

SELF-DISCLOSURE AND COHESION IN THE RELIGIOUS CLASSROOM

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By  
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# Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

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## APPROVAL PAGE


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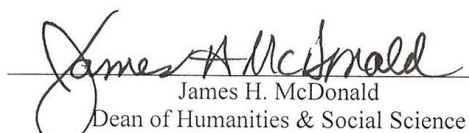
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SELF-DISCLOSURE AND COHESION IN THE RELIDIOUS CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This research regards the relationship between self-disclosure and cohesion in a religious setting. Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory is used to understand self-disclosure in the unique setting of religious education. This relationship between self-disclosure and cohesion has been varied in the traditional school classroom and in therapy groups. The inconsistency of results regarding self-disclosure and cohesion as well as the unique setting of the religious classroom requires further consideration. Ninety-six high school students from twelve different religious Latter-day Saint seminary classrooms self-reported aspects of self-disclosure and cohesion as well as willingness and competence to communicate in the religious classroom. Students had been in class for four months prior to this study. In addition, test subject's degree of communication apprehension was examined by comparing partner, group, and class communication and their willingness and competency to communicate. The correlation between cohesion and self-disclosure in the religious classroom statistically was significant ( $p = .001$ ). In

addition, students perceived themselves as more competent and willing to communicate with a partner rather than with the entire class ( $p = .049$ ).

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract..... iii

Acknowledgements..... iv

Chapters

[1.](#) Introduction..... 1

    Theoretical Perspective..... 1

    Self-Disclosure..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

    Self-Disclosure in the Classroom..... 6

    Student to Student Self-disclosure in the Classroom..... 7

    Cohesion ..... 10

    The Relationship between Self-Disclosure and Cohesion ..... 10

    Willingness to Communicate and Self-Perceived Competence..... 15

[2.](#) Method ..... 17

    Participants..... 18

    Instruments..... 19

[3.](#) Results..... 22

[4.](#) Discussion..... 25

    Limitations and Future Research ..... 27

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

Conclusion .....	28
References .....	30
Appendix.....	35
Instrument .....	35
Vita.....	40

## **Introduction**

In the religious classroom students interact with each other in a unique way that differs from that of a normal classroom experience. The nature of a religious course fosters an environment in which students have many opportunities to share personal experiences and explain examples from their life when discussing religious positions. This creates a unique type of interpersonal self-disclosure. In the Latter-day Saint seminary classroom students come with a similar set of values and beliefs that may allow students to feel more comfortable when they communicate what they know and feel. As a student shares with other students in the class their feelings and thoughts on a particular religious principle often they draw from their life experiences. These real life experiences frequently reveal personal information in regards to how they have come to understand religious values in their lives. Self-disclosure in the religious classroom can be rich with meaning to the individual; therefore it may have an important affect on the other students who learn from that information and the group as a whole. To date, self-disclosure in the religious classroom has not been studied. The significance of a study in the religious classroom has implications not only for religious educators, but for leaders of churches and possibly group therapists who deal with self-disclosure on a personal level within a group setting. Therefore, self-disclosure in the religious classroom, and its affect on the group, requires consideration. This paper will focus on the relationship and function of self-disclosure and cohesion within the religious classroom setting. In addition, this study will seek to understand in which capacity (with a partner, group, or entire class) are students more willing and competent to self-disclose information.

## Theoretical Perspective

### Self-Disclosure

In order to understand this relationship within the religious classroom, a review of the literature is appropriate. Sidney M. Jourard (1971), one of the pioneer theorists of self-disclosure defined self-disclosure as having an attitude of trust and love. In his book, *The Transparent Self*, Jourard explains that “when a man discloses his experiences to another fully spontaneously, and honestly, then the mystery that he was decreases enormously” (1971, p. 5). Self-disclosure is defined by West and Turner as “revealing pieces of information about oneself to another, and the purposeful process of revealing information about yourself to others” (2007, p. 189). When one discloses information to another it indicates that the recipient is liked and trusted by the disclosure (Worthy, Gary, Kahn, 1969). Several theories highlight our understanding of self-disclosure and are relevant to the current study. Altman and Taylor (1973) Social Penetration Theory, Worthy, Gary, and Kahn’s (1969) Social Reward Theory and West and Turner (2007) breadth and depth constructs are a foundation for self-disclosure in the classroom. Initially, the Social Penetration Theory conceptualized by Irwin Altman and Dalmis Taylor (1973) provides a model for self disclosure. Altman and Taylor contend that there is a process of social penetration where individuals move from superficial communication to more intimate communication. This process of social penetration comes in part from self-disclosure and the reciprocity that Altman and Taylor feel carries a relationship to a more intimate level. Reciprocity is the “process whereby one person’s openness leads to the other’s openness” (West & Turner, 2007). Altman



## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

and Taylor (1973) expand the process of reciprocity within the social penetration theory further with the analogy of an onion. The more intimate a relationship comes through self-disclosure the more “layers” the relationship goes toward the center. As students in a classroom self-disclose the relationship between the students may change the communication from casual to more intimate. Worthy, Gary, and Kahn’s (1969) early work structured a theory based on social rewards as the key concept for self-disclosure. This theory posits that the receiver of a self-disclosure sees the intimacy level of the disclosure as an indication of the sender's trust and liking. To the extent that this disclosure has been of an intimate nature, the receiver feels socially rewarded and, as a consequence, likes the sender. Intimacy according to Worthy et al. refers to a deep level of communication where the sender reveals personal information about themselves. McCallister viewed the self-disclosure process not only from the receiver, but from the sender—a type of parallel process:

Just as a receiver might look at the level of a self-disclosure in order to ascertain how much the sender likes and trusts him, the sender might look at this same disclosure to answer the same question. Thus, each act of disclosure would be affecting the sender's liking for the receiver in a parallel position to the receiver's liking for the sender. (1980, p. 410).

