

Running Head: TEACHER STRESS

**“Stressed” is “Desserts” Spelled Backwards:
Taking the Stress of Discipline off the Teacher and
Placing it on the Student**

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Abstract

Abby Sipress conducted her action research on how the Love and Logic approach to behavior management affected the climate of her classroom.

Dealing with behaviors was an incredibly stressful experience for both teacher and students with her primarily reactive disciplinary strategies. Her research points to the necessity of proactive measures and transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the student when inappropriate behaviors occur.

Drawing on surveys and interviews with teachers and a personal reflective journal, Sipress found that the philosophy and practice of the Love and Logic approach reduced stress for teachers, decreased time spent on disciplining, and created students who were responsible for their own behavior.

“Stressed” is “Desserts” Spelled Backwards: Taking the Stress of Discipline Away From the Teacher and Placing it on the Student

Rationale

My first two years of teaching were spent in a constant state of stress. My students were major disciplinary problems, and I felt that no matter what I tried, I was always reacting to their behaviors. I was not alone. The whole school seemed to be teeming with children who were out of control. As teachers, we tried to get help, but found very little support from our building administrator. By the end of my second year, I was ready to quit teaching altogether. As an attempt to not admit failure, I decided maybe it wasn't the kids, maybe it was the school. I applied for a voluntary transfer within the district, and soon found myself beginning my third year of teaching at Castle Hills Elementary School, only about a mile from my old school.

The first thing I noticed was the atmosphere at the school. It was very pleasant! The kids *and the staff* seemed happy! My class, however, was already

having problems. It suddenly dawned on me that the problem I had at my old school wasn't my students' problem, and it really wasn't a problem with the school itself, it was *my* problem. I had become a *reactive* teacher. I noticed a lot of the teachers and even the administrators at my new school seemed to be able to stop problems before they started! Their kids weren't throwing temper tantrums when they didn't get their way. They didn't disrespect one another like my students were. Most importantly, when their students *did* break a rule, the consequences actually had meaning. It didn't take long before I found out why – they were using a classroom management approach called Love and Logic®. I found out that our assistant principal was going to be facilitating a course called “9 Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom,” and I quickly signed up.

As I sat in the first class learning how to deal with arguing students, I wondered how different my first two years would have been if I had known about this program from the beginning. More importantly, I wondered if it would actually work in my classroom. I decided that the majority of my stress came from dealing with discipline. I set out on a mission to implement Love and Logic to the best of my ability, and see how it affected my feelings of stress. I wanted to be like the staff member who, when I asked how she dealt with discipline problems, answered “I don't. The student does.”

Research Question

How will implementing the Love and Logic® approach to classroom management affect my stress level as it relates to student discipline?

Literature Review

I began my review of literature with publications by the creators of Love and Logic. *Teaching with Love and Logic* (1995) gives a framework of the program, and gives solid advice for teachers on how to manage their classrooms. Creator Jim Fay introduces the contributors to the book who are all teachers or administrators. He explains that the evolution of Love and Logic comes from tried and true classroom practices. The majority of contributors to the book are sharing experience that they have had themselves. The book is filled with tips for the classroom, as well as the theory that falls with each intervention. In the 9 *Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom* video and workbook, father and son creators of Love and Logic, Jim and Charles Fay, go into the details of how to actually run a Love and Logic classroom. Several of their examples relate to both teachers and parents. The information in the video and workbook is all

real-life situations, where teachers are asked to reflect and discuss their own experiences.

After learning all I could about Love and Logic, I thought it would also be beneficial to learn about teacher stress. In an article in *Stress News*, Matt Jarvis (2002) discusses the common stressors of teachers. He found that teaching is considered a highly stressful occupation. Many teachers find themselves dealing with stress-related medical issues. In his article, Jarvis states that classroom management anxiety ranked second only to evaluation apprehension as the main stressor for teachers. He also found that anxiety over classroom management is the only stressor that did not go away with teaching experience. Jarvis notes that the high stress of the occupation affects teacher recruitment and retention.

