. Twenty-nine subjects completed pre, post, and 8-week follow-up questionnaires for the control group.

INSTRUMENTATION: The questionnaire included demographic information and questions from the objectives covered in the *Above the Line Performance* training. Teacher-student connectedness, discipline management, work attitude/staff morale, and emotional/social/physical health were measured using a 10-point *Likert* scale ranging from 1-2 =Never, 3-4 = Rarely, 5-6= Somewhat, 7-8 = Usually and 9-10 = Always. The questionnaire (see pages 12-14) was distributed prior to taking the 2-day course, upon-completion, and 8-weeks after completion. Content validity was established by a panel of experts who judged the instrument. Reliability was established for the questionnaire using pre and post test scores from subjects in the control group. Test-retest reliability for the total scores on teacher-student

connectedness, discipline management, work attitude/staff morale, and emotional/social/physical health were r =.96, r =.98, r =.97, and r =.97, respectively, over a 3-day period.

PROCEDURE: After permission was obtained, the experimental and control groups were asked to complete the questionnaire prior to, upon completion of, and eight weeks after completion of the training. For the experimental group, the questionnaire was distributed prior to taking the 2-day course, upon-completion, and finally collected by mail eight weeks after completion. For the control group, the questionnaire was distributed and collected by staff at the same time the experimental group was completing the questionnaires. The control group eventually received the *Above the Line Performance* training and follow-up correspondence for seven weeks after the eight-week data collection period.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS: The results of this study are not only relevant to school districts, but all professionals who are in-charge of staff development. Based on the analysis, and within limitations of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The *Above the Line Performance* training had a significant ($p < .0001$) positive effect on teacher-student connectedness in the classroom.

2. The *Above the Line Performance* training had a significant ($p < .0001$) positive effect on discipline management practices in the classroom.

3. The *Above the Line Performance* training had a significant ($p < .0001$) positive effect on work attitude and staff morale at school.

4. The *Above the Line Performance* training had a significant ($p < .0001$) positive effect on the emotional/social/physical health of school staff.

5. The *Above the Line Performance* training was significantly ($p < .0001$) effective at **sustaining** an increase in teacher-student connectedness, positive discipline management practices, positive work attitudes/staff morale, and the emotional/social/physical health of school staff over a two-month period-of-time.

RESULTS

The data was analyzed by using analysis of variance and Pearson correlations. The alpha level was set at $p \leq .05$ for all analysis. Data analyses revealed that there were no significant differences ($p > .05$) between the experimental and control groups on all variables prior to the training (pre-test means total values).

There were, however, **significant differences ($p < .0001$)** in post-test total mean values **(Table 1)** between the experimental (Me) and control groups (Mc) in Teacher-Student Connectedness, (Me = 175.96; Mc = 156.31), Discipline Management, (Me = 44.16; Mc = 27.20), Work Attitude/Staff Morale, (Me = 38.06; Mc = 29.79), and Emotional/Social/Physical Health, (Me = 91.80; Mc = 69.06).

There were also **significant differences ($p < .0001$)** in 8-week follow-up total mean values **(Table 1)** between the experimental (Me) and control groups (Mc) in Teacher-Student Connectedness, (Me = 184.56; Mc = 156.06), Discipline Management, (Me = 40.86; Mc = 26.62), Work Attitude/Staff Morale, (Me = 36.93 ; Mc = 29.79), and Emotional/Social/Physical Health, (Me = 82.50; Mc = 69.72).

Experimental Group Changes: Differences between the total mean changes over time for the experimental group (Me) revealed a statistically **significant increase** ($p < .0001$) from pre to post-testing **(Table 2)** for Teacher-Student Connectedness, Discipline Management, Work Attitude/Staff Morale, and Emotional/Social/Physical Health, (Me = 18.90, 17.36, 6.76, and 19.94) , respectively, and from pre-test to 8-week follow-up **(Table 2)**, (Me = 27.50, 14.06, 5.63, and 10.64), respectively.

Control Group Changes: Differences between the total mean changes for the control group (Mc) **(Table 2)** were **not statistically different** ($p \geq .05$) for Teacher-Student Connectedness, Discipline Management, Work Attitude/Staff Morale, and Emotional/Social/Physical Health from pre-test to post-test, (Mc = -0.89, .014, .-0.03, -0.11), respectively, or from pre-test to 8-week follow-up, (Mc = – 1.14, -0.44, -0.03, and 0.55), respectively.

