Brain-Based Classroom Management:

*Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym* Strategies with Kindergartners

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Abstract:

A kindergarten teacher and her intern explore the effectiveness of classroom management strategies based in brain research with their students. The pair integrated components of Dr. Becky Bailey's *Conscious Discipline* and Drs. Paul and Gail Dennison's *Brain Gym* into their daily management techniques and classroom routines. In doing this inquiry their main wondering was, "What effect will *Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym* strategies have on student behavior?" After collecting and analyzing data, they found that the strategies they employed reduced overall conflicts and improved transition times in their room.

Cheryl Isola is a Kindergarten teacher in the State College Area School District with 17 years of teaching experience. Steven Calderone is an intern in Cheryl’s classroom for the entire 2007-2008 academic year. They decided to collaborate on a teacher inquiry together because of their shared passion for classroom management and professional development.

Teaching Context:

Our kindergarten class is made up of seventeen unique children—seven boys and ten girls. Considering the class size, the ethnic and cultural makeup is rather diverse. For instance, we have children representing European, Russian, Middle Eastern, and African descents. In terms of academics, we have children ranging across the spectrum. We have two students that excel academically and will probably be designated gifted or talented. Alternatively, we have one student with both Down Syndrome and Autism and another child whose developmental age is three years and three months. The remaining students fall between these extremes. We have strong students as well as struggling students distributed throughout. Behavior patterns are also extremely varied in our classroom. As is the case with academic levels and cultural background, our students also represent a vast range of temperaments. For instance, we have some kids that
will “go with the flow,” while we have others that are very particular about every aspect of the
day. To help classify our kids in a systematic fashion, we filled out a survey from *Raising Your
Spirited Child*, which rates a child as cool, spunky, or spirited¹ (Kurcinka, 1991). Six of our
youngsters are cool, three are spunky and eight are spirited (a graph showing this breakdown is
attached as Figure 1). Those cool students tend to be followers socially and adhere to classroom
rules and procedures with few incidents. Our spunky and spirited kids tend to be the ones that
present more behavior management challenges. We enthusiastically embrace the differences that
are representative of our students.

Largely due to the diversity of our class, behavior is an everyday challenge, which has
motivated us to inquire about classroom management techniques. *Conscious Discipline* appealed
to us because it emphasizes relationships, language and acceptance as the bases for effective and
caring classroom management. We also researched *Brain Gym*² as a related resource. *Brain
Gym* outlines physical movements that are designed to maximize cognitive functioning. We felt
that combining the relaxation strategies of *Brain Gym* and the management techniques of
*Conscious Discipline* would put our class in the best state to learn and function as a caring
“School Family,” as *Conscious Discipline* creator, Dr. Becky Bailey, would put it.

**Wonderings and Questions:**

*Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym* are designed to be comprehensive and applicable
across all areas of curriculum. We decided to carefully select the components of each that were

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¹ A “cool” child is rarely sensitive or emotional and very easy going. Alternatively, a “spirited”
child is highly sensitive to environmental factors and exhibits a wide range of strong emotions.
“Spunky” children fall between these extremes.
² *Brain Gym* is a set of 26 movements based in brain research that are designed to optimize
cognitive functioning. For the purposes of our inquiry, we highlighted six movements that are
accompanied by songs on the *Brain Gym* CD. Pictures and explanations of the six movements
can be found in Appendix A.
directly relevant to our needs and the needs of our students. For instance, *Brain Gym* has a total of 26 movements designed to target different parts of the body and brain. We decided to lead our students through six movements paired with music from the *Brain Gym* CD at three strategic points throughout our day. Likewise, we only employed those strategies in *Conscious Discipline* that fit best into our goals for classroom community. Hence, when we refer to *Conscious Discipline* or *Brain Gym* strategies, we specifically mean our selected strategies as opposed to the overall approaches.

Main Wondering:

- What effects will *Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym* strategies have on student behavior?

Sub Questions:

1. How will selected *Conscious Discipline* techniques such as the Safe Place\(^3\), “Kindness Counts” Flowers\(^4\), community building songs\(^5\), and teacher language and modeling of the Big Voice\(^6\) and Instant Replay\(^7\) impact student mood, behavior, tattling, and overall conflicts?