Susan Black (2003) wrote in her article, *Stressed Out in the Classroom*, about causes of teacher stress and what school can do about it. One key point to her article was that school culture and climate can have a great effect on teacher stress. She also suggests that schools offer stress-management courses to teacher, although she also points out a study where this occurred, and there was only a very small reduction in teacher stress.

Tools

In completing my action research, I used the following sources of information: a survey to all of the teachers in my school relating to discipline and stress, informal interviews with teachers using Love and Logic to various degrees, and a personal reflective journal from my classroom experiences, containing notes from the 9 Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom meetings.

Survey and Interviews

In Spring of 2005, the teachers in my school completed a survey. This survey, in addition to asking how long they have been teaching, asked the teachers about their familiarity with Love and Logic. They were also asked to determine to what extent they implemented the approach. The remainder of the survey focused on discipline and stress. The first thing I wanted to know was approximately how much of their day was spent dealing with discipline. Following that, I asked the teachers to rate on a scale of one to five their feelings of stress in relation to six different aspects of classroom discipline.

The interviews that I held were very informal, more like conversations. In reality, they were for my personal benefit – I wanted to be a better Love and Logic teacher. I asked teachers – both experienced with Love and Logic and

brand new, about techniques they used, problems they were having, and for examples of their own successes.

Reflective Journal and Meeting Notes

Throughout the year, I kept a journal about how Love and Logic was working for me. In this journal, I kept notes from the 9 Essential Skills class. I wrote about specific moments when I felt that it was really working for me, and also when it wasn't. I was sure to note days that dealing with discipline left me feeling stressed, and days when I left school actually *not* thinking about discipline.

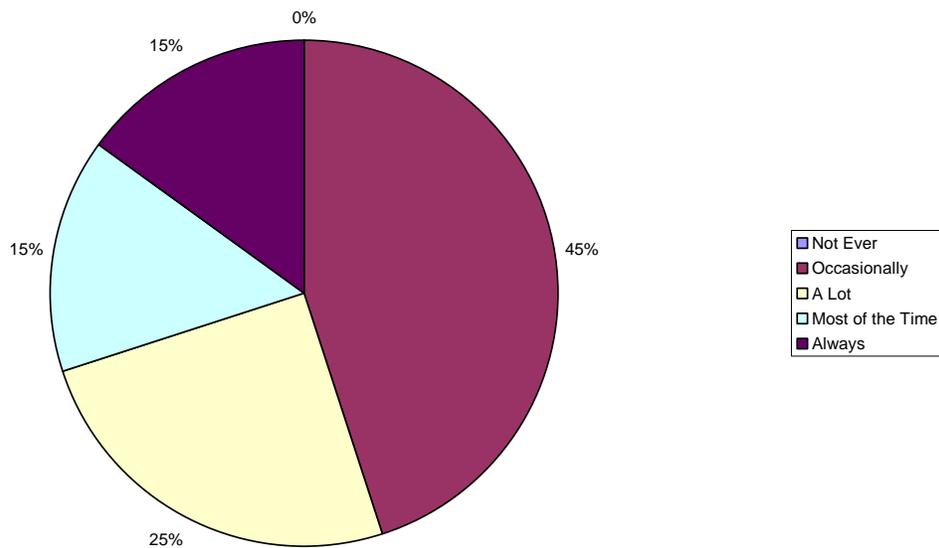
Data

Survey / Interviews

I sent a survey out to the entire staff of my school, and received 20 completed. The first important thing I observed is something I suspected all along – everyone was using Love and Logic to *some* extent. The use of Love and Logic is recommended in our school achievement plan, so I expected to find this. I asked the teachers to indicate how often they implement Love and Logic