Table 1. Pre-test, Post-test and Follow-Up Mean Values

RESULTS	Pre	Post	8-Weeks
TEACHER-STUDENT CONNECTEDNESS			
Low = 21 and High = 210			
& (Likert Scale 1-10)			
Experimental	**157.06**	**175.96**	**184.56**
(N=30)	(7.47)	(8.37)	(8.78)
Control	**157.20**	**156.31**	**156.06**
(N=29)	(7.48)	(7.44)	(7.43)
DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT			
Low = 5 and High = 50			
& (Likert Scale 1-10)			
Experimental	**26.80**	**44.16**	**40.86**
(N=30)	(5.36)	(8.83)	(8.17)
Control	**27.06**	**27.20**	**26.62**
(N=29)	(5.41)	(5.44)	(5.32)
WORK ATTITUDE/STAFF MORALE			
Low = 4 and High = 40			
& (Likert Scale 1-10)			
Experimental	**31.30**	**38.06**	**36.93**
(N=30)	(7.82)	(9.51)	(9.23)
Control	**29.82**	**29.79**	**29.79**
(N=29)	(7.45)	(7.44)	(7.44)
EMOT./SOC./PHYS. HEALTH			
Low = 10 and High = 100			
& (Likert Scale 1-10)			
Experimental	**71.86**	**91.80**	**82.50**
(N=30)	(7.19)	(9.18)	(8.25)
Control	**69.17**	**69.06**	**69.72**
(N=29)	(6.92)	(6.90)	(6.97)

Table 2. Pre-test to Post-test Mean Changes, and Pre-test to 8-Week Follow-up Mean Changes for the Experimental and Control Groups

RESULTS	Pre to Post	Pre to 8-Weeks
TEACHER-STUDENT CONNECTEDNESS & (Likert Scale 1-10)	▲	▲
Experimental (N=30)	**18.90** (0.90)	**27.50** (1.31)
Control (N=29)	**-0.89** (-0.04)	**-1.14** (-0.05)
DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT & (Likert Scale 1-10)	▲	▲
Experimental (N=30)	**17.36** (3.47)	**14.06** (2.81)
Control (N=29)	**0.14** (0.03)	**-0.44** (-0.09)
WORK ATTITUDE/STAFF MORALE & (Likert Scale 1-10)	▲	▲
Experimental (N=30)	**6.76** (1.69)	**5.63** (1.41)
Control (N=29)	**-0.03** (-0.01)	**-0.03** (-0.01)
EMOT./SOC./PHYS. HEALTH & (Likert Scale 1-10)	▲	▲
Experimental (N=30)	**19.94** (1.99)	**10.64** (1.06)
Control (N=29)	**-0.11** (-0.01)	**0.55** (0.05)

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Mention achievement at school and everyone thinks of student grades and test scores. However, student successes are possible only when other variables are aligned. Great learning can happen only in classrooms where trust and respect enable active participation without fear of judgment from teachers and/or other students; where discipline problems are not allowed to subvert teaching and learning; where enthusiastic, passionate and healthy teachers connect with students as partners in learning; where teachers create lessons that are so engaging that students are excited about the learning process; and, in schools, where administrators and teachers model leadership skills and fully support the efforts of each other and their students.

Career Skills Network provides an approach for impacting the variables listed above in the *Above the Line Performance* training. First and foremost, this training helps teachers rediscover their PASSION FOR TEACHING. Through facilitator modeling and feedback, staff members are provided with a variety of stress reducing and skill-building strategies for:

OBJECTIVES

- Leading with passion and purpose;
- Building strong connections with students, colleagues and families;
- Creating an atmosphere of trust, value and joy;
- Becoming mission-minded champions who assume responsibility for their actions and outcomes;
- Developing management systems and communication techniques that enhance accountability and commitment;
- Providing samples of effective communication strategies and "coaching techniques" when tough feedback is necessary;
- Modeling the physical, mental, and emotional example of *top performers*; and
- Creating a plan for personal health practices that decrease stress and increase positive work/personal attitudes and staff morale.

The **OUTCOME** of *Above the Line Performance* implementation - **a united staff with positive morale and a powerful learning environment for students.** It also produces life leaders who have the knowledge and skill-sets to develop healthy relationships and model the character traits that students must acquire to reach their full potential.