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\(^3\) *Conscious Discipline*’s Safe Place (Pictured in Figure 2) is a quiet area of the classroom that the students are encouraged to visit if they feel upset or angry in any way. This area has a comfortable place for the child to sit, a stuffed animal to comfort them, calming lotion, and books outlining calming strategies.

\(^4\) *Conscious Discipline*’s “Kindness Counts” Flowers (Pictured in Figure 3) is a system in which children may add a plastic flower to a jar after demonstrating a random act of kindness. Teachers may invite students to place a flower in the jar if they observe students doing something nice, or students may tell the teachers when someone did a kind thing for them.

\(^5\) Dr. Becky Bailey and musical artist Jack Hartmann have a series of songs promoting the themes central to *Conscious Discipline*.

\(^6\) Using one’s Big Voice is a strategy similar to that of using an “I message.” Students clearly and assertively state what they feel and what they want to change. An example of a student using his/her big voice would be, “I don’t like it when you take my eraser without asking, please ask me before you use it next time.”
2. How will selected *Brain Gym* songs and movements affect student readiness to work and ability to transition between centers or activities?

3. How can we help students to notice the positive actions of others as opposed to the negative ones?

4. What effects do teacher language, phrasing, and modeling have on student use of *Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym* strategies?

**Data Collection and Analysis Process:**

In connecting our classroom context to our motivation for inquiry, we stated that our kids pose considerable behavior management challenges. More specifically, we were concerned with tattling and conflicts between our students, emotional outbursts and breakdowns, transitional time, and time to start work after a transition. These concerns together resulted in an overall negative classroom climate, which we wanted to address.

To document the frequency of conflicts and tattling, we chose to tally occurrences during free play time and directed instructional time. We made a chart for each week that had a column for each activity type (directed and free) and a row for each child in the class. We marked a tally for each student that we observed in a conflict and/or each child that tattled. We collected this data over a one month period starting the week of February 18, 2008 and ending the week of March 17, 2008.

To address emotional outbursts and breakdowns, we decided that anecdotal notes, observations and photographs would be most effective and appropriate given the nature of these situations. We introduced the Safe Place to the students as an area of the classroom that they

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7 Employing the Instant Replay strategy involves using a student conflict as a teaching tool. The teacher asks students if they are willing to reenact a recent conflict for the class highlighting a better way to solve the problem.
could visit if they are feeling upset or angry for any reason. We then transcribed student testimonials regarding the use of the Safe Place, we documented our own observations of kids using the resource spontaneously, and we photographed several children visiting the Safe Place for various reasons. The Safe Place was a component of our room from the beginning of the year. However, as was the case with documenting conflicts, we only narrowed in on observing the student use of the Safe Place during the data collection period from February 18, 2008 to March 21, 2008.

We noticed kids being disruptive during transitions and consequently starting work slowly after transitions. After starting our daily “Brain Breaks” (during which we lead the children in the six Brain Gym movements), we started to time how long transitions took between centers and how long it took children to begin composing at Writer’s Workshop after centers. In addition to timing problematic times of the day, we also thought that student opinions and responses to Brain Gym movements might be particularly telling of how effective they perceive the exercises to be. For this portion of our research, we briefly interviewed each child about their feelings toward Brain Gym and how helpful they find the “Brain Breaks.” Due to our focus on other aspects of this inquiry and our desire to better understand Brain Gym prior to implementing it with our kids, we scheduled the introduction of these exercises for the week of February 25, 2008. Consequently, the data we have for this section of the inquiry represents the weeks of February 25, 2008 through March 17, 2008.

Although we developed specific interventions and data collection techniques for each of the above areas of our inquiry, we still had to address that overall negative feeling regarding classroom climate. At the beginning of our inquiry, we introduced the following strategies from Conscious Discipline: “Kindness Counts” Flowers, community building songs, and certain
techniques such as the Big Voice and Instant Replay. Since the instances of these strategies in use are very specific and unique by nature, we decided to collect these pieces of data anecdotally. Therefore, we compiled a great deal of quotes from student interactions with each other, student quotes to teachers, and observations of student actions. The time frame for this set of data is consistent with the other areas, spanning from the beginning of February until the end of March.

