

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A JUST COMMUNITY APPROACH WITH DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS AT BOSCOVILLE CENTER: PROBLEMS AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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### ABSTRACT

A description and an analysis of the process and the outcomes of an experiment with the Just Community Approach (JCA) in the development of moral judgment of delinquents are presented. Subjects involved in this experiment were 12 male adolescents (14 to 18 years old) and eight adult educators. Data used in this paper were obtained from the Moral Judgment Interview (SIMJI) and several other questionnaires. Material from the journals kept by the educators and the intervention, though not completely implemented, increased the participants' moral judgment and slightly improved the "moral atmosphere" of the program.

The JCA project at Boscoville is a three-phase long-term program. The first phase consists in the implementation and evaluation of the JCA program, the second phase focuses on strengthening the JCA intervention, while the third phase concerns itself with the evaluation of the short-term and long-term effects of the Just Community Approach.

This paper describes several aspects of phase one of this JCA experiment at Boscoville, especially the evaluation of the quality of the JCA implementation during Year One. This description will however be prefaced here by a short review of the literature on previous JCA experiments with delinquents.

### **Moral Intervention Experiments with Delinquents**

Two kinds of Developmental moral interventions have been used with delinquents: the micro-intervention and the macro-intervention (JCA) (Gibbs, Arnold, Ahlborn & Chessman, 1984). Both interventions are concerned with giving individuals the opportunity to confront each other's perspectives through role taking and with creating a cognitive disequilibrium in order to facilitate personal growth at a more advanced stage of moral judgment.

The micro-intervention (Blatt, 1969; Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975) consists of group discussions on hypothetical moral dilemmas and has often been used with delinquents (Arbuthnot, 1984; Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1983; Arbuthnot, Gordon, Martin & Gotthardt, 1983; Fleetwood & Parish, 1976; Gibbs, & al., 1984; Goldstein & Glick, 1987; Hickey, 1972; Rosenkoetter, Landman & Mazak, 1980; Séguin-Tremblay & Kiely, 1979; Ventis, 1976).

To be efficient, the micro-intervention must respect some conditions (Gibbs & al., 1984; Nucci, 1987) among which the main condition is the establishment of a just environment. Such condition seems very difficult to establish in jails and in most of the institutions for delinquents (Scharf, 1973; Scharf & Hickey, 1976). That was one of the prime reasons the JCA was developed and tested with delinquents in institutions (Hickey & Scharf, 1980; Kohlberg, Kauffman, Scharf & Hickey, 1974).

The macro-intervention, the Just Community Approach (JCA) aims to create a just and democratic environment and to stimulate the moral development of its participants. The JCA postulates that moral development, referring to the development of the sense of justice, can be made only through a just environment. In this environment, the subjects are encouraged to cooperate with peers and adults in order to build democratically, to make decisions with a greater concern for justice, and to enforce their community rules (Hickey & Scharf, 1980; Power, Higgins, Kohlberg, 1989; Mosher, 1980).

JCA projects involving delinquents have shown efficiency not only to improve the moral atmosphere of the program and the individual stage of moral judgment but also as an effective tool to reform the educational

system in order to give delinquents equal opportunities for quality education (Kohlberg, Scharf & Hickey, 1973; Hickey & Scharf, 1980; Jennings & Kohlberg, 1983; 1980; Blakeney & Blakeney, 1990; Blakeney, 1984.; Ayers, Duguid, Montague & Wolowydnik, 1980; Ayers, 1978; Duguid, 1981). Although these experiments have shown that the JCA can be efficiently implemented in some rehabilitation programs for delinquents, there is no empirical evidence that the JCA can endure in practice in institutional settings. Despite positive results found in JCA projects, most of the JCA projects with delinquents have been short lived. Thus, the need to test the JCA's ability to endure in official rehabilitation services was an important element of the rationale for the JCA experiment at Boscoville.

### **Boscoville JCA Project**

Boscoville is a rehabilitation center for male delinquent adolescents (14 to 18 years of age) located in the eastern part of Montreal. This Center has been considered, for many years, to be an institution concerned with program experimentation in re-education to enhance the personal development of its clients. Over the years, Ego development (Gendreau, 1966; Guindon, 1969) as well as Milieu Therapy (Redl & Wineman, 1951; Gendreau, 1978) have been the major perspectives at the basis of the center reeducation program.