Theoretical Basis: The *Above the Line Performance* learning approach is closely aligned with the Social-Cognitive Theory of Learning (Bandura, 1986). Albert Bandura (1986) combines both behavioral and cognitive philosophies to form the Social-Cognitive Theory. An underlying assumption of Social-Cognitive Theory is that (teacher and student) behavior is dynamic and dependent on personal beliefs as well as the environment, which influence each other simultaneously (Perry, Baranowski & Parcel, 1991). Social-Cognitive Theory asserts that the likelihood for a behavior occurring is a function of the individual's expectancy that behavior will lead to a particular outcome and to the extent to which that outcome is valued (Norman, 1991). Bandura (1986) says that a person must have self-efficacy in order for the behavior change to occur. That is, a person must have conviction that he/she can execute the behavior successfully. Finally, Bandura (1986) believes that people acquire new behaviors through the observation of others and self-regulatory mechanisms. Observation simply means observing skills-sets and behaviors of others and imitating those behaviors. Self-regulation involves self-assessing behaviors, keeping track of actions, comparing actions to a standard of behavior and self-direction of acquired behaviors (Bandura, 1986). The *Above the Line Performance* training is designed based on the assumptions of the Social-Cognitive Theory.

IMPORTANCE OF THE VARIABLES OBSERVED

Teacher-Student Connectedness: Teacher-student relationships allow a student to feel safe; thereby enabling the student to actively participate in lessons and approach the teacher for help. A close teacher-student relationship also permits the teacher to provide responsive instructions that would, in turn, benefit the student instructionally. Teacher-student relationships have also been shown to act as a buffer for maladaptive behaviors (Meehan et al., 2003). Birch (1996) found that teacher-student relationships that are characterized by low conflict, low dependency, and high closeness have been associated with higher obedience and more self-direct functioning in the classroom. Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that students who felt a high-sense of relatedness to teachers were more engaged in the classroom both behaviorally and emotionally. In line with this finding, (Howes, et al., 1994) found that

students with higher sense of teacher support were more accepted by their peers which enhanced their sense of belonging in the classroom. Finally, (Gest et al., 2005) found that students with a high level of aggression were less likely to dislike school when they reported high levels of teacher-student support. This report suggests that teacher-student relationships may play an important part in keeping students engaged in school, thereby positively affecting dropout rates.

Discipline Management: For any teacher, managing students' misbehavior in the classroom can be frustrating both professionally and personally. Behavioral interruptions not only detract from learning opportunities but can also increase stress in the classroom, diminish positive peer relationships, further negatively affecting the classroom environment. Knowing that classroom management is a key variable that affects student achievement (Marzano, 2000), it is important to identify factors that influence the ability of the teacher to manage the classroom.

In a meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, Marzano (2003) reported that the keystone for all aspects of effective classroom management was the quality of the teacher-student relationships. Voisin, et. al., (2005) demonstrated a significant association between an increase in teacher-student connectedness and a decrease in anti-social behavior in teens. Teachers who have not formed a connection with students, often use ineffective punitive discipline practices. When a teacher's relationship with a student is characterized by harsh discipline practices without warmth and support, the student's sense of belonging decreases, thereby affecting learning outcomes and positive feelings towards school in general (Hamre and Pianta, 2001). Loeber (1990) suggests that bonding with a prosocial adult figure may assist in learning prosocial skills and "unlearn" aggressive behaviors, thereby positively affecting classroom instruction and management.

Work Attitude/Staff Morale: Staff morale and positive attitudes at work are extremely important to the functioning of schools and a school district. If not managed properly, they can have devastating costs including; employee turnover and job dissatisfaction. A conservative

national estimate of replacing; including recruitment and training, of public school teachers is $2.2 billion a year (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2005). Losing quality teachers and teacher dissatisfaction ultimately affect the learning environment for students. Conversely, when staff morale is high, school employees have a positive attitude about their job and will work cooperatively to see that students are provided with the best education possible.

Emotional/Social /Physical Health: It is well known that Air Traffic Controllers have the most stressful job in the United States. Additionally, one of the most stressful job in the United States is TEACHING. The awesome responsibility of guiding America's children towards a successful future is dependent upon the well-being of the school's greatest resource –THE TEACHERS. However, with the current job demands in schools; including high standards with lack of autonomy and decision-making, low public confidence in schools, school violence, unsupportive administrators, and a sense of isolation from peers, teachers are working in a stressful environment.

Researchers found that when people work and live in stressful environments and do not feel that there is any way to change the stressors, a stress response in the body will occur (Newkirk, 2009). The outcomes unmanageable stress for schools are increased staff absenteeism from illness, high healthcare costs, poor classroom performance, negative work attitudes, and ineffective colleague and teacher-student relationships (Newkirk, 2009).

The overall school performance is in jeopardy with the devastating effects of workplace and environmental stressors. Therefore, there is clear need for schools to provide trainings for administrators and teachers to build connections with each other, as well as students and to provide information about recognizing daily stressors and the mediating factors that combat the stress response.

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