With all of our data collected, we needed to compile and analyze the information in a way that would be easily understood by ourselves and our readers and, therefore, most useful. Regarding conflict and tattling recording sheets, we felt an electronic spreadsheet would be the most logical choice for organizing these pieces of data. We transcribed the results from the tally sheets to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and, in turn, created graphs breaking the data into weeks and individual student sections. With the data arranged in this format, we could easily observe the various tables to search for trends and changes across the data. In terms of our observational and anecdotal notes, we organized the pieces of data into categories including Safe Place, student behavior/actions, and student quotes referencing teacher-modeled language. As was the case with our graphs, having the data organized allowed us to quickly see commonalities and discrepancies among the students’ quotes and actions. With our data compiled and organized systematically, we were able to make claims and back them up with valid evidence.

**Explanation of Findings:**

After thoroughly analyzing the data, we felt confident in making five claims regarding our implementation of *Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym* techniques. Our research yielded largely consistent themes, however, there were some isolated discrepancies and opposing data, which we will outline below.
Claim 1: The Safe Place is an effective self-calming resource for our students who are angry or upset.

Evidence: To support our claim concerning the effectiveness of the Safe Place, we have several photographs of our students using the Safe Place (See Figures 4-6), we have anecdotal accounts of particularly significant times when students made use of this resource (See Figure Captions 4-6), and we also have a book written by one of our students about the Safe Place as a tool to use when a student is sad (See Figure 7). Aside from the pictures and their descriptions, we also have a vast array of student testimonials that show their overall support and appreciation of the Safe Place. Here are some particularly noteworthy examples:

- “Thank you for letting me go to the Safe Place, I feel better now.”
- “I’m feeling really angry, I think the Safe Place will help.”
- “My tummy really hurts, can I go hold Huggles in the Safe Place?”
- “Guess what? I have a Safe Place in my room at home!”

Disproving Points: Although those students that utilize the Safe Place are loyal and consistent visitors, they actually represent less than half of the class. Out of 17 kids, only eight use the Safe Place on a regular basis and attest to its usefulness.

Claim 2: Our students enjoy Brain Gym, and it is an effective way to decrease disruptions during transition times.

Evidence: As we outlined in the data collection portion of this paper, we timed the transitions between centers and before Writer’s Workshop after implementing Brain Gym with our students. We found a steady decrease in the amount of time it took for students to transition to new activities and also to transition between center time and writing time. Graphs depicting these

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8 Huggles is a stuffed animal available at the Safe Place for students to hold to help them feel comfortable and calm.
findings are attached as Figures 8 and 9. In terms of proving that the kids like the exercises, we conducted student interviews to assess whether the children actually do like the Brain Breaks. A great majority of our students reported that they enjoy doing the exercises. Some parents have even told us that they see their children doing the exercises at home!

**Disproving Points:** Although we claim that students enjoy participating in the *Brain Gym* exercises, we feel compelled to mention that not every student said they enjoy the exercises in the brief interviews we conducted with them concerning *Brain Gym*. Initially, 14 out of the 17 claimed to like the exercises, while three were not interested. Two of the three students who were against the Brain Breaks eventually changed their minds and told us they loved doing the exercises throughout the day. At this point, only one student has yet to admit he likes doing the exercises with the class.

**Claim 3:** *Promoting community building songs, Instant Replay, and the use of the Big Voice reduced the amount of conflicts among our students.*

**Evidence:** Figures 10-15 show the results of our observations over the one-month period between the weeks of February 18 and March 21, 2008. As is clearly visible in these graphs, the overall number of student conflicts is drastically lower now than it was initially.

**Disproving Points:** Although the final weekly totals are lower than the initial ones in each graph, there are cases where conflicts became more frequent before they dissipated. This point can be viewed as discouraging, however, we see it as proof that Dr. Becky Bailey intended these techniques to be used consistently and over an extended period of time.

**Claim 4:** “*Kindness Counts*” Flowers is an effective tool for motivating our students to focus on positive actions as opposed to negative ones.
Evidence: After introducing the “Kindness Counts” Flowers to our kids, we noticed our children performing more and more unprompted acts of kindness for each other. There are examples of these acts each day, however, we are including three instances in which students who would normally not act in an overly helpful way decided to do something kind.

