Students Who Drive You Crazy: Succeeding with Resistant, Unmotivated, and Otherwise Difficult Young People

Reviewed in Research Roundup » Volume 22 Number 2, Winter 2006


Kottler explores the difficult relationships between educators and students who appear “needy, hostile, bored, unmotivated…or otherwise disruptive.” After examining some of these patterns of behavior, he suggests educators begin by assessing their own reactions to student behavior that drives them crazy.

While he doesn’t intend to absolve students of their responsibility for bad behavior, his premise is that “almost all conflicts result from complex, interactive effects.” In his view, many students misbehave because they need—and want—to be held to reasonable boundaries. However, educators have the often-difficult task of setting these boundaries in ways that don’t perpetuate misbehavior.

Drawing from his own experience and from in-depth interviews with counselors, school administrators, and students, Kottler offers specific strategies for dealing with and preventing problematic behavior. He suggests that educators start by becoming more aware of their own attitudes. In his view: “If you can get yourself to the point where you are cool, calm, and collected, then almost any intervention you employ is going to be more effective.”

Kottler’s suggestions and down-to-earth style can be a significant resource for principals, whether they are dealing with these students themselves, working with teachers who are having problems with specific students, or developing content for a staff study group. He provides some insightful questions:

- What are some signs that what you are doing isn’t working?
- What secondary gains is the student celebrating as a result of this failure?
- What interventions have been the most and least helpful?
- What is getting in the way of being more effective?
- What outside resources can you tap?