Therefore the self-disclosure process can be found to be reciprocal in nature and to act as a social reward. As a student in the religious classroom shares personal information he or she not only influences him or herself, but others who are in the classroom. As cited above by McCallister the receiver uses the sender’s self-disclosure as a gauge to understand the level of liking and trust

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

of the sender. What affect this type of self-disclosure has on classroom communication remains to be seen.

West and Turner (2007) specify two ways that self-disclosure can be illustrated. The first is breadth which refers to the number of topics discussed and the amount of time partners spend communicating about these topics (p. 191). Because a seminary class meets on a daily to weekly basis, the breadth of information that can be shared is significant. The second view is that of depth. “Depth refers to the degree of intimacy that guides topic discussion” (p. 191). Within the classroom setting depth would vary greatly depending on subject and the openness of the teacher and students. In a traditional classroom setting looking at self-disclosure through the lens of breadth may have more application and implications. This is because students are often discouraged to share personal feelings by the teacher or the very nature of the classroom setting. However, in a religious classroom setting this may be different because depth of self-disclosure is encouraged. Depth can be seen as students discuss how religious principles relate to them on a very personal level. For example, a student may share how their relationship has improved with God through prayer. As a student self-discloses this type of personal information communication moves to a deeper level

In regard to depth, Adler and Towne (1996) identify four levels of depth in the self-disclosure process. Each level shows how self disclosure moves from superficial communication to more personal information. The levels are clichés, facts, opinions, and feelings. Understanding this process, will clarify what the process of self-disclosure would look like in the religious classroom. Clichés are classified as “ritualized, stock responses to social situations

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

(Adler and Towne, 1996, p. 338).” Clichés are those polite albeit brief responses that are given to strangers or new situations. In the religious classroom clichés would have their place, but would almost always move to more depth because students and teachers see each other daily which allows the student-teacher communication to develop beyond small-talk. The next level is facts. Adler and Towne indicate that at this level those who disclose facts, which are not generally known to others, show trust and commitment in the relationship. This is a building block to the last levels. At the beginning of the seminary class students are given opportunities to share information regarding their individual lives such as their hobbies, current job, and information about their family. The last two levels of self-disclosure may have particular relevance to the religious classroom. Opinions are how a person stands on a particular topic. Students in a religious classroom are consistently sharing their opinions on their personal views of religious subjects. As a class, students share their opinions about God, faith, prayer, and other religious doctrines. The final level is feelings, which are as Adler and Towne state, “usually the most reveling one” (1996, p. 339). Students in a religious setting are asked to share and express how they personally feel about religious principles. This goes beyond merely the student’s opinions of the subject matter, to the depth of how they have come to know for themselves that the principle or subject matter is true. Within the religious classroom this type of depth is often found, therefore there is a need to understand the dynamics of this type of self-disclosure in the classroom setting.

## **Self-Disclosure in the Classroom**

Self-disclosure in the classroom has historically and typically been associated with the teacher and student relationship. Only a limited amount of research has regarded the effects of self-disclosure from student to student within the classroom. In order to understand student to student self-disclosure in the classroom there must first be an understanding of how this topic has traditionally been viewed in previous studies. Self-disclosure research in the classroom has typically been characterized by the teacher self-disclosing information to the students. Self-disclosure, as it pertains to educational settings, has been defined as the instructor's sharing of personal and professional information about himself or herself in a believable way (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994). There can be both positive and negative results of self-disclosure in the classroom. "The treatment of self-disclosure in the classroom can be rewarding when it is conducted in a non-threatening, non-judgmental atmosphere of trust. The trust takes time and commitment to develop in the teacher-student relationship" (Montalbano-Phelps, 2003, p. 3). There has been little research about student-to-student self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure in the classroom follows the same rules and guidelines of a one-on-one relationship. Too much information disclosed by an individual can be just as damaging to a relationship as too little information. Hart and Burks (1972) describe this concept as rhetorical sensitivity. Therefore there seems to be a need for a balance of self-disclosure. Jourard stated, "too much or too little self-disclosure betokens disturbances in self and in interpersonal relationships" (as cited by Cozby, 1972, p. 152) Balance should be considered and understood as students or the teacher self-disclose feelings and opinions.

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

Rasmussen and Mishna (2008) state that there is a fine balance between thoughtful restraint and genuine openness as a teacher uses self-disclosure in the classroom. In addition Rasmussen and Mishna assert the concept that instructors cannot, not self-disclose. Self-disclosure then becomes a byproduct or a natural consequence as one teaches. Is the same true has students share their thoughts and feelings in the religious classroom?

### **Student to Student Self-disclosure in the Classroom**

When a student discloses information to a teacher he/she is also disclosing information to his or her classmates as well. Woolfolk, Garlinsky, and Nicolich (1977) considered the role of the teacher in inviting student self-disclosure. Their results indicated that “teacher communications appear to have an impact on student expressed willingness to disclose personal information to her or him” (p. 131). Specifically, student’s measure of self-disclosure was a direct function of the how the teacher responded positively to the student’s behavior (1977). As teachers verbally facilitated the self-disclosure processes within the classroom, self-disclosure positively increased.