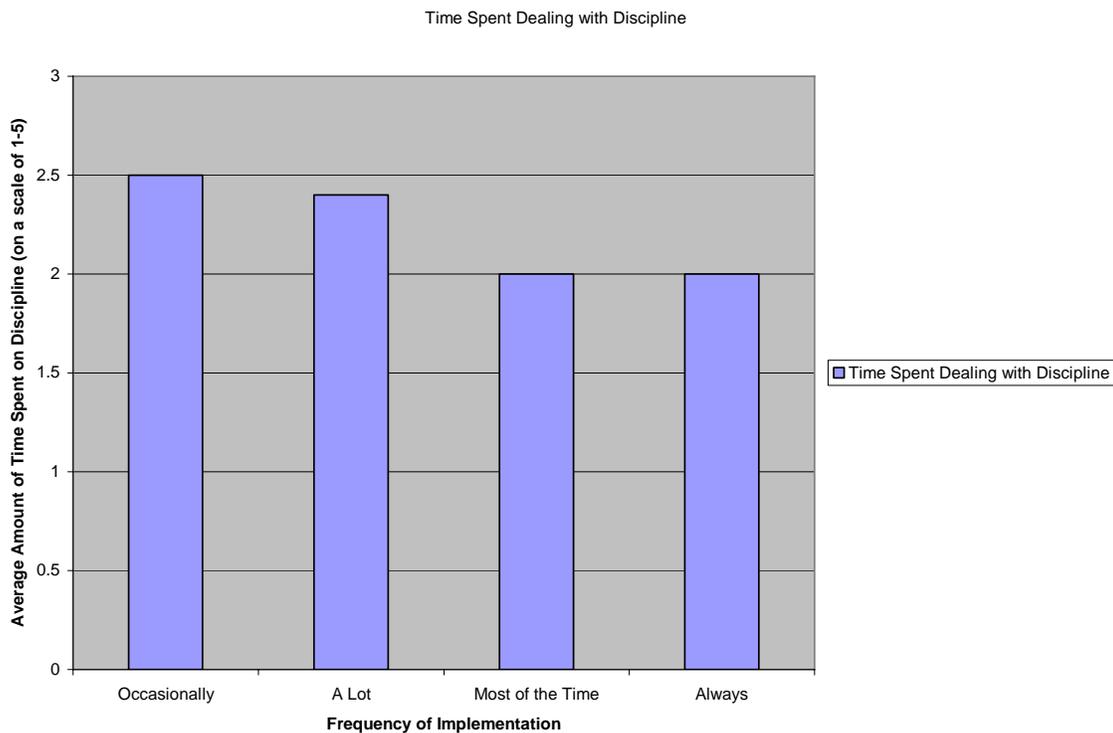
on a scale that I created from “Not Ever” to “Always.” The chart below shows the frequency that teachers at Castle Hills are implementing Love and Logic. The greatest majority of the teachers who responded use the approach “occasionally.” A quarter use the approach “a lot” and the rest is evenly divided between those who use it “most of the time” or “always.” Not one teacher surveyed responded that they never use the program.