- On one occasion, a student was away from the classroom and one of her classmates said, “She is not here right now, I should get her backpack for her and load it up.” We allowed her to help out and then prompted her to put a flower in the jar later.
- One afternoon, we were returning from the computer lab when the special education teacher in our school picked up one of our students. Another child offered to return his jacket to the classroom for him. Again, we praised the child and allowed her to place a flower in the vase.
- Without being asked, one student offered to stack the chairs that belonged to his classmates that were absent that day. As was the case with the other students, he completed this task and placed a flower in the jar.

Disproving Points: Although this technique has been extremely effective at promoting the reporting of kind acts as opposed to tattling, we have started to see students doing menial acts just for the reward of putting a flower in the jar. These instances are isolated to a few select students. Also, this trend of being kind just for flowers is in opposition to the design of the motivator in that we explained the “Kindness Counts” Flowers as a sign that someone was nice to you, not that you yourself did something kind.

Claim 5: Our students are more likely to use Conscious Discipline language when the teachers model it consistently and often.
Evidence: In proving this claim, we are relying heavily on providing actual student quotes that are reflective of the teacher-modeled phrases. We constantly make a conscious effort to model language that is consistent with Conscious Discipline themes. These themes include assertiveness and directness. The following examples of student quotes show that the students are indeed using language that is reflective of our modeling.

- After being chased during free play, one student said the following, “Stop it, ----, stop chasing me, you know that is not safe.”
- One student repeatedly asked another to stop bothering her, finally she said, “I don’t like it when you don’t listen to my Big Voice. Please stop it when I ask you to.”
- Two students were fighting over some blocks, finally one student decided that they should leave that area, “Let’s not have a fight about this…do you wanna look at this book with me?”
- Two students were arguing over their places in line. They proceeded to banter back and forth until one student finally said, “Why don’t we just forget about it…So, do you want to play at choice time?”
- Two students were building separate structures with our class blocks. Eventually, they wanted to use some of the same blocks, and they began to bicker. Finally, one student suggested, “Let’s build something together.” The other student enthusiastically agreed.

Disproving Points: We have provided solid evidence that the kids are using the language we model for them, however, there are still instances where the children use inappropriate or hurtful language. We are confident that our claim is still valid in the sense that there has been a shift in the way our students interact, even if the change is not 100% complete.

Reflections and Future Practice:
In reflecting on our journey with *Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym*, we can truthfully say that the knowledge we have gleaned from our students, our data (both disproving and proving data), each other, and the published resources we referenced will be invaluable to us as educators that hold professional development in high regard. Although we are coming away from this experience with techniques and practices that we plan to implement with our future students, we have even more questions regarding management, language, and the role of physical activity in a traditional classroom setting.

From our students, we learned that even children as young as five are capable of articulating their feelings and solving problems independently. We also learned that the students value movement throughout the day, and they recognize Brain Breaks as helpful to them as learners. We are curious, now, as to how effective these strategies would be if implemented with older children. We have seen how helpful *Brain Gym* was with behavior; we wonder how it might affect academic achievement with older kids.

Although our data was conclusive overall, some of the disproving points lead us to form new wonderings. For instance, we noted that only eight out of 17 kids used the Safe Place consistently. We are curious as to whether there is some factor that makes a child more apt to use this resource. Also, we were slightly discouraged by students performing insignificant “kind” acts in an attempt to be praised and allowed to place a “Kindness Counts” flower in the jar. We are now wondering how we could frame this aspect of *Conscious Discipline* in the future to avoid this adverse effect. Finally, our data showed that *Brain Gym* was effective at getting kids ready to work. We also noticed an overall calmer atmosphere in the room after implementing *Brain Gym*. Although we did not make claims addressing the calming effects of these exercises, we are interested in investigating techniques to measure calmness in a way that
would prove *Brain Gym* aides in calming students. Although we are left with new questions, we did learn from all of our data. We also learned from each other.

Doing a collaborative inquiry was extremely rewarding. We had the opportunity to share ideas about how to personalize these techniques to best fit our philosophies and our students’ needs. Also, we were able to support each other in striving to be consistent with our language and implementation of *Conscious Discipline* and *Brain Gym*. We collaborated on all aspects of this endeavor, including research and finding published references.

