

From the Superintendent's Desk
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February 10, 2017

Since late December, I have been reading Thomas R. Hoerr's book titled The Formative Five: Fostering Grit, Empathy, and Other Success Skills Every Student Needs. He asserts that **empathy, self-control, integrity, and embracing diversity** will be the key success skills students (and adults) will need to solve all of the problems they will inevitably confront. He asserts we will need lots of **grit**, too.

Two weeks ago, I wrote about **empathy**- what it is, why it's needed, and how it can be developed. In this article, I wish to talk about the second of the success skills- **self-control**.

Daniel Goleman (1995) defines self-control as "the ability to modulate and control one's actions in age-appropriate ways; a sense of inner control." Walter Mischel (2014) said, "it is the ability to delay gratification and to resist temptation." James Heckman (2013) said, "self-control depends much more than smarts." What he was getting at has more to do with strength of motivation, ability to act on long-term plans, and the social-emotional regulation needed to work with others. He says these factors have a large impact on such things as: earnings, employment, labor force experience, college attendance, teenage pregnancy, participation in risky activities, compliance with health protocols, and participation in crime. Interesting ideas, huh?

Charles Duhigg, in his book The Power of Habit, said, "Self-control can be taught. Willpower is a **learnable** skill."

Wright (2009) said, "Individuals lacking in self-control are insensitive to others. They are also more likely to experience problems in social relationships, more likely to use drugs and abuse alcohol, and are more likely not to wear a seatbelt and get into automobile accidents."

Well, if it's a **learnable** skill, we can help students develop self-control by presenting them with choices so that they can learn to take responsibility for their behaviors, learn to consider alternatives, make decisions, and accept consequences.

Hoerr states there are five basic steps to develop **self-control**:

1. Developing awareness
2. Complying
3. Goal-setting
4. Transferring
5. Monitoring

In helping students understand how self-control is developed, teachers should talk about its importance and cite examples of people who have been successful because they exercised self-control in some

aspect of their performance. Teachers can help students **develop awareness** of how self-control is developed through class discussions and talking about real life examples of people whose success in life is due largely to them exercising self-control.

Once students have developed an awareness of the importance of self-control, the next step is for them to attempt exercising theirs by **complying** with school rules and teacher directives. At the same time, educators should make students aware *why* specific rules and directives are necessary and discuss with them why compliance can be difficult.

The third step in developing self-control has to do with **setting goals**. Educators can help students do this by them setting one *academic* and one *personal* goal related to self-control. For each goal, students should identify three specific components: 1) the ultimate objective; 2) the obstacles or distractions they will need to overcome to meet that objective; and, 3) how they will determine success.

For example, *academic* goals include allocating enough time to complete homework (using self-control to avoid distractions), remaining attentive in class (using self-control to resist talking to friends), being on time to classes (using self-control not to linger in the halls), etc. *Personal* goals could be as specific as improving as an artist (using self-control to practice diligence routinely) or as broad as being kinder to friends or not arguing with parents (using self-control to restrain negative emotions). Goals should be reasonable and practical; obstacles and distractions should be specified.

There are a couple of points to be made here. 1) We fail to meet goals because we lose focus. We cannot let that happen if we want to be successful. And, 2) it's important to reflect on our progress. Are we moving forward or are we stalled in our tracks or losing ground? And why is that?

The fourth step in developing self-control has to do with **transferring**. Once students have set their goals and have had time to pursue them, then it's time to discuss how they might transfer the lessons about self-control that they learned during the process to other situations. For example, if hard work and practice results in getting high grades in an academic subject, then can hard work and practice also lead to success in sports? The self-control it takes to achieve success in academics is similar to what it takes to achieve success in sports.

The fifth step in developing self-control is **monitoring**. Monitoring progress on one's goals and revising them when necessary helps students identify their most effective self-control strategies. It is important to understand what you did and why it worked so that you can use what was learned in other situations. Intention and effort can help develop self-control.

I hope this article has helped clarify what **self-control** is, why it is an important skill to have, and how one can go about developing it. In two weeks, I will write about the third "success skill" every student needs: **integrity**.