Following an evaluation of the Boscoville program (LeBlanc, 1983) which showed that there were moderate positive results, the need to transform and to complement this re-education model with the introduction of a moral education component appeared. It was then decided to conduct a JCA experiment in one unit with twelve adolescents (the Terrasse unit) and eight educators.

The initial project had three main objectives: first, to include some specific JCA elements (Kohlberg, Kauffman, Hickey & Scharf, 1974; Jennings, & Kohlberg, 1983) into the existing Boscoville Program; second, to offer support to each adolescent through an individualized treatment plan; and third, to offer training and continued support to the educators in the use of the JCA.

### **The JCA Elements or Activities**

For the first year of the JCA project, in order to stimulate power and to share responsibility between youth and adults, it was planned that the specific JCA elements (Jennings, & Kohlberg, 1983) to be included in the program would be a democratic Constitution, a weekly General Assembly of the community, an Administration Activity, a Discipline Committee, a Community Manual and a Team Manual.

The Constitution should be discussed, written and democratically

voted upon by both the adolescents and the adults (one person, one vote) of the unit, and should be used to resolve future conflicts inside the unit.

The general Community Assembly was planned to be held on a regular basis. Its content should be: a) information about the program; b) consultation on some social events to be organized; c) discussion and vote upon the community rules. All members (adults and adolescents) of the unit should attend this Assembly.

The Administration Activity was planned to be a weekly group meeting purporting on the issues of task delegation and responsibility sharing among the adolescents. During the meeting, youths would be accountable to the group for the responsibilities placed upon them by the group.

It was planned to create a Discipline Committee for enforcement of the rules. This committee should include adolescents and adults chosen by the community on a rotation basis to judge infractions.

Finally, was also planned the elaboration of a Community Manual and a Team Manual which include the Constitution and all the procedures decided upon by the community and the team. These manuals would be the official references for information to new persons arriving into the unit and for conflict resolution.

### **The Individualized Treatment Plan**

The Youth Protection Law of the Province of Quebec prescribes that an individualized treatment plan must be established and reviewed regularly for each adolescent. In this JCA project it was decided that individualized treatment plan would contain some special intervention for stimulating the adolescent moral judgment. In addition, it was agreed that each adolescent would have a weekly meeting with his counsellor educator.

### **The Educators' Support and Training**

The original plan was that educators would be supported and trained through weekly sub-group supervision meetings complementing some workshop days on the theory and practice of the JCA.

### **Rationale for the Evaluation of the JCA Implementation**

According to some authors (Quay, 1977; Sechrest & Rosenblatt, 1987), much research on intervention programs with delinquents has been weak because a) the intervention was based on weak theory, or b) the research focused on measuring a program's effects before ensuring the program's strength and integrity (Sechrest & Redner, 1979). There is an increasing consensus among researchers on the importance of verifying that what is measured is really what was planned to be measured (face validity) (Borg & Gall, 1989; Hurteau, 1989; Scheirer & Reznovic, 1983; Sechrest, West, Phillips, Redner & Yeaton, 1977; Tremblay, 1985; Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981). Achieving this goal may be facilitated by an ongoing evaluation of the

process of how the program is implemented. It is in this sense that an evaluation of the JCA implementation at Boscoville was conducted.

### Evaluation

This ongoing evaluation is both summative and formative (Scriven, 1967; Stufflebeam, 1971). More specifically, it is summative in that it attempts to verify the genuineness (integrity) of the Just Community Approach by examining the congruencies (similarities and discrepancies) between the intended JCA program and the applied and observed JCA program. It is formative in that it aims to increase the quality of the program and to adjust it by looking at some effects as indicators of the JCA strength and intensity.

Stake's evaluation model (1972) was adopted in this study because it allows one to look at both the congruencies and the congruencies of a program's application. Crucial questions have been asked in order to verify specific criteria of a genuine JCA experiment (Jennings, Kilkenny & Kohlberg, 1983) and to collect accurate information about the program.

### Instruments

Various instruments have been used for the data collection: interviews, such as Kohlberg's Standard Issue Moral Judgment Interview (SIMJI) (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), self-revealed delinquency questionnaire (LeBlanc, Fréchette, Dionne, 1987; LeBlanc, Fréchette, 1989), moral atmosphere questionnaire (SAQ) (Power, Higgins, Kohlberg, 1989), socio-economic-status questionnaire, and journals kept by the educators and the consultant.

### Subjects

The subjects were the 12 adolescents of the unit and the 8 adult educators participating in this JCA program.