Ronsenfeld and Gilbert (1989) examined the relationship between cohesion and self-disclosure in the classroom as students communicate one with another. Using a self-disclosure and a cohesion questionnaire Rosenfeld and Gilbert tested for the difference between these two variables in the classroom. Ronsenfeld and Gilbert concluded that “in the classroom setting, unintentional and positive disclosures, perceived as honest on the part of the individual but not as

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

honest when offered by others, are associated with high cohesion.” Rosenfeld and Gilbert (1989) go on to describe what type of self-disclosure is acceptable and common within the classroom:

Disclosures are typically used to establish a topic of common interest, present agreeable personalities, and discuss nonthreatening, noncontroversial issues. A group with the task of accomplishing an educational objective requires no more than superficial and pleasant relationships among the group members to ensure an adequate level of effectiveness for the short life of the particular group. (pp. 298-299)

Therefore it would seem that the degree and level of self-disclosure in the traditional classroom would need to be non-intimate for it to be effective. Is the same true for the religious classroom?

Fritz (1979) regarded self-disclosure in the classroom as a way to promote personal growth. The student-centered approach views the student as an active, self-directed participant rather than a student who is a passive recipient who merely reacts to the teacher. Fritz states further that a teacher can set the stage for an informal exchange of personal feeling and beliefs by his or her own disclosures. Therefore, if the teacher is willing to open up and share his or her feelings and personal experiences then the students will most likely do the same. This reciprocity may foster learning and personal growth in the classroom.

Finally, Myers study of college students revealed that students are more likely to disclose information with classmates rather than instructors, although the self-disclosure may not be intimate (1998). In a study of Japanese junior high students it was concluded that self-disclosure of students in their classes promotes adjustment to the classes. (Onodera & Kawamura, 2002).

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

As the literature suggests, the majority of studies relating to self-disclosure in the classroom are centered on the role of the teacher. However, there has yet to be a study on the effect of student-to-student self-disclosure in the religious classroom. There has been research that suggests the importance of peer communication. Ladd and Kochenderfer (1996) suggested that friendships and peer relationships influence success in the school. Fortney, Johnson and Long (2001) resound the fact that the influence of peers as part of the classroom environment often plays a positive role in helping socialize individuals with behavioral problems or those with special education needs. Although this paper will not delve into these discoveries it is important to note the importance of the peer interaction within the classroom.

This paper will look at self-disclosure through the lens of the religious classroom, specifically that of seminaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In the traditional classroom much information is shared between students, however as stated above there is little or no depth. Rosenfeld and Gilbert (1989) explain the reason for this. “The typical academic environment neither requires nor encourages intimacy; therefore, disclosures that occur are perceived as unintentional and positive...” (p. 298). Does this change significantly in the religious setting? In religious setting students are often given the opportunity to explain their beliefs and share their understanding of said beliefs. Self-disclosure may also goes to another level within the religious context as students have the opportunity to testify of the beliefs they have.

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

Furthermore, students are encouraged to share their beliefs in a variety of settings within the religious classroom. Do students feel more willing and competent to share information with just one person, with a group or with the entire class?

### **Cohesion**

Cohesion in research has readily been seen as a desirable quality of any group, organization, or classroom (Roark & Sarah, 1989). Bollen and Hoyle (1990) define perceived cohesion as “an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership in the group” (p. 482). This definition not only defines the term of cohesion, but also links to desirable outcomes of belonging and association. Carron and Spink (1995) define cohesion as the dynamic property that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in pursuit of its goals and objectives. Furthermore, research indicates that cohesiveness can be effective in therapeutic settings as well (Roark & Sarah, 1989). In addition, cohesion has been found to enhance group interaction and interpersonal learning as well as led to greater productivity (Santarsiero, Baker, & McGee, 1995). Cohesiveness has been a quality that has been viewed as desirable within many groups. “Cohesion is sought as a means of group maintenance and a source of member enjoyment (Miller, 1976). Cohesion can readily be seen as a desirable quality in the religious classroom.

### **The Relationship between Self-Disclosure and Cohesion**

What is the relationship between cohesion and self-disclosure? Furthermore, why is this relationship important? “Active attempts to promote cohesion in the classroom are desirable



## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

given its important role in predicting classroom outcomes (Rosenfeld & Gilbert, 1989, p. 299).”

One of the processes or ends of self-disclosure is liking. Cozby (1972) suggests that people like most those others who disclose most to them, but a curvilinear relationship exists between disclosure and liking. As Cozby stated proper balance of self-disclosure can create an atmosphere of liking or a bond between two people. Does it therefore also create an atmosphere of cohesion?