Frequency of Implementation of Love and Logic in Castle Hills Classrooms



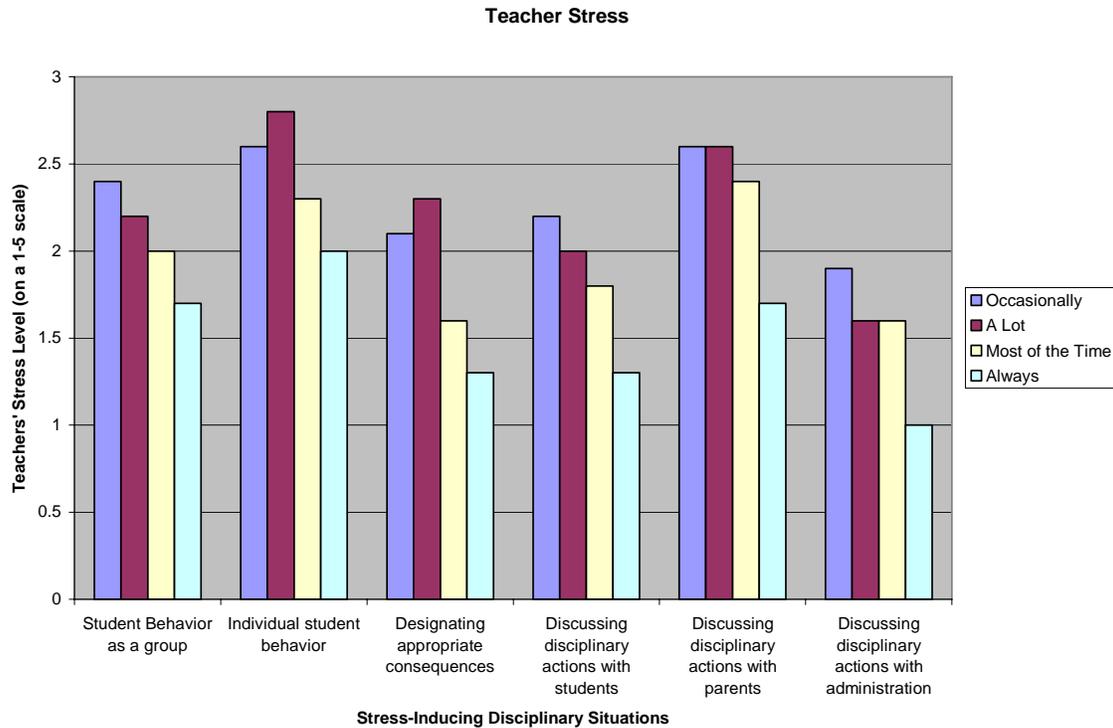
I found that the amount of time that the teachers are spending on discipline and the amount of stress they feel is directly correlated with the frequency of Love and Logic implementation.

Teachers were asked to determine on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being very little and 5 being “most of the day”) approximately how much time they spend dealing with discipline in an average day. Those teachers who implement Love and Logic “occasionally” or “a lot” spent more time dealing with discipline than those who are implementing it on a more regular basis. As previously mentioned, everyone is using the approach to some extent, so none of the teachers felt that they were spending an extraordinary amount of time with discipline. It is clear, though, that the Love and Logic teachers that spend more time actually using the skills spend less time disciplining.



The most powerful data is illustrated on the next chart.

The teachers were asked to rate on the same scale of 1-5 their feelings of stress in relation to 6 different discipline situations. The first two were stress in relation to behavior – first as a whole group and then individual behavior. The third was designing appropriate consequences, and the last three involved discussing discipline with students, parents, and administrators. Again, no teachers found that their stress levels were extremely high in any of the situations, however there were some who felt no stress at all. Those teachers, for the most part, were teachers using Love and Logic either most of the time or always. I found the correlation between the frequency of Love and Logic implementation and teachers' stress in relation to various aspects of discipline astounding. While all teachers feel some discipline-related stress, those teachers who were implementing Love and Logic more felt significantly less stress in every area they were questioned about.



Following the survey, I casually discussed Love and Logic practices with several of the teachers in my building. I asked them about their successes and failures with Love and Logic. The most common problem that teachers found was that it sometimes felt unnatural, and that they, like me, had to often fight the urge to react immediately. I was relieved to find that the teachers who had been using Love and Logic for a long time, and who were implementing it all of the time now found it to be second nature. They are already at the point where I want to be – not dealing with discipline because their students are responsible for themselves.

Reflective Journal / Meeting Notes

The reflective journal and the 9 Essential Skills classes have been the most useful tools to me in my quest to change the way I view discipline. At the beginning of the class, I gave myself a journal assignment to analyze the way I had been dealing with discipline prior to Love and Logic. What I realized was that I felt defeated by my students. I would wait until they broke a rule, and then I would instantly respond with a consequence. The consequence was typically a lost privilege, usually recess. I noted in my journal that I did realize, at the time, that most of my students didn't care if they missed recess. I didn't have a lot of other things to take away, though, so I continued taking away recess. With every broken rule, and every lost recess, I found myself becoming more stressed. I was very angry because my "plan" just wasn't working. I found that the anger I felt toward myself was being taken out on the kids. I was to the point where I arrived at school stressed. There was no time for me to be proactive, because I was already reacting to my own feelings of stress.