On October 1, the adolescents were administered questionnaires on socio-demographic characteristics, self-revealed delinquency questionnaires, and individual moral judgment interviews (SIMJI, Form A, pre-test). The educators were interviewed on their moral judgment (SIMJI, Form B, pre-test). In addition, the educators' and the adolescents' perception of the moral atmosphere of their unit was solicited (SAQ) (October 1, May 1, October 2). The SIMJI was administered as post-test in May to the adolescents and in June to the educators. In addition, the adolescents and the educators answered the SAQ on October 1, May and October 2.

## THE ADOLESCENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

*Socio-economic and school level.* Ten adolescents completed the questionnaire (LeBlanc and Fréchette, 1989). Two adolescents came from lower socio-economic class, four from lower middle-class, and four from middle-class (see Figure 1). They were at the first years of high school. Three

subjects were in grade seven, five were in grade eight and three were in grade nine. This school level is at least one year below the mean level for an equivalent age adolescent population in Quebec.

*Level of revealed-delinquency.* Eight adolescents answered the questionnaire (LeBlanc, Fréchette & Dionne, 1987). Six were at the highest level of delinquency (level IV), one was at the level III, and one revealed no delinquency (see Figure 1). This last subject was placed at Boscoville because of disturbed behaviors at home and at school.

*Level of moral judgement.* Ten subjects were interviewed (SIMJI). One adolescent was at stage 2, seven were at transitional stage 2/3, and two were at the beginning of stage 3. The mean score of Weight Average Score (WAS) was 252.6, the lowest score being 220, and, the highest at 292 (see Figure 2).

Interrater reliability was calculated between the two coders of the Boscoville study which indicated a comparatively high rate:  $r=.9679$  ( $n=20$ ).

### The Educators' Characteristics

The moral judgment levels of the educators were measured through SIMJI (Form B). After the first phase of their training on moral judgment theory, the educators were individually interviewed. These educators were all university graduates from Psycho-Education or another Human Sciences Department and were very experienced in the field. Two were at Boscoville for over fifteen years and the mean of the professional experience among the team was 9 years ( $n=8$ ,  $x=9$ ).

*Level of educators' moral judgment.* Four educators were at stage 4, three were at stage 4/5, and one was at stage 5.

*Level of educators' motivation.* Three educators perceived themselves as being very motivated, two others were motivated, and two others acknowledged that they were weakly motivated. The reasons given by the third group for experiencing weak motivation involved self-thought about their professional futures. Also, with this approach, they were concerned with the time and energy consuming aspects as well as the fact that they would be giving so much power to delinquents.

### The Initial Moral Atmosphere of the Unit

The adolescents and the educators answered the SAQ (Power & al. 1989). This questionnaire contains sentences describing values and norms (ex.: fighting, drugs, respect, justice of the rules). For each sentence, the subjects were asked to give three kinds of answers. First, on a scale of five points they had to circle a number indicating if that particular norm or value were existing in the unit (1=true, 5=false). Second, they were asked to indicate if they care that this norm exists in their unit (5 points scale where 1 = they care a lot, 5 = they do not care). Third, they had to note if they would be ready to bring this point up into a group discussion (on a 4 points scale where 4 = they would not participate in a group discussion on that norm,

and 1 = they would be ready to bring up this point to group discussion).

At the beginning of the evaluation, the mean of the adolescents' answers to the first 19 sentences was 3.08/5 for their perception of the existence of these norms,  $x = 2.92/5$  about their level of caring relative to the norms, and  $x = 2.89/4$  about their readiness to discuss these issues in the group (see Figure 3, Moral Atmosphere).

### **The Implementaion Process of the JCA**

Information was collected to answer five crucial questions in an effort to verify the genuiness of the JCA program implemented at Boscoville: Question 1. Is there power and responsibility sharing between the adults and adolescents of the unit in order to build a just environment? Question 2. Were the adolescents stimulated to think about values? Question 3. Did the adolescents receive individualized support in their re- education process? Questions 4 and 5. Were educators given support to implement the JCA? Did the educators develop their abilities to apply JCA?

For question 1, the indicators were the writing of the Constitution and the implementation of the JCA activities. The collected information shows that, although the process was long, a Constitution was written, discussed and voted upon; the General Community Assembly was held regularly though moral discussion and votes upon rules were not as frequent as expected; after a trial and error period, the Administration Activity was functioning as expected; the Discipline Committee was not created and implemented; the Team Manual and the Community Manual were elaborated though they were not used in reference for conflict resolution and for information.