One outcome of high cohesion and high self-disclosure may be risk taking. “Risk taking by definition, involves the possibility of loss or harm. In group settings, risky behavior is behavior with unpredictable or uncertain consequences, which may lead to loss of self-esteem or increased vulnerability in the group” (Stokes, Fuehrer, & Childs, 1983, pp. 63-64). The person who is self-disclosing information about him or herself is in essence taking a risk. As stated above this could have a negative or positive effect on the group. Corey (1990) states that “cohesion occurs when people open up and take risks” and without this groupness or belongingness “members become frozen behind their defenses, and their work is of necessity superficial” (as cited by Hunter et al., 1990, p. 2). Stokes, Fuehrer, & Childs (1983) suggest that increased risk-taking is usually associated with increased group cohesion. Therefore, as one discloses information, which is a risk taking activity, there may be more cohesion created within a group. Elias, Johnson, and Fortman (1989) posited that self-disclosure intervention resulted in significantly higher group cohesiveness, commitment to task and productivity. “Groups in which members disclosed about intimate topics were perceived as more cohesive than were groups in which members disclosed about less intimate topics” (Stokes, Fuehrer, & Childs, 1983). With

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

this in mind, Stokes, Fuehrer, & Childs also found that “increased risk taking leads to greater cohesion” (p. 65). This implies a curvilinear relation between cohesion and risk-taking when a wide range of risk-taking is considered (Stokes, Fuehrer, & Childs, 1983). When there is too much or too little self-disclosure cohesion can be negatively affected. Therefore there must be a great balance of self-disclosure to create cohesion.

Conversely, other studies found little or no significant relationship between cohesion and self-disclosure. Hunter, Gomez, Ankarlo, Kirz, and Norbury cite that within training groups “little or no relationship between self-disclosure and cohesiveness was found at any level of analysis, and neither variable changed significantly over time” (1996, p. 2). This may be in part because the length of the group was short. In addition, Swagger (1984) in an early study of the classroom found that there was not significant correlation between self-disclosure and group cohesiveness among adolescents or those of college age. The current study is needed to help understand this relationship and the balance of self-disclosure and cohesion.

An additional dilemma arises when studying the relationship between cohesion and self-disclosure. Does cohesion create an atmosphere where self-disclosure can take place, or does self-disclosure create cohesion? Roark and Sarah state, “It appears that a good case can be made that higher levels of cohesion in groups will lead to higher levels of empathy, acceptance, self-disclosure, and trust. However, an equally good (or perhaps better) case can be made that an increase in these factors will lead to an increase in cohesion” (1989, p.67). This quote illustrates the difficulty in determining which happens first, cohesion or self-disclosure. Hunter et al (1996) conclude that in a group cohesion comes before self-disclosure: “It has been shown,

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

through content analysis, self-report and unobtrusive measures of small groups, that member self-disclose when a group cohesion stage had formed” (p. 2). Santarsiero, Baker, & McGee (1995), also found that “cohesion seems to form an interpersonal foundation or the groundwork for self-disclosure by serving as a primary interpersonal and affective structure and, thus, helps to link the members of the group” (p. 408). Others carry this idea further by stating that increasing self-disclosure leads then to higher levels of group cohesiveness (Stokes, Fueher, & Childs, 1983). Therefore self-disclosure and cohesion appear to be reciprocal in nature. The two concepts seem to work hand in hand to enhance the experience of the group. It is because of this connection between cohesion and self-disclosure there can be value in understanding the implications in the classroom.

What then does self-disclosure and cohesion look like in an educational setting?

Rosenfeld and Gilbert (1989) assessed the self-disclosure and cohesion relationship in small classroom groups. They discovered an “ambiguity and lack of generalizability in findings from studies conducted with therapy or simulated therapy groups...” (p. 293). Rosenfeld and Gilbert (1989) explained:

The relationship between cohesion and several dimensions of self-disclosure in the classroom setting is different from the relationship found in therapy groups, therapy-analogue situations, and intimate relationships. In therapeutic settings and latter stages of relationship development, disclosures that are high-risk are associated with increased trust, attraction, and high cohesion. However, in the classroom setting, unintentional and

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

positive disclosures, perceived as honest on the part of the individual but not as honest when offered by others, are associated with high cohesion (p.298).

With the objectives of understanding the difference between the classroom setting and the therapeutic setting, they discovered that self-disclosure of the therapeutic nature is inappropriate within the classroom setting because the objectives of each type are different. “A group with the task of accomplishing an educational objective requires no more than superficial and pleasant relationships among the group members to ensure adequate level of effectiveness for the short life of that particular group” (1989 p. 298).

The religious classroom combines the elements of the traditional classroom as well as some of the elements of the group therapy setting. To understand the religious classroom, there must be a comparison and distinction to the group therapy setting. Rosenfeld and Gilbert (1989) delineate the objective of the therapeutic setting, “The primary goal of the therapeutic setting is often self-understanding and the primary means of obtaining this self-understanding is through self-disclosure” (p. 298). Although the religious classroom does not fit perfectly the therapeutic setting, the elements of self-discovery and self-understanding are evident in the religious classroom. In fact teachers often encourage students to share their thoughts, feelings and beliefs in hopes of creating this self-understanding. The study of self-disclosure and cohesion in the religious classroom is then needed to understand the relationship within this unique setting.

### **Willingness to Communicate and Self-Perceived Competence**

There are many reasons why a student would choose to self-disclose or not self-disclose in the religious classroom. Many students are simply not willing to share information about themselves and others do not feel competent to share what they know and feel. These two elements bring us into the realm of communication apprehension. Communication apprehension has been found to have an impact on communication skill, and communication competence (McCroskey, 1984). Those students that do not self-disclose information in the classroom may act this way because of communication apprehension. Communication apprehension (CA) can affect all walks of life. There are four types of communication apprehension, (1) traitlike, (2) person-group, (3) situational, and (4) generalized-context CA (McCroskey, 1984).

