

DISCIPLINE:

A Nice, Difficult Work

“The true object . . . is gained only when the wrongdoer himself is led to see his fault and his will is enlisted for its correction. When this is accomplished, . . . seek to preserve his self-respect and to inspire him with courage and hope. This work is the nicest, the most difficult, ever committed to human beings.”—Ellen G. White.¹

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BY
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Chaos—Teacher A's Classroom

Most of Teacher A's students are enthusiastic and intelligent. They like school and they like their teacher, but they are bouncing off the walls. Some are passing around a beanbag under their desks, a couple are yelling at each other, one has stolen another student's backpack, and a noisy trio of girls is pestering the teacher to write them a pass to use the bathroom. A few students, struggling against the noise, are trying to do their assigned work. Teacher A constantly corrects the students by scolding them for misbehaving, telling them how to behave correctly, and warning about the consequences of their actions if they continue acting up.

When Teacher A finds time to concentrate on his students' work, he finds their answers unfocused and vague. He tells them to try again. When they seem puzzled, he reminds them of the explanation he gave at the beginning of class.

At this point, the room has reached complete chaos, so Teacher A shouts for silence and sends the most blatant offenders to the office. After a couple of minutes during which students trade accusations about

who has caused their teacher's outburst, the class quiets down, only to erupt again and again as the day progresses.

The Traditional Model

In 1903, Ellen G. White observed, “The object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government.”² The evidence from the 1996 Teacher A scenario described above³ suggests that children's lack of self-government remains a source of concern almost a century later.

In Teacher A's class, the students appear incapable of self-discipline, let alone self-government. Although the teacher repeatedly admonishes and corrects them, they ignore him. In a tougher school, they would be defiant and perhaps violent. Yet Teacher A and other educators like him are often at a loss to know how to make their classrooms orderly and more productive.

Such teachers operate within a traditional reactive model, which assumes that when children misbehave, adults punish, discipline, or correct them. Teachers hope that if children experience consistent, swift, and logical consequences for impulsive behaviors, they will learn from their mistakes and behave more responsibly in the future.

As in any model, the dynamic works only if everyone participates. In this case, maintaining this model requires that all the adults in a community agree to be consistently responsible for inculcating children with expected mores, morals, and expectations. Adults perform this important function through discipline, supervision, encouragement, and censure during informal

interactions such as baby sitting one another's children or caring for the needy of the neighborhood as well as formal socializing "rituals" such as nightly family dinners, church services, community events, and scouting activities. As a result, most children learn safe, high-achieving, and socially responsible behavior. As they practice this behavior, they stay safe and in turn make decisions that keep the community safe.⁴

Unfortunately, today few families or communities provide such mentoring. Migrations to and from large cities, disruption of employment due to down-sizing, rising divorce rates, and the need for parents to work longer hours have created families in which children simply spend less time with their parents. The small-town sense of community and shared values is largely a thing of the past. And even in the increasingly rare circumstances where the traditional adult/child dynamic exists, the negative influences of the outside world are still undeniably and willfully intrusive.

Parents and educators are right to worry about the susceptibility of *every* child when in the U.S. every 59 seconds,

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a baby is born to a teen mother; every seven minutes a child is arrested for a drug crime, every four hours a child commits suicide, and every day thousands of weapons are brought to school campuses.⁵ Other countries are experiencing similar problems.

Teachers constantly see the "trickle-down" effects that such dangers pose. Because of these negative influences, educators realize that students' lapses of self-control in the classroom can predict more severe problems later on, including

violence, victimization, addiction, abuse, early sexual activity, gang involvement, and juvenile delinquency. For this reason, the uncontrolled behavior in Teacher A's classroom is not merely annoying but dangerous and cause for critical concern.

As we have seen, there has been a shift away from the communities in which all adults foster or mentor the child's abilities to direct, control, discipline, and restrain themselves. To maintain the integrity of the old model while giving children what they need, education must foster students' self-correcting abilities through adult mentorship at school.