The main problem for the educators regarding the power and responsibility sharing was that, during some assemblies, the adolescents challenged them for changing some basic rules like the curfew hour and the obligation to participate in the activities. According to the educators, during some group crises times, the adolescents used their votes to support their delinquent behaviors and to avoid personal involvement in their rehabilitation process.

The Discipline Committee was not created, because the educators were afraid that the adolescents would distort the goal of this committee and would use it for revenge against their peers.

To answer question 2 concerning the adolescents' stimulation to think about values, information gathered shows that from January to May, hypothetical moral dilemmas were regularly discussed and the adolescents were involved in the enforcement of the activity rules and offered suggestions about some moral issues they would like to discuss. After some months, this activity was well implemented.

## SOME PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Information was collected after eight months of JCA implementation on the adolescents' and educators' moral judgment, and after 12 months on the unit moral atmosphere.

### The Adolescents' Moral Judgement

After eight months, the Terrasse unit adolescents were re-administered the moral judgment interview (SIMJI, Form A). Eight subjects of the initial group were still residing at the Terrasse, though most of them were soon to be released from Boscoville.

When compared with the pretest, the mean of progress for the eight subjects is 47.2 of weighted Average Score (WAS), equivalent to almost one half stage (see figure 2).

### The Educators' Moral Judgement

The educators were also administered a new moral judgment interview (SIMJI, Form B). The findings suggested minimal progress, from 0 to 18 WAS with a mean of 8.3 WAS for eight educators. This slight progress is not significant.

### The moral atmosphere

At the end of Year 1 (October 2), the results showed that the adolescents had comparatively similar perceptions of the atmosphere of their unit to those they had five months earlier (May). On the 5 points scale of the SAQ, where 5 is negative and 1 is positive, they perceived that most of the norms did not really exist in their unit ( $x=2.97/5$ ) although they were ready to bring this point up in group discussions ( $x=1.9/4$ ) (see Figure 3).

## DISCUSSION

An analysis has been done for each part of the evaluation, the summative and formative in order to determine if the implemented JCA was a genuine JCA.

### The Summative Evaluation of the JCA Experiment

The first criterion of this evaluation was the democratic sharing of power and responsibility between the adolescents and adults. This was exercised to a certain extent.

Over the year some progress was made. Still the Terrasse community did not meet its objective of implementing its democratic functioning at the intended level. One possible explanation for not meeting this expected level of democratic functioning is that some administrative problems compromised the stability and quality of the educators' supervision meetings. As a result, the educators had difficulty understanding and mastering the Just Community Approach. This lack of understanding could have accounted for tensions and conflicts among the team members when they had to cope



with the adolescents' serious misbehaviors. This increase in the delinquent behavior during the first months of the process was stressful for the educators and therefore affected their participation level in training.

The increase in the adolescents' delinquency could be interpreted as a resistance to reflection and to socialized exchanges with their peers. This kind of resistance has been observed among delinquent groups when confronted by a demand to open communication (Achille, 1965; Mailloux, 1971) or to democratize prison life (Duguid, 1981).

In the Terrasse JCA project, during the first months, the adolescents used their votes to refuse to participate in the activities and to support their delinquent behaviors. The educators felt as though they had lost control and power. A possible interpretation is that the combination of the lack of preparation of the educators and the adolescents' resistances were the most important factors explaining the discrepancies between the expected level of democracy and the observed level during this first year of JCA program. A closer analysis of the collected information shows that, although it has been difficult to implement and less qualitative than expected, there was some progress in the democratic power and responsibility sharing within the Terrasse community: a Constitution has been voted upon, the Administration Activity was well functioning, the Community and the Team Manual were written; the quality of the moral atmosphere slightly increased and the adolescents were more ready to discuss some moral norms in group sessions.

The second criterion of the JCA involves the stimulation of adolescents' individual moral judgment. The first indicator of this criteria was the Moral Teaching Activity and the second was the youths' participation in the activity improvement. After a trial and error period, adjustments were made and the Moral Teaching Activity was held regularly from January to May. In addition to the discussions on moral hypothetical dilemmas, the adolescents participated in the decisions pertaining to the activity rules and their enforcement. Despite these difficulties, it could be said that this second criteria was met at a qualitative level.

The third criterion, the individualized support to the adolescents, was realized almost as expected. Each youth had individualized treatment plans and regular weekly meetings with his counsellor-educator, although the educators did not lead moral discussion with the youth during these meetings as often as expected.