I have decided to highlight my progress following 4 of the meetings of the 9 Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom group. I feel that my reflections for these particular meetings show how I was able to make a significant improvement in my own practice.

Meeting One: The first meeting had an assortment of people in attendance, most of whom would continue for the remainder of the year. Most of

us were within the first few years of teaching, a few in their very first year. There were also a few veteran teachers, looking to find something new. All of the meetings were to be facilitated by our Assistant Principal, who had found extreme success using Love and Logic in her own classroom and as an administrator. Following the first meeting of the 9 Essential Skills group, I made a promise to myself in my journal to change my ways with every new skill I learned. I would learn a skill, have a month to master it, and then come back ready for a new skill. I was off to a slow start, because one thing my students *didn't* do a lot of was argue, and that was the first skill. So for a month, I felt lost. I wanted to create arguments so I could try out my new skill, but I knew better. I spoke to a few other teachers from the group, and they felt the same way.

Meeting Two: The second class began with a discussion about how the month had gone. No one had a lot to say, there was one person who had tried the skill out and it worked well, but we all felt we had much more to learn. The lesson for this meeting was about delaying consequences, and it was a perfect chance for me to get to work. I was the teacher with the “card system.” I warned students over and over again, and when their card finally got flipped to red, the consequence was lost recess. This, as I mentioned earlier, was useless. About a week after the second class, one of my students wrote something mean about another student in our morning sign-in book. Instead of immediately reacting, as I was used to, I decided to try delaying the consequence. I approached the student and knelt down to her eyelevel. I whispered first how sorry I was that she had negative feelings about one of her classmates. I told her that there would

have to be some kind of consequence, but I wasn't sure what yet. I used the saying right from the book "I'll let you know on Monday what the consequence will be – try not to worry about it and let it ruin your weekend." This was a Friday, and we had this conversation at the end of the day. Her consequence was not until Monday. By the time Monday rolled around, she had, of course, spent the weekend worrying about it. Her consequence was minimal – write a letter to the other student full of *nice* things about her – but the effect was tremendous. The actual consequence was that she spent the entire weekend thinking about what she had done! I felt like I had made a huge breakthrough already.

Meeting Six: Until this point, I had been finding success with Love and Logic. Many of the aspects of it felt very unnatural to me, but I was sticking it out because I was seeing a change in my students. Together, my students and I had mastered the recover process. I was no longer sending kids to "time out" for a specific amount of time. It was no longer my concern. If someone had to go to "recovery" (a new name for time out), it was their responsibility to come back as soon as they were able to work with the rest of the class. I was impressed to see that they were capable of making that decision for themselves. My biggest struggle at this point was making my empathy SOUND empathetic. I am a very sarcastic person, and a lot of the time I found myself trying to be empathetic, but sounding sarcastic. It's a battle I still deal with, but I'm trying!

Meeting six was when we learned about enforceable statements. An example of this is something I was already doing. Instead of saying "be quiet," a Love and Logic teacher would say "I'll begin teaching when the room is quiet."

This places the responsibility of just about everything directly on the students. Enforceable statements have become a staple in my life. I use them now with everyone, in and out of school, and it's a very powerful tool. I have also heard a great majority of the teachers and other staff in my school using enforceable statements on a regular basis.

A few weeks before the last meeting, I had another great moment with one of my students. This particular boy holds a lot of anger. When he gets upset, he takes his anger out on whoever happens to be around him. On this day, that person was me. I was impressed with how calm I was able to stay. I expressed my empathy and asked what happened. He immediately started yelling. This is a point where I would normally have started to stress. This time, however, I stopped him and calmly said "I can tell you're not ready to talk yet. Why don't you go to recovery and come talk to me when your voice is as calm as mine?" It worked! We had to go through that cycle a few times, but in the end, we ended up having a very nice, calm conversation and I was able to help him deal with his problem.