The driving forces behind this inquiry were Dr. Becky Bailey’s *Conscious Discipline* and Drs. Paul and Gail Dennison’s *Brain Gym*. Although we refrained from formally citing or implementing related sources, we did do a great deal of research in an effort to cross check the validity of the selected resources. For example, we also read Dr. Becky Bailey’s other books, *Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline* and *There’s Got to be a Better Way*. Similarly, we found *Power of Our Words*, by Paula Denton to be an excellent resource regarding teacher language. In terms of *Brain Gym*, we found Eric Jensen and Carla Hannaford’s books (*Brain Compatible Strategies* and *Smart Moves*, respectively) as helpful when trying to clarify the jargon presented in *Brain Gym*. We know that research is ever expanding and plan to seek out information in the future to supplement the knowledge we have gained in this experience regarding classroom management and brain research.

We are both as enthusiastic (if not more) about the classroom interventions we researched now as we were at the beginning\(^9\). We both plan to use these strategies in the future and to continue to inquire about our teaching. We agree with the Dennisons when they say that providing support and permission to move in the classroom will foster children in growing to

\(^9\) This is Cheryl’s third formal inquiry and Steven’s first.
utilize their full intelligence (Dennison & Dennison, 1989). Also, we find Dr. Becky Bailey’s words particularly supportive when she says, “Discipline is a lifelong journey, not a technique!” (Bailey, 2001). Nothing will change overnight, and there is no magic answer. However, we feel these behavior management techniques are extremely powerful when used together.
References


Bailey, Becky A. (2003). *There’s got to be a better way: Discipline that works for parents and teachers*. Oviedo, FL: Loving Guidance, Inc.


Figure Captions

Figure 1. Results of the *Raising Your Spirited Child* survey we conducted on our students to have a systematic way of classifying our kids.

Figure 2. A picture of our class Safe Place modeled after the one described by Dr. Becky Bailey in *Conscious Discipline*.

Figure 3. A picture of our class’s “Kindness Counts” Flower Jar and “Kindness Counts” Flowers.

Figure 4. The student using the Safe Place in this photograph had been very upset about where he and his book buddies would sit to read together. We offered the Safe Place as an option for this student, and, as the picture shows, he calmed down almost immediately and listened intently to the story.

Figure 5. This is the student in our class diagnosed with both Down Syndrome and autism. The class was giving him a round of applause and praising him after he correctly answered a question. He got overwhelmed and immediately got up and walked to the Safe Place. This student does not use the Safe Place regularly, but this unprompted visit was particularly telling of how powerful of a classroom component the Safe Place can be.

Figure 6. This photograph shows one of our “cool kids” really missing her mom. She asked to go to the Safe Place and read a book. This photograph shows her using several of the components of the Safe Place simultaneously: the comfortable seat, the themed books, and the stuffed animal.

Figure 7. A book written by one of our students titled *Huggles Goes to the Safe Place*. This story summarizes the steps a student can take to feel better using the Safe Place. We have this book laminated and available for our students to use when they visit our classroom Safe Place.
Figure 8. Average amount of time it took students to transition between centers during the weeks of February 25, March 3 and March 17, 2008.

Figure 9. Average amount of time it took for students to transition from center time to writing time during the weeks of February 25, March 3, and March 17, 2008.

Figure 10. Conflicts observed during instructional time over our one-month data collection period.

Figure 11. Conflicts observed during free play time over our one-month data collection period.

Figure 12. Total conflicts separated by student during the week of February 18, 2008.

Figure 13. Total conflicts separated by student during the week of February 25, 2008.

Figure 14. Total conflicts separated by student during the week of March 3, 2008.

Figure 15. Total conflicts separated by student during the week of March 17, 2008.
Figure 1

Spirited Child Ratings

Rating


Child Names

Cool
Spunky
Spirited
Figure 2
Figure 3
Figure 4
Figure 5
Figure 6
Figure 7

Huggles Goes to the Safe Place
Figure 8

**Average Transition Time Between Centers**

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Figure 10

![Bar Chart: Instructional Time Conflicts by Week]

- **Week of 2/18**: Number of observed conflicts not specified.
- **Week of 2/25**: Number of observed conflicts not specified.
- **Week of 3/3**: Number of observed conflicts not specified.
- **Week of 3/17**: Number of observed conflicts not specified.