The fourth criterion was the support to the educators to help them apply the JCA. This support was not as intensive as was expected. This discrepancy could be explained by a major crisis among the Boscoville administration, poor financial support and bad scheduling of the supervision sessions.

The fifth criterion was the educators' competence to apply the JCA. This competence can be explained by the poor support given to them (by the administration and through too much irregular supervision) and by the complexity of a program such as the JCA (which seemed at first glance quite simple to apply).

### **Analysis of the Formative Evaluation of JCA Implementation**

Two main results were analyzed: the adolescents' progress on their moral judgment level and the progress on the community moral atmosphere quality.

#### **The adolescents progress on their moral judgment level**

The adolescents' WAS and stage as measured by the SIMJI post test were compared to both the pretest and to results obtained by Jennings (1983) in the Florida JCA experiment (see figure 2). The data revealed progress of almost one half stage. This is slightly higher than Blatt's effect and Florida's JCA results. With such results at this phase of the project, the question does not appear to be that of establishing statistical significance, but rather explaining such a level of change within a JCA not as well implemented as was expected.

A first explanation could be that this progress was caused by the Moral Teaching activity which was applied with quality and stability. According to Berkowitz (1989), group discussion of moral dilemma, if well conducted, can produce just as important changes on individual moral judgment as the JCA.

A second explanation might be that, although the JCA was weak in some aspects, there were some elements which were sufficiently qualitative to warrant change. The adolescents could have been cognitively unbalanced by the different points of view among their peers during the Administration Activity. During these activities, they were exposed regularly to real life moral dilemmas through group discussions about the distribution of community responsibilities. According to Gibbs & al. (1984), this kind of group discussion can be a sufficient condition for stimulating individual moral judgment of delinquents.

A third explanation could be that these results were related to some coding errors of the SIMJI. This does not seem likely however since the interrater agreement rate is higher ( $r=.9679$ ,  $n=20$ ) than the prescribed norms ( $r=.9$ ) (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987).

A final explanation might be that these changes were an effect of the Boscoville program at large rather than the elements of the JCA per se. This avenue will need further verification.

#### **The community moral atmosphere**

Although the changes on the SAQ were not as important as originally anticipated, the changes which occurred evolved around the adolescents' desire for group discussions about the norms they would like to see established in the community (see Figure 3, column 3). This minimal progress indicates a beginning of group openness and might be explained as an effect of the numerous group discussions about norms which were regularly held during some of the JCA activities. This hypothesis, though

tentative, can hardly be proven because, according to Berkowitz (1989), it is almost impossible to show the influence of specific factors on a complex variable such as moral atmosphere.

These findings could be considered to be indicators of some small but promising progress, thereby encouraging one to continue and to persevere in the same positive direction.

### Conclusion

This paper describes several aspects of the first phase of a JCA experiment conducted at Boscoville with 12 juvenile delinquent boys and their educators. It presents more specifically the evaluation that was conducted during Year One of the experiment. The findings demonstrate that it was a first year of trial and error to establish a program of democratic functioning. During the first months the adolescents tended to use their democratic power in order to defend their delinquency against change and were found to resist the socialized influence of the environment. These resistances sometimes produced feelings of depression among the educators who frequently resorted to their old means of control and to a moralizing approach instead of applying the moral development intervention. Despite experiencing difficulties, the quality of the moral atmosphere slightly increased and some JCA activities were quite well implemented. The adolescents' moral judgment progressed to more than one third of the stage and the educators were motivated to continue the experiment. There is reason enough to be optimistic that the JCA can continue to be experimented with at the Terrasse unit during the coming years.

At the end of this evaluation, our main suggestion in order to improve the quality of the JCA is that a substantial training program for the educators should include the regular presence of JCA Consultants during some JCA meetings in order to aid the Development of the educators' ability to apply the JCA.

In summary, this first phase of JCA at Boscoville has not been easy, but sufficiently interesting progress has been made to justify the continuance of the experiment. In addition, the Just Community Approach forced the educators to reflect on their ways of searching for justice in their personal lives and in their own community. This educators' reflection could be the first step to reform the education process and to reach a greater equity of chances of development for each individual in our society.