Students in a classroom all have varying degrees of ability and desire to communicate. Any of the four types of communication apprehension could potentially affect how, why, and when a student communicates in the classroom. This paper does not identify the types of communication apprehension but instead hypothesizes that high CA would limit the amount of self-disclosure. This study considers how communication apprehension, i.e. the lack of self disclosure affects coherence for students in the classroom. In addition, this study will seek to understand in which setting within the classroom communication apprehension exists. This will be done using two instruments, willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence (SPCC). Willingness to communicate has been defined as “an individual’s predisposition to initiate communicating with others” (McCroskey, 1997, p. 77). Self-perceived communication competence is defined “as an individual’s self-perception of that competence or

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

skill” (McCrosky, 1997, p. 104). What is the application in the religious classroom? As students disclose in the classroom in what setting are they more willing and competent to self-disclose information? Within the religious classroom students are given opportunity to self-disclose in three general settings: dyads, groups, and the entire class. In which of these settings are students more willing and competent to self-disclose? In addition there are different levels of depth within self-disclosure as mentioned by Adler and Towne (1996). Each depth: explain facts, share opinions, and testify of feelings will also be analyzed to understand willingness and competence.

## Chapter 2-Method

During the last five decades significant research has been done on the importance and relationship of self-disclosure and cohesion. As students in a religious classroom setting self-disclose by sharing their views, values, and beliefs is cohesion created in the classroom? What is the affect of communication apprehension in the self-disclosure process?

H1: When students self-report a high level of self-disclosure in the religious classroom those same students will also self-report a high level of cohesion.

H2: Students who have been in the seminary setting for more years (seniors and juniors) will self-disclose more information than those who have been in the seminary setting for fewer years (sophomores).

H3: Students will feel more competent to self-disclose personal information in small groups.

H4: Students will feel more willing to self-disclose personal information in small groups.

H5: The smaller the class (less than 25 students) the more self-disclosure.

H6: The smaller the class (less than 25 students) the greater the cohesion.

The process of data gathering and demographics will be described to understand the results and above stated hypothesizes. The definition of self-disclosure in this paper will be: Student to student communication in which students explain, share or testify of apparent beliefs within the religious classroom.

## Participants

The participants ( $n= 96$ ) were high school students of religious seminaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a rural conservative area in a city in southern Utah. The course of study was the New Testament. Each class was made up of a mix of boys and girls from the ages of 15 to 18 sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school. All participants chose to take the religious course during their normal school day in place of other elective credits. Participants chose the class period; however they did not chose their classmates or their instructor. Each class met with each other for 4 months prior to the study. All participants in this study were considered minors. Three seminaries were selected and within these seminaries 20 classes were contacted to gain parental permission. In each class students were asked to raise their hand if they would be willing to return the next time with permission slips and participate in the study, only those who were willing to do so were given a permission form. There were 400 students that volunteered to have their parents sign the permission form. Only one quarter of those who took permission forms returned with them signed the next day. Those who returned with the permission forms were asked to go in a separate room and participate in the survey. The participants female ( $n= 62$ ) and male ( $n= 32$ ) were instructed to think of their seminary class as they filled out the survey. The average age of participants was 16.37. The surveys were filled out by 43 sophomores, 37 juniors, and 16 seniors. Finally, there were 50 students that belonged to classes that consisted of 25 or fewer students and 46 students that belonged to classes that consisted of 26 or more students.



### **Instruments**

Each student in the selected classes was given four instruments to complete. These instruments were combined into one document to facilitate the taking of the survey. The instrument consisted of forty-five questions. Approval for this study was given by the IRB because the participants were considered minors. The first instrument was the breadth and depth portion of- The Revised Self-Disclosure Scale (Wheless and Grotz, 1976). The second instrument was a combination of three different questionnaires in regard to cohesion in the classroom. The three instruments combine the Classroom Cohesion Questionnaire (Rosenfeld and Gilbert, 1989) the Classroom Life Instrument (Ghazi, 2003) and the My Class inventory (Fraizer and Fisher, 1982b). These three instruments combine proven instruments that in combination are applicable to the religious classroom. The combination of the three instruments result in an 11 question instrument appropriately adapted for the religious classroom. The third instrument was the Willingness to Communicate Scale (McCroskey, 1997). The last instrument was the Self-Perceived Communication Competence instrument (McCroskey, 1997). The questionnaire also included demographic questions regarding age, gender, school, teacher, and period, and class size. See appendix for instrument.

The *Revised Self-Disclosure Scale* (RSDS) is a 31-item instrument that asks participants to report their perspective of their own self-disclosure. This instrument focuses on five different areas of self-disclosure: Intended disclosure, Amount, Positive/Negative, Control of Depth, Honesty/Accuracy. This 31 item questionnaire has been used multiple times since its conception (Wheless & Grotz 1976,1977; Stacks & Stones, 1984; Rosenfield & Gilbert 1989, Myers &

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

Johnson 2004; Shirly et al. 2007). For simplicity and application in the religious classroom the 12 questions referring to depth and breadth will be administered to participants. Wheelless (1978) reported the following reliabilities of .87 for depth and .88 for breadth.

The *Classroom Cohesion Questionnaire* (CCQ) is a ten item questionnaire that asks participants to indicate how they felt about the classroom group that they were with in regard to cohesion. Rosenfeld and Gilbert developed this questionnaire that was specifically for the classroom setting (1989). Rosenfeld and Gilbert were looking at groups within the classroom setting, therefore only three questions were chosen that refer to the entire class. They are the following: I want to remain a member of this group. I trust class members. There was a feeling of unity and cohesion in this group.