The chart shows a significant increase in conflicts during the week of 2/25 compared to other weeks.
Figure 11

Total Free Play Conflicts by Week

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Figure 12

Total Conflicts by Student During the Week of 2/18
Figure 13

Total Conflicts per Student During the Week of 2/25

![Bar chart showing total conflicts per student during the week of 2/25.](chart.png)
Figure 14

Total Conflicts per Student During the Week of 3/3

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Figure 15

Total Conflicts per Student During the Week of 3/17
Appendix A—Brain Gym Exercises

- “Brain Buttons”—The Brain Buttons (soft tissue under the clavicle to the left and right of the sternum) are massaged deeply with one hand while holding the navel with the other hand” (Dennison & Dennison, 1989).  

![Image of a child doing a Brain Gym exercise](image-url)
• **Lip Rubbing**—The *Brain Gym* CD explains a move where the kids continue to push their navel while they also rub their lips with one finger.
• “The Thinking Cap—This activity helps the student focus attention on his hearing. It also relaxes tension in the cranial bones. The student uses his thumbs and index fingers to pull the ears gently back and unroll them. He begins at the top of the ear and gently massages down and around the curve, ending with the bottom lobe” (Dennison &Dennison, 1989).
• “Cross Crawl—In this contralateral exercise, similar to walking in place, the student alternatively moves one arm and its opposite leg and the other arm and its opposite leg. Because Cross Crawl accesses both brain hemispheres simultaneously, this is the ideal warm-up for all skills which require crossing the body’s lateral midline” (Dennison & Dennison, 1989).
• **Hook-Ups**—Hook-ups connect the electrical circuits in the body, containing and thus focusing both attention and disorganized energy. The mind and body relax as energy circulates through areas blocked by tension. The figure 8 pattern of the arms and legs follows the energy flow lines of the body” (Dennison & Dennison, 1989).
• “Fingertip Touching”—The touching of the fingertips balances and connects the two brain hemispheres” (Dennison & Dennison, 1989).
Appendix B—Inquiry Brief

Steven Calderone and Cheryl Isola

Becci Burns

CI 495

14 February 2008

Inquiry Brief: Conscious Discipline in a Kindergarten Classroom

CONTEXT:

Our kindergarten class is made up of seventeen unique children—seven boys and ten girls. Considering the class size, the ethnic and cultural makeup is rather diverse. For instance, we have children representing European, Russian, Middle Eastern, and African descents. In terms of academics, we have children ranging across the spectrum. We have two students that excel academically and will probably be designated gifted or talented. Alternatively, we have one student with both Down Syndrome and Autism, and another child whose developmental age is three years and three months. The remaining students fall between these extremes, we have strong students as well as struggling ones distributed throughout. Behavior patterns are also extremely varied in our classroom. Out of our seventeen youngsters, we perceive nine to be extremely strong-willed. Seven of these strong-willed students are classroom leaders, and five of them pose significant behavior problems. The remaining students tend to be followers and follow classroom rules and procedures with few incidents. We enthusiastically embrace the differences that are representative of our students. Behavior is an everyday challenge, which has motivated us to inquire about classroom management techniques.

RATIONALE:
Cheryl Isola is a kindergarten teacher with seventeen years of professional experience, ten of which have been in kindergarten specifically. Steven is an intern in the Penn State University-State College Area School District Professional Development School partnership. Steven is participating in a yearlong student teaching internship with Cheryl as his mentor.

Cheryl discovered *Conscious Discipline* at a session during the National Kindergarten Conference in July of 2007. She was immediately interested in the potential usefulness of the skills outlined by Dr. Becky A. Bailey. Cheryl introduced *Conscious Discipline* to Steven before school even started. We decided together that implementing some of the techniques would be beneficial to our students.