Figure 1 Characteristics of the Terrasse adolescents in October 1987

Subj	Age	Law	Time passed at Boscov	Family residence	School level	Socio Economic level	Moral Judgement		Self-rev. delin.			
							Sta.	MMS	Pr.	Fre	Va.	Sta.
1	14.1	38NV	1 month	MT1.	SecI	Low/M	2/3	232	8	216	45	IV
2	16.1	C110	6 month	Mt1	SecII	Low	2/3	265	-	-	-	-
3	15.2	C110	2 month	Mt1.	SecII	Medium	3	292	8	189	18	IV
4	14.9	38NV	3 month	Mt1	SecIII	Medium	2/3	250	-	-	-	-
5	15.7	38NV	2 month	Mt1	SecI	Low/M	3	288	8	371	19	IV
6	15.8	38NV	9 month	Mt1	SecII	Low	2	220	10	79	14	IV
7	13.6	38NV	1week	Mt1	SecI	Medium	2/3	240	0	0	0	0
8	16.1	C110	7 month	Mt1	SecII	Low/M	2/3	227	6	650	17	IV
9	15.10	38NV	6 month	Mt1	SecII	Low/M	2/3	246	10	28	11	III
10	15.11	38NV	8 month	Mt1	SecIII	Medium	2/3	266	9	113	22	IV
M.	15.3		4 month	Mt1	SecII	Low/M	2/3	252	8.4	205	18	IV

Legend:

Column 1: Subj. = subject number

Column 2: Age

Column 3: Law 38NV= Quebec Youth Protection Law  
 Non-voluntary Placement for serious misbehavior  
 C110 = Canada Youth Offender Act for criminal offenses

Column 4: Time passed at Boscoville before the SIMJI pre-test

Column 5: Town of family residence

Column 6: School level; secI=seventh year of school

Column 7: Socio-economic level on a 4 levels scale (low, low/med, med, high)

Column 8&9: Moral judgement; stage (Sta) and Moral Maturity Points (MMS)

Column 10-11-12-13: Self-revealed delinquency

pre= precocity age of the first infraction

fre= frequency, number of offense

va= variety of offenses

sta= stage of criminal activity aggravation

Figure 2 Moral Maturity Point Difference between Pre and Post-test

	Just Community						Behavior Modification			Transactional Analysis		
	Boscoville Terrasse			Florida Project			Pre	Post	Dif	Pre	Post	Dif
Subj	Pre	Post	Dif	Pre	Post	Dif	Pre	Post	Dif	Pre	Post	Dif
1	232	317	85	200	233	33	226	240	14	236	246	06
2	265	310	45	270	300	30	185	200	15	273	265	-08
3	292	300	08	200	270	70	230	261	31	254	264	10
4	250	291	41	205	250	45	250	275	25	275	256	-19
5	288	320	32	233	270	37	230	240	10			
6	220	264	44	200	225	25	255	254	-01			
7	240	316	76	200	205	05	232	256	24			
8				180	210	30	227	282	05			
mean	240	291	45	211	246	35	236	251	15	262	257	-03

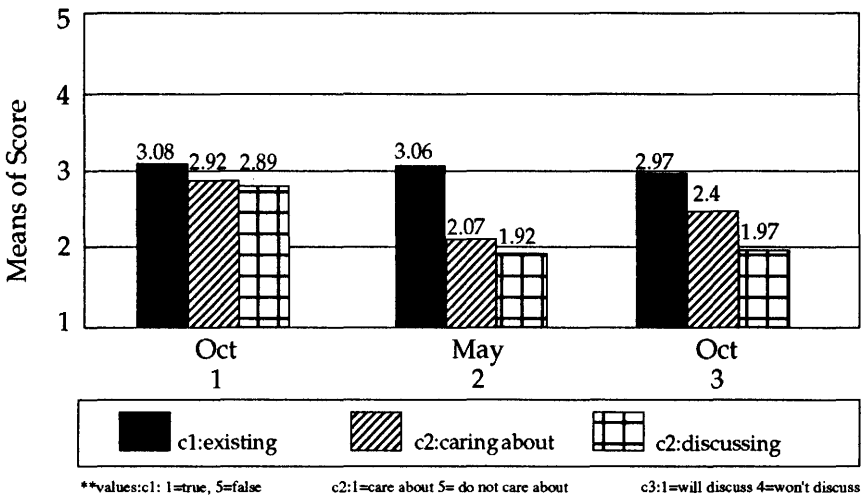
Time between pre and post-test:

Boscoville: 8 months Florida Project: 9 months

Behavior Modification 12 months Transactional Analysis: 6 months

(Insert Figure 3) Harvard Graphic: \atmosmor.cht

Figure 3 Moral atmosphere



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