Resiliency

The good news is that while all children are highly susceptible, they all come to school with one tremendous asset—their resiliency, the capacity to rebound from setbacks, to regulate their impulses, and to survive and even thrive amid life's "slings and arrows." All of us called upon our resiliency when we first learned to walk. We fell down and got up again and again, each time trying new

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methods, exercising new muscles, abandoning old ways, and persevering until we succeeded. Humans are so resilient, in fact, that not one of us ever gave up trying to learn to walk, complaining that it was too hard or too complex. The older we grow, the more we depend on our resiliency or self-correction to master our instincts, emotions, and inhibitions in order to solve problems and survive times of crisis. Every child can implement a wide range of resiliency and self-correcting strategies. By failing to call on his students' resiliency, Teacher A ignored his most valuable ally in gaining and maintaining student compliance.

Researchers have discovered that in order to be resilient, children use more than 50 skills and strategies. Teacher/mentors can rehearse these with young people to encourage self-governance. These skills can be broken down into five general categories:

1. The ability to “audition” and envision many solutions to a problem and then to select the best approach.
2. The ability to maintain control over oneself and one's environment in order to bring about a positive future.
3. The ability to find important peo-

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ple who will listen sympathetically and the opportunities to express one's strengths and talents through the arts, sports, social activities, and in meaningful close relationships.

4. The ability to reflect on one's past experiences and the experiences of others, and to act positively on this reflection.

5. The ability to realize and use the depth of one's strengths and a range of strategies.⁶

Children who are resilient—who can maintain self-discipline in the face of difficulty, provocation, and temptation—do so by using the abilities listed above to make responsible decisions, to gain a sense of perspective, and to correct themselves. In Ellen White's words, they use their resiliency to govern themselves and maintain “integrity.”

Emmy Werner, a researcher in education and human development at the University of California at Davis, has shown that when a child's resiliency is fostered by an adult who holds consistent, explicitly stated high expectations, a large majority of children born into families with repeated patterns of dysfunction (such as addiction, violence, and abuse) do not, as adults, succumb to these risks.⁷

Clearly, educators must strengthen students' resiliency by designing learning activities and classroom management procedures to help students rehearse self-correction and self-discipline. This should lead to high achievement by all students.

Resiliency in the Classroom

An important way to increase students' resiliency is through mentoring. To achieve this, educators must do the following:

1. Hold high expectations for every student's learning behavior, process, and results.
2. Adapt the level of challenge to meet the learner's capacity to resolve problems.
3. Be able to bridge the intellectual and cultural gaps between the learner and himself or herself.
4. Demonstrate ways to resolve or negotiate disagreements or differences.
5. Convey the message that the learner's initiative and emotional involvement are valued and respected.

6. Assure students that problems can be solved by a variety of means.

7. Provide learners with feedback.⁸

Most teachers instinctively direct classroom learning by utilizing students' basic resiliency capabilities. When it comes to class management, however, many educators (like Teacher A) revert to the older model of simply telling stu-

dents what they have done wrong. Unfortunately, this approach does not give students any practice in regulating their impulses. To truly foster resiliency, teachers must help groups and individuals practice restoring order in the classroom and in their lives.

Most bright and healthy first graders can no more read, pronounce, or under-

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stand the word *Rumpelstiltskin* on the first try than they can stop themselves from whispering to their friends during class when they get excited. Effective reading instruction means helping students apply current knowledge to correctly pronounce words. Likewise, helping them learn self-control requires that teachers provide opportunities for self-correction in academic and social activities. The appendix lists learning activities that strengthen resiliency and foster high achievement and self-government.

In the scenario that follows, Teacher B mentors her class in the components of resiliency described in this article.⁹

Self-Governing Students—Teacher B's Classroom

Next door to Teacher A is Teacher B, who shares the same students. On the first day of school, Teacher B explains that in her class, she makes no distinction between students' behavior when they learn (e.g., write, read, add, create, etc.) and when they socialize (e.g., make agreements, collaborate, share, argue, disagree, etc.). She tells them that they are capable of correcting their own learning and social behaviors when necessary. This results from each student's unique and individual ways of solving academic and social problems. "For ex-

APPENDIX

Problem-solving methods that foster resiliency:

- investigations
- taking polls
- making charts
- finding answers to big questions
- finding out how people in other times solved problems similar to yours
- asking and answering "what if" questions such as: What if pigs had wings?
- studying how unusual or chance circumstances led to success or a new invention.

vention.