Our reasoning behind deciding that *Conscious Discipline* would be useful in our kindergarten classroom stemmed from our overall knowledge of children in this age group and the social goals of kindergarten, including working and playing cooperatively, being an active member of a classroom community, and solving problems appropriately. Introducing these skills in kindergarten prepares the children for lifelong success in social situations and is therefore invaluable. There are a whole host of kindergarten goals and standards separate from those listed, however the ones included represent the goals most directly related to our inquiry wonderings.

As we mentioned above, our students have presented considerable behavior management challenges since day one. Specifically, we observe constant conflicts related to sharing, tattling, anger and emotional management, and overall getting along. We knew from the beginning that community building and conflict resolution would be significant focal points for our students and us. We looked to *Conscious Discipline* as a professional, empirically based resource, which we could use to guide our thinking and strategizing.
In the fall, we were unsure about pursuing a formal inquiry based on *Conscious Discipline*, although we knew we wanted to implement some of the relevant techniques. When the spring rolled around, Cheryl officially decided to complete an inquiry project for the year. We are both passionate about behavior management and saw the great potential for these techniques in our classroom. Together, we opted to work collaboratively on an inquiry based on several skills and strategies outlined in *Conscious Discipline*.

**MAIN WONDERING:**
- What effect will *Conscious Discipline* strategies have on classroom behavior?

**SUB QUESTIONS:**
1. What causes negative behaviors and how can these causes be reversed to elicit kind, helpful behaviors?
2. What techniques are most effective in teaching kindergartners conflict resolution tools?
3. What effect will *Brain Gym* strategies have on the number of conflicts in our class?
4. How will related theories and strategies (such as *Brain Gym* and *Power of our Words*) relate to the effectiveness of the *Conscious Discipline* strategies?
5. How can we help students to notice the positive actions of others as opposed to the negative actions?
6. What effect does teacher language, phrasing, and modeling have on student use of strategies?

**TIMELINE:**
- February:
  - Initial data collection:
    - Document conflict/tattling/sharing frequency
- Document anecdotal records of how students resolve conflicts independently
- Chart emotional outbursts and breakdowns
- “Spirited Child” rating—Raising Your Spirited Child
- Document student use of Safe Place

  o Weekly Breakdown:

    - Week of 2/4—Introduce Kindness Counts Flowers
    - Week of 2/11—Develop recording sheet for behavior observations
    - Week of 2/18—Begin data collection as specified above
    - Week of 2/25—Introduce “We Care Center,” introduce Brain Gym activities, complete “Spirited Child” rating, and continue data collection as specified above

  • March:

    o Continue to monitor our language and modeling of strategies

    o Weekly Breakdown:

      - Week of 3/3—Continue data collection as specified above
      - Week of 3/10—Spring Break
      - Week of 3/17—Introduce “Time Machine” for conflict resolution and continue data collection as specified above
      - Week of 3/25—Begin initial data compilation and analysis

  • April:

    o Based on effectiveness, continue strategies as appropriate

    o Weekly Breakdown:
• Week of 4/1—Finalize data analysis
• Week of 4/7—Write final inquiry paper
• Week of 4/14—Create PowerPoint/Pages presentation for Inquiry Conference and review/edit inquiry paper
• Week of 4/21—Hand in final inquiry paper, prepare for presentation and present findings at Inquiry Conference

DATA COLLECTION IDEAS:

• Conflict/Tattling Data: Due to the generic nature of the student conflict/tattling, “Student name did behavior to me, and he/she wouldn’t stop,” we want to develop a tally sheet that will allow us to specify the date and activity. [Relates to Main Wondering and Sub Questions 1, 2, 5 and 6].

• Student response to Conscious Discipline: We want to know how the students feel about the activities and skills described in Conscious Discipline (Student Family Jobs, Safe Place, Kindness Counts Flowers, etc.). We will conduct individual student interviews to retrieve this data. [Relates to Main Wondering and Sub Questions 2, 3, and 4].

• Raising Your Spirited Child survey. This book has a survey to aid in determining whether your child is “spirited.” We want to complete this checklist for each of our students so we can have an official backing for our claim that several of our students are “strong-willed.” [Included to provide an official classification for those students we perceive to be “strong-willed”].

• Emotional Outbursts/Breakdowns: We feel documenting these emotional situations in detail along with any Brain Gym strategies that may alleviate these outbursts or
breakdowns would be extremely powerful evidence of effect. [Relates to Main Wondering and Sub Questions 1, 3, 4, and 6].