The *Classroom Life Instrument* (CLI) is a 68 item instrument that regarded seven aspects of classroom life. Ghazi (2003) used this instrument with college age students. Ghazi reported a reliability of .58 for the cohesion portion of the *Classroom Life Instrument*. Five items from that scale, specific to cohesion in the classroom were used for this study. They are as follows: My best friends are in this class, I like to work with other students in this class, All the students in this class know each other, In this class everybody is my friend., and I am often lonely in this class.

The *My Class Inventory* (MCI) is a 38 item self report instrument. This instrument was used as a tool to assess many aspects of the classroom, specifically that of the elementary school setting. Fraser (1982) and Fraser and Fisher (1982b) provide us with the validity and consistency of this instrument. They reported using a large sample ( $n=2,305$ ) of seventh grade Australian

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

students to assess the reliability for the longer and shorter MCI. The cohesion portion which was used in this study reported a .80 and .67. Once again five questions that were specifically regarding cohesion were used for the current study. Everybody is my friend (will be omitted because it is already used in previous instrument), Some students are not my friends, All students are close friends, All students like one another, and Students like each other as friends.

The willingness to communicate (WTC) scale was used to understand the general willingness to communicate in different situations. The willingness to communicate scale originally consisted of twenty communication situations (McCrosky & Richmond, 1991). This scale was adapted to the religious classroom by taking nine different situations that are prevalent in the religious classroom, and asking participants to self-report on their willingness to communicate in those situations. The willingness to communicate scale was reported reliable and valid by McCrosky & Richmond (1991) at .86 and .92.

The self-perceived communication competency (SPCC) was used to assess the person's perception of their own communication competency in different situations. This instrument consisted of twelve situations in which communication takes place. For this study nine questions were adapted to fit the communication found in the religious classroom. The (SPCC) scale has proven reliable and valid by McCrosky & Richmond (1991) at .86 and .89.

These instruments allow the participants to self-report their communication in the religious classroom. Through this self-report instrument valuable insights will be established and the variables of cohesion, self-disclosure, and communication apprehension will be analyzed in the religious classroom.

### Chapter 3-Results

Through the use of statistical analysis three of the six hypothesized were rejected while H1, H3, H4 were found to be statistically significant. Below are the results of the statistical analysis and processes. Each of the five hypotheses will be discussed.

H1 asserted that students in a religious classroom who self-report a high level of self-disclosure in the religious classroom will also self-report a high level of cohesion. This hypothesis is confirmed. Our instrument included 11 items gauging self-disclosure and 12 items measure cohesion. These items were measured on an ordinal scale, which allowed us to generate overall means for self-disclosure and cohesion using the “compute” feature in SPSS. The self-disclosure mean was 4.77, while the cohesion mean was 2.99. After computing these means, we conducted two correlation tests (parametric and non-parametric) to determine whether self-disclosure and cohesion were positively correlated. The results support H1. The parametric test was Pearson’s  $r$ , which yielded a correlation value of  $+0.35$ , which is statistically significant at the  $.01$  level ( $p = .001$ ). Because our subjects constituted a convenience sample and therefore were not normally distributed in the population, we also ran a non-parametric test (Spearman’s  $\rho$ ). The value of  $\rho$  is  $+0.38$ , which is statistically significant at the  $.01$  level ( $p = .000$ ). The values of  $r$  and  $\rho$  indicate a strong positive correlation between the variables self-disclosure and cohesion.

H2 argues that older students who have more experience in seminary will self-disclosure to a greater degree than young, less-experienced seminary students. This hypothesis is rejected. We used the self-disclosure mean described above, and compared the means for three groups

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

(sophomores, juniors and seniors) using a one-way ANOVA, which generated an  $F$  value of .819, which was not significant ( $p = .444$ ). Because our sample is skewed (by virtue of its “convenience sample” nature), we also ran the non-parametric equivalent of a one-way ANOVA. The non-parametric equivalent is the Kruskal-Wallis test. The value of  $H$  was 1.99, which was also not significant ( $p = .368$ ). Therefore, we must conclude that there is no difference between sophomores, juniors and seniors when it comes to their willingness to self-disclose in seminary.  $H_2$  is rejected.

$H_3$  states that students will express greater confidence in their communication competency to communicate in smaller groups than with the entire class. This hypothesis is supported. We measured subjects’ perceived levels of communication competence and their willingness to communicate using scales modified to fit the religious classroom. Part of the modification included perceived competence and willingness to communicate with partners, in small groups, or with the entire class. We computed means for all three groups (partners, groups, class) and ran a one-way ANOVA to measure differences between the means. On the communication competency scale, the ANOVA showed significant differences between the partner (79.279), group (75.010) and class (71.427) means, with an  $F$  value of 3.039, which was statistically significant at the .05 level ( $p = .049$ ). These figures demonstrate that students feel most competent to communicate with partners in the religious classroom setting and least competent to communicate with the entire class in the religious classroom setting. Thus,  $H_3$  is supported.

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

H4 states that students will express greater willingness to communicate in smaller groups than with the entire class. On the willingness to communicate scale, the ANOVA showed significant differences between the partner (76.885), group (71.903) and class (65.267) means, with an  $F$  value of 6.256, which was statistically significant at the .01 level ( $p = .002$ ). These figures demonstrate that students are more willing to communicate with partners in the religious classroom setting and least willing to communicate with the entire class in the religious classroom setting. Thus, H4 is supported.