Experiments: making or designing inventions, e.g., a contraption to help cats and dogs live peacefully with one another.

- Generate many ways to solve a specific problem.

Open-ended questions: What do you think Isaac felt when his father, Abraham, released him and slaughtered a ram instead?

- Predict outcomes for questions.

Divergent thinking: How many different ways could you tie your shoes?

Tying learning directly to student experiences: In Ruth 1:16, Ruth says, "entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest; I will go. . ."

• When have you felt like saying something like this? To whom have you felt like saying this?

Group collaboration: A group of four students measures the height and weight of each person in the class. One student finds the mean height and weight, another the median, the third charts the information, and the fourth compares the measurements to national averages. Together they tell the class why they think the numbers agree or disagree with the national averages.

Metacognition: Asking students to consider how they learned: e.g.: What was the hardest part of solving a math problem, and how did you overcome the difficulty?

- What could you do to become more comfortable with this assignment?
- How would you teach this lesson to someone else?
- How long will it take you to do this project?

Using the arts to learn and to demonstrate learning: Pantomime the way caterpillars turn into butterflies.

Consistent feedback on journals, work sheets, etc.:

1. In solving this problem, what methods did you try?
2. What worked or didn't work?
3. How did you get started?
4. Tell me what you did when you got stuck.
5. What questions did you ask yourself to find a way through the problem?
6. Did you find any patterns?
7. What kind of picture could you draw to help you solve this problem?
8. Why do you think you now have the right answer?
9. What did you learn while doing the problem?
10. What did you learn about yourself from doing the problem?

ample,” she says, “you all know how to check your work in math, so I know you can use similar strategies to ‘check’ your class behavior, too.” Her job, she explains, is to insist on the highest standards for school work and behavior and to guide students to use these methods to become high achievers.

She explains her expectations for class behavior and homework, and posts models of students’ work. Finally, she describes her high expectations for the children’s social behavior. To demonstrate, she and the class write out the agreements, which they post alongside the class work on the bulletin boards. The agreements include (1) arriving on time, (2) no put-downs, and (3) no interrupting another person. The students write in their own words the way they want to be treated by their peers.

As the weeks pass, Teacher B asks her students to solve complex problems by working collaboratively, by keeping records of their solutions and ideas in journals, and by presenting projects and information in a variety of ways. When the children struggle with the subject matter, Teacher B asks them to show her how they arrived at their answers, and then to hypothesize ways to solve the problems. She supports them in their

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search for methods and solutions. When student behavior becomes unruly, Teacher B or a student stops the class with an agreed-upon signal, and they examine the behavior using the same methods (questions and answers, journals, projects) that they employed to understand the academic subject matter. The discussions take a long time at first, but after two months, the number of disruptions has decreased significantly. Together, teacher and students have made the class high-achieving and safe.

The importance of adult educators

fostering resiliency cannot be underestimated. Few children receive this mentoring in their communities. Yet for a society to comport itself with justice and peace, it must pass on the accumulated wisdom regarding the ways we as a group restore ourselves from difficulty and stress.

As our communities become increasingly more fragmented, every adult educator—teacher, administrator, counselor, parent, bus driver, aide, campus supervisor, parole officer, youth advocacy case worker, etc.—must consciously foster and rehearse methods to improve students’ resiliency. This will strengthen children’s protections against risk and illness, increase their school achievement, and give them a heightened sense of self-worth. Mentoring of resilience for achievement and safety is what Ellen White referred to when she wrote that adults most effectively teach self-governance when they preserve children’s self-respect. They can thus employ children’s good will in their own correction,¹⁰ and ensure a more orderly society as well as preparation for the life to come. ☞

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