- Document through tally, anecdotes and pictures the student use of the Safe Place, Kindness Counts Flowers, Kindness Counts Notes, the We Care Center, and other Conscious Discipline strategies or tools. [Relates to Main Wondering and all Sub Questions].

- Document through student quotes, observations and video student use of Conscious Discipline strategies. [Relates to Main Wondering and all Sub Questions].
Appendix C—Annotated Bibliography

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15 February 2008

Annotated Bibliography


--This book is the basis for our inquiry; it contains the basic skills and procedures we will employ throughout this inquiry. The Conscientious Discipline approach is based on current brain and child development research and is designed to be effective and empowering for students and teachers alike. It focuses on the emotional intelligence of the brain, community building, and overall classroom interactions and relationships. It is relevant to our inquiry because it is the provided the driving force for our interest and wonderings in this approach.


--The concepts introduced in this book are again consistent with those outlined in Conscientious Discipline and There’s Got to Be a Better Way. Specifically, the strategies are geared toward helping those children who may have difficulties making good choices and/or exhibit chronic behavior problems. We feel that employing these strategies in conjunction with those strategies from Conscientious Discipline will really help us to best serve all of our students, especially those we perceive to be “strong-willed.”
Bailey, Becky A. (2003). *There’s got to be a better way: Discipline that works for parents and teachers*. Oviedo, FL: Loving Guidance, Inc.

--This book re-emphasizes the use of positively framed language introduced by *Conscious Discipline*. This book leads parents and teachers away from fear-based discipline in a direction oriented toward love and acceptance discipline. Limit setting and consequences are highlighted in this text; this concept is also highly connected to *Conscious Discipline*. One of our goals in inquiring into the effectiveness of *Conscious Discipline* is monitoring our language, this book supports the type of language we feel will be successful in management and classroom community building.


--The *Brain Gym* program incorporates 26 directed physical movements that are specifically designed to maximize cognitive functioning and mood. Often, this program is implemented at a school-wide level. We feel that choosing several specific movements from the routine will be sufficient for our needs and intents. We plan to incorporate these “brain breaks” into our daily routine as a scheduled part of our day. We would like to see if this addition has any effect on the success of the *Conscious Discipline* skills and overall class behavior.


--This resource emphasizes the important intricacies evident in the way we speak to one another and our students. We feel that because much of our focus for this inquiry is on our language (especially that of *Conscious Discipline*), this book will really help us to be aware of the unspoken/non-explicit messages we are conveying through our speech. One of our sub questions
for our main wondering deals with the relatedness of other programs and resources to Conscious Discipline, we feel initially that the concepts in this book do lend themselves to the Conscious Discipline approach.


--This book illustrates methods for teachers to use while delivering praise to children, especially those difficult ones. Specifically, we are interested in the idea of “video moments” in which a teacher replays a child’s specific actions without implying judgment. The form of this replay is that of commentary and is designed to show the child that you notice what they are doing without rating their performance.


--This book emphasizes the importance of physical movement throughout the day to support brain performance. Although the main points are very similar to those described in *Brain Gym*, the delivery is very different. *Brain Gym* is written by a kinesiologist and is jargon-laden. *Smart Moves* is written by an educator and is more teacher-friendly. We feel that using both of these resources will allow us to cross check ideas and best implement the skills.


--This article outlines strategies similar to those found in *Brain Gym*. The main focus here is that strategic physical movement spread throughout the day can improve overall mood and cognitive functioning. We feel this resource will be invaluable to our inquiry because of its close relation
to *Brain Gym* and its overall goals of best preparing children (and their brains) to participate in a classroom community.


--This book provides advice for raising what these experts call “spirited children.” In this text is a survey for rating your child’s temperament. We plan to use the survey to provide a more official label for the students we perceive to be “strong-willed.”


--This portion of Becky Bailey’s official website contains real world testimonials as to the effectiveness of *Conscious Discipline*. We feel that these narratives will provide motivation and insight for our *Conscious Discipline* journey. The range of grade levels and settings represented in these stories could provide us with an idea of how feasible a future school-wide implementation of *Conscious Discipline* could be.