H5 suggested that students in smaller classes will be more willing to self-disclose, while H6 asserted that smaller classes would have greater cohesion than larger classes. These hypotheses are rejected. Our sample was divided almost equally between smaller classes (25 or fewer students) and larger classes (26 or more students). By asking SPSS to “split” the data file on the basis of class size, we computed self-disclosure and cohesion means using the aggregate figures computed for H1. Then we compared those means for smaller and larger classes using independent  $t$ -tests. For self-disclosure, the value of  $t$  was .76, which was not statistically significant ( $p = .451$ ). For cohesion, the value of  $t$  was .62, which was also not statistically significant ( $p = .534$ ). Thus, the differences between smaller and larger classes were not significant, and we reject H5 and H6.

### **Chapter 4-Discussion**

As acknowledged earlier in this paper, the results have been varied in regard to the relationship of cohesion and self-disclosure. Rosenfeld and Gilbert (1989), Hunter et al (1996), Santarsiero, Baker, & McGee (1995), Stokes, Fueher, & Childs (1983) all found that there was a relationship with cohesion and self-disclosure. Results in this study support the important relationship between cohesion and self-disclosure in the religious classroom. If a teacher can cultivate an atmosphere in the classroom where students feel comfortable enough to share their feelings and beliefs, then there will also be a greater measure of cohesion. When cohesion is created it would encourage more self-disclosure. Furthermore, this study adds important insight on the relevance of self-disclosure in the religious classroom. These results would not be easily transferred to the traditional classroom because of the difference in the breadth and depth of self-disclosure, however there may be some similarities with therapy groups in which higher levels of self-disclosure are often manifested, and morals and self-understanding are often taught.

Of course in the religious classroom there is a strong socialization that occurs with the teacher and the students especially when the participants are of the same religious persuasion. So I would expect that the participants would feel some initial cohesion with each other.

As stated in the results, there is no difference between the breadth and depth of self-disclosure between sophomores, juniors, and seniors. These results may have been different if the instrument was conducted at the beginning of the school year rather than at the end. This is

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

because sophomores who are not used to being in a class with a senior may feel less likely to self-disclose because of their perceived competence in communication. Therefore, it is important to understand that after four months a sophomore perceives himself or herself as a part of the classroom, one who can open up and communicate with the class. This constitutes a shift in the thinking of the religious educator and dismisses the thinking that those who are older will self-disclose more information than those who are younger.

The relationship between the group size and the students perceived willingness and competency is valuable information for the religious instructor. Understanding that students feel more competent and more willing to communicate as partners rather than groups, and in groups rather than with the whole classroom, religious educators can adapt their teaching techniques in the way classroom discussion happens. Of course individuals would not be asked or required to communicate only with partners or groups in the religious classroom, but that the teacher could plan partner and group discussions intermixed with the typical class discussions. This would allow those who feel less competent or willing to talk to the entire class, a chance to communicate in an environment where he or she feels comfortable. After a student has communicated openly with his partner, he or she may then feel more competent to share that same information with the entire class. Once again understanding that students do feel more competent and willing to communicate with a partner or as a group can change the way a religious educator plans and implements his or her lessons.

The last two hypotheses that were rejected have implications for administrators of religious education. Class sizes in this study ranged from 18 all the way to 36 (although this was



unusually high). The class size, big or small, did not affect the amount or degree of self-disclosure or cohesion in the classroom. These results allow an administrator to decide class sizes with a greater understanding of the dynamic of self-disclosure and cohesion in the classroom.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The greatest limitation to this study was the method of data collection. The data collection was not homogenous, because of the difficulty in obtaining parental permission from the participants. Although the results were statistically significant even with this “convenience sample,” further research could include a different approach to rectify this. Another possible limitation with this research is that it was specific to release-time seminary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In addition the study was conducted with students from the same general geographical area. Although the results may be generalized to other settings, the data collection minimizes this possibility. Further limitations can be seen because a pilot study was not conducted before the actual study. This would have been helpful because the questions used were reliable within their specific instruments; however the combination of questions needed to be tested previous to the actual study.

The participants of this study, as stated previously, were asked to self-report their communication patterns within the seminary class. As always with this method of research caution needs to be taken as to understand that self-report can be less accurate and participants may choose to lie or not accurately depict how they truly feel about the subject because of a desire to be seen in a positive light.

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

This study has established a correlating relationship with self-disclosure and cohesion in the religious classroom; however future research is needed in understanding if cohesion or self-disclosure comes first. Also, a study could seek to understand more specifically what type of self-disclosure creates the correlating cohesion. Furthermore, a study could include a post-test and a pre-test survey that looked at the difference between self-disclosure and cohesion at the beginning of the semester in comparison with the last part of the semester. This would add additional insight into this relationship. Future research can also look at how self-disclosure may become a negative aspect in the religious classroom, as stated in previous studies.

Moreover, additional research could look into the role of the religious educator in facilitating self-disclosure in the classroom. What things invite or discourage self-disclosure in the classroom. As cited there have been many studies conducted on the self-disclosure of the teacher. This could also be done in the religious classroom to understand the role of the self-disclosure of the religious educator.

