

How Caring School Community Supports Students in Managing Their Own Behaviors

By Kathy King-Dickman | Categories: Caring School Community, Implementation

For over three decades I took pride in the fact that my classroom was run in a manner that, at the time, seemed effective. My students were motivated to learn, engaged in their work, and rarely misbehaved. If I snapped my fingers at unruly children in the back of the room, they most often stopped their errant behavior and returned to work. At other times, I would simply praise the child sitting next to someone acting out and the miscreant would return to the task at hand. If a student's behavior got too far out of line, I would remind them that they were too fine of a person to behave in such a manner. Although many of my students have gone on to become successful, there are others who have not done as well in the adult world as I would have expected. This has led me to do much reflection on why this is true. I've asked myself:

Were the children and adolescents in my charge given the chance to learn how to regulate their own behavior, or was someone else just controlling them?

Was I so busy managing my students' behaviors that they didn't have a chance to learn to do it for themselves?

The Importance of Self-Regulation

Social psychologists Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Vohs describe self-regulation as, "... the self's capacity for altering its behaviors.[1] In order to prepare students to be successful in the 21st century, we need to teach students to be aware of and regulate their own behavior. At Collaborative Classroom we believe this instruction needs to start with our youngest learners if it is to be cemented by high school, college and beyond—leading students to successful lives and careers. As my Collaborative Classroom mentors, Peter Brunn and Kristi Rauch say, *"We see behavior as something that we work on all of the time; it is something that students eventually need to own and not have managed for them."*

Collaborative Classroom's program *Caring School Community* teaches several social skills to this end, including: reflecting on one's own behavior, considering the natural consequences of actions, monitoring attention and refocusing when necessary, persevering through challenges, agreeing and disagreeing in respectful ways, and considering how to make amends after causing harm. (*Caring School Community Teacher's Manual*, p. xv). These skills align with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)'s five competencies that lead children and adolescents to grow up to contribute to society in positive ways: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Teaching Self-Regulation with *Caring School Community*

Caring School Community (CSC) focuses on a different topic each week, teaching students many of the skills that will lead to better self-awareness, the ability to manage one's behavior, empathy for others' feelings, the formation of solid relationships with others, and responsibility. In the elementary grades, *CSC* has students focus on school life, character building, and social issues. In the middle school grades, students focus on positive school experiences, personal relationships, social issues, and wellness and creativity.

Spending time exploring these broad topics as children in school can lead to adults who need no outside interference or support to succeed in all aspects of life.

Additionally, *CSC* supports a discipline system that respects the student. Misbehavior is seen in exactly the same way as a mistake in content, such as answering a math problem wrong. Effective teachers do not reprimand a child for making an error in content; they simply go about instructing so that the child learns needed skills to not make that same error again. Teachers using the *CSC* program are not upset by misbehavior; they look at it as a chance to teach so the child will eventually learn to behave appropriately. Misbehavior isn't viewed "...as a character flaw, but instead as a challenge in a specific context that requires time and effort to address."

Conclusion

Some of my best students dropped out of college after their freshman year. Statistics from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center suggest that, "On average, just 58 percent of students who started college in the fall of 2012 had earned any degree six years later."

This made me wonder: *Have we been raising a nation of students who cannot self-regulate their own behaviors and are waiting for someone outside of themselves to do this work? Does this affect their ability to achieve?*

Take a moment to reflect on your own classroom. *Are you allowing students to make mistakes in order that they learn, or are you merely controlling your young charges as I did for many, many years?* If you believe you could do more to help your students learn to manage their own behaviors, consider how you can leverage the work of *CSC*! Let your students make mistakes and try not to interfere immediately when this happens. Give them the power of growing from and reflecting on their mistakes. This practice will lead children to run their own worlds and set them up to go forth and succeed on their own.

[i] Roy F. Baumeister and Kathleen D. Vohs, "Self-Regulation, Ego Depletion, and Motivation," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1/1 (2007): 115-128, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00001.x>