Meeting Nine: By the time we met for our last meeting, I felt triumphant. My classroom was not perfect; I still had a lot of work to do. I felt, though, that my students and I had come so far! The others in the class (which had dwindled a little bit due to time constraints) agreed that they have seen a lot of positive changes. I now feel that the students in my class are equipped to solve some of their own problems. They are responsible for their own behavior and learning. One thing I learned in this course which was very hard for me to grasp is "I can't

MAKE them learn.” I still have a few students who I’m trying to figure out. I know that there’s no way that I will ever have a “perfectly behaved class.” I have the skills and the confidence now, though, to come pretty close.

Recommendations

The recommendations that have emerged from my research begin personally, and extend to the school, district, and state levels.

Personal: I plan to continue using Love and Logic in my classroom next year. I think that now that I am fully equipped with the 9 essential skills, a lot of advice and stories from other teachers, and the strong support of my administrator, I will have continued success. I plan to begin offering my students choices from the first day of school, and teaching them how to be responsible for themselves and how to be good problem solvers.

School: I am going to recommend to the administrators in the building to once again offer the 9 Essential Skills course to new / interested staff. Our assistant principal, Beth Howell, who had been the official “Love and Logic guru” of the building, is leaving us for a principalship at another school, so I have offered to facilitate the course next year. I am also going to recommend the

continuation of “Love and Logic Club,” which is a group of experienced Love and Logic teachers that meets once a month to share tips and strategies.

District: Having taught at another school in my district, I am all too aware that not every school is a Love and Logic school. Based on my findings, I think it would be beneficial for the district to offer training as part of the fall inservice days. In order to do this, I will recommend to the district that a few teachers be sent to one of the Love and Logic conferences to be fully trained to be Love and Logic teacher educators. This will equip our district with qualified, in-house trainers who can also serve as mentors to recently trained teachers.

Additionally, I think that the district could set up an online listserv so that Love and Logic teachers from different schools can be in contact with one another. This would serve as a venue for peer conferencing and advising.

State: Love and Logic is really something that should be taught to pre-service teachers. This would be extremely beneficial to new teachers coming into the workforce. I am recommending that the teacher education programs at Wilmington College, University of Delaware and Delaware State University consider Love and Logic training as an option for pre-service teachers. In addition, I would like to see Love and Logic as part of the state mentor program course opportunities. DSEA currently offers an “I Can Do It” workshop for classroom management to all new teachers. Having taken both courses, I strongly feel that Love and Logic is a much better approach to classroom

management. I recommend to DSEA to consider either replacing “I Can Do It” with Love and Logic, or offering it in addition.

I think that with the addition of Love and Logic to classrooms throughout the state of Delaware, we will soon find significantly less stressed teachers who have finally gotten their desserts – students who are responsible for their own behavior, less time spent on discipline, and therefore more time to do what we love most – helping students learn.

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Appendix

Survey to Teachers

Name (optional): _____

Subject / Grade taught: _____

Years Teaching _____

Please circle the appropriate answer.

1. Are you familiar with Love and Logic?
Not at all Somewhat Yes

**If you answered "Not at all," please skip #2 and go directly to #3.*

2. To what extent do you feel you implement Love and Logic (or aspects of Love and Logic) in your classroom?

Not ever Occasionally A lot Most of the time Always

3. On average, how would you classify the amount of time spent dealing with discipline (all aspects – student behavior, consequences, talking to parents/staff, etc.) in one day? ("1" meaning hardly any time at all, "5" meaning it consumes the greater part of the day).

1 2 3 4 5

4. Using a scale of 1 – 5 ("1" meaning having no feelings of stress at all, "5" meaning that the situation is a major cause of stress for you), please rank your feelings of emotional stress based on the following situations:

Student behavior *as a group (general)* 1 2 3 4 5

Individual student behavior (general) 1 2 3 4 5

Designating appropriate consequences 1 2 3 4 5

Discussing disciplinary actions with students 1 2 3 4 5

Discussing disciplinary actions with parents 1 2 3 4 5

Discussing disciplinary actions with school administration 1 2 3 4 5

5. Would you be willing to participate in a short interview so I may further understand discipline related stress in teachers?

Yes (if yes, please include your name at the top so I may contact you)

No