Teaching Self-Control: A Curriculum for Responsible Behavior

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


Martin Henley addresses a growing problem—students who enter school without the life and family experiences needed to develop self-control and self-management. Standard approaches to discipline work poorly with such students since, in Henley’s words, “Confront them and they fight back. Punish them and they grow resentful.”

As an alternative, Henley suggests schools teach self-control skills across the curriculum. He provides both a curriculum and strategies to help schools do so. For example, he identifies “accepting evaluative comments” as a skill some students actually need to be taught. Its component sub-skills include learning from mistakes and distinguishing criticism from teasing, sarcasm, and mean statements.

Sample activities show what might help students understand the concepts and practice appropriate responses. For example, young children might read the story The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Teasing and then talk about the differences between teasing and constructive criticism. Henley has given careful attention to how his suggested activities are organized, with each of the “units” something a teacher could easily incorporate in one or two class periods. He also provides suggested “positive behavioral supports” for educators to use as students practice self-control skills.

Teaching Self-Control identifies a number of actions that many of us take for granted—such as “adjusting behavior to match the situation”—but that may be difficult for some students, especially those who lack important social skills. The suggested approaches give them an opportunity to develop into self-controlled, productive students.