In regard to students willingness and perceived competence, are students more willing and competent to share with the whole class if they have first shared the information with a partner. Finally, a similar study could be done within the realm of group therapy to see if results are similar or if religious education is entirely different from the group therapy setting.

### **Conclusion**

Each hypothesis which was supported or disproved yielded insights into the communication patterns of the youth in the religious classroom. As students explain, share and testify in the religious classroom, cohesion increases in the classroom. Age or year in school of

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

student is no indicator of the amount of self-disclosure. Perceived willingness and competency to communicate in the religious classroom decrease the bigger the group in which they are communicating. These snap shots of the processes of self-disclosure add to the understanding and effectiveness of the religious educator, and have the potential, if this to make the religious classroom better.

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## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

### Appendix

#### Instrument

DIRECTIONS: Please mark the following statements to reflect how *you* communicate with *the seminary class*. Indicate the degree to which the following statements reflect how you communicate with this group by circling the option that best describes how much you agree with each statement below. Work quickly and just record your first impressions.

These questions will ask you how you talk about yourself in seminary- As you evaluate yourself on this topic think about when you explain, share and testify in class. As you do this you are communicating information about your experiences and feelings.

I do not often talk about myself in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

My statements of my feelings are usually brief in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

I usually talk about myself for fairly long periods of time in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

My conversation lasts the least time in seminary when I am discussing myself.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

I often talk about myself in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

Only infrequently (rarely) do I express my personal beliefs and opinions in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

I intimately disclose (make known) who I really am, openly and fully in my discussions in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

Once I get started in seminary, my self-disclosure (sharing information about myself) lasts a long time.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

I often disclose (make known) intimate, personal things about myself without hesitation in seminary.

*strongly agree*   *agree*   *moderately agree*   *undecided*   *moderately disagree*   *disagree*   *strongly disagree*

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

I feel that I sometimes do not control my self-disclosure of personal or intimate things I tell about myself in the classroom.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

Once I get started, I intimately and fully reveal myself in my self-disclosures in the seminary class.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

My best friends are in this class.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

I like to work with other students in this class.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

All the students in this class know each other.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

In this class everybody is my friend.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

I am often lonely in this class.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

Some students are not my friends.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

All students are close friends.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

All students like one another.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

Students like each other as friends.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

I want to remain a member of this group.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

I trust class members.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

There is a feeling of unity and cohesion in this class.

*strongly agree agree moderately agree undecided moderately disagree disagree strongly disagree*

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

### WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE SCALE (WTC)

**DIRECTIONS:** Below are nine situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate in the seminary. Suppose you have completely free choice. Determine the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left what percentage of the time you would choose to communicate. Choose any numbers between 0% = never, 100%= always.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Explain the meaning of gospel principles (facts) with a partner in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Explain the meaning of gospel principles (facts) with a group in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_\_ 3. Explain the meaning of gospel principles (facts) with the entire seminary class.
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Share how you feel about gospel principles (opinions) with a group in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_\_ 5. Share how you feel about gospel principles (opinions) with the entire seminary class.
- \_\_\_\_ 6. Share how you feel about gospel principles (opinions) with a partner in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_\_ 7. Testify about gospel principles with the entire seminary class. (feelings).
- \_\_\_\_ 8. Testify about gospel principles with a group in the seminary class (feelings).
- \_\_\_\_ 9. Testify about gospel principles with a partner in the seminary class (feelings).

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

### SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE (SPCC)

**DIRECTIONS:** Below are nine situations in which you might need to communicate in the seminary class. People's abilities to communicate effectively vary a lot, and sometimes the same person is more competent to communicate in one situation than in another. Please indicate how competent (capable) you believe you are to communicate in each of the situations described below. Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item your estimate of your competence. Presume 0 = completely incompetent and 100 = competent.

- \_\_\_ 1. Explain the meaning of gospel principles (facts) with a partner in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_ 2. Explain the meaning of gospel principles (facts) with a group in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_ 3. Explain the meaning of gospel principles (facts) with the entire seminary class.
- \_\_\_ 4. Share how you feel about gospel principles (opinions) with a group in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_ 5. Share how you feel about gospel principles (opinions) with the entire seminary class.
- \_\_\_ 6. Share how you feel about gospel principles (opinions) with a partner in the seminary class.
- \_\_\_ 7. Testify about gospel principles with the entire seminary class. (feelings).
- \_\_\_ 8. Testify about gospel principles with a group in the seminary class (feelings).
- \_\_\_ 9. Testify about gospel principles with a partner in the seminary class (feelings).

Please fill in the appropriate information for the following questions: Your cooperation has been beneficial thank you.

Gender: \_\_\_Female \_\_\_Male

Year in School: \_\_\_Sophomore \_\_\_Junior \_\_\_Senior

What is your age \_\_\_15 \_\_\_16 \_\_\_17 \_\_\_18

How many students are in your class \_\_\_\_\_.

## Self-Disclosure and Cohesion in the Classroom

### **Vita**

Curt Wakefield was born in Rexburg Idaho. He went to Madison High School and Graduated in 1998. He served a two year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ in the country of Italy. Curt then received his bachelor degree in Recreation Leadership at BYU-Idaho in Rexburg Idaho in 2004. He married Shawna Riddoch in 2002, and currently has three children, Hiedi, Tanner, and Alia. In 2004, Curt was hired to teach seminary full-time in St. George Utah. He currently works at the Snow Canyon Seminary as a seminary instructor,