

Will Introducing Etiquette in the Public School System Improve Standardized Test Scores?

In April of 2003, a report by the research group, Public Agenda, claimed that 43% of teachers in public schools spend more time dealing with behavioral issues than they do teaching. That is almost half of all teachers! Thirty percent of teachers know a colleague who left education because of discipline problems. We are losing almost a third of all teachers due to discipline problems! According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals, a lack of good manners is a growing problem in classrooms and playgrounds. The average-sized school of 450 students loses \$1 million a year due to problem behavior.

Where is this money going? For one, it's being lost through a revolving door of teachers. Districts hire teachers, put them through workshops and training to prepare them for the local academic needs of their students, and then place them in classrooms. But the classrooms are full of many students who don't understand the reason to raise a hand to be called upon. They don't understand why there should be a distance between a teacher and a student, where a teacher is called by their last name and not their first name. They think they are on the same level, and there is no respect. Not only are some fighting in the halls, or bringing weapons to school. There is also a more subtle terrorism that has been lurking in our schools for quite a long time. I even remember being victim to it as a student. Many don't understand what social security really is (and, no, I am not referring to President Roosevelt's Social Security). They don't understand that, in order for them to feel safe enough to take learning risks, they must help others also feel safe in taking learning risks. Laughter erupts when a student takes too long to answer a question, or provides the wrong answer. Isn't this a more important type of social security to understand than Roosevelt's social security? Investing in academic success performance, be it through teachers, money, time, more curriculum in the tested subjects, attention...doesn't do much if kids are afraid to come to school. It also doesn't do much if kids aren't in school for the right reasons.

States Corrine Gregory, founder of The Polite Child, "...We can't teach students until we have their attention, and if they don't take their jobs as students seriously no amount of trying to cram academics into them will have a substantial lasting effect."

How do we reach the at-risk, the underprivileged, and the lower classes? Every year, this was a big issue in the schools I would teach at. We would have staff meetings focused on getting the minority group's scores up. Gregory states that "Social skills are the great equalizer; good social skills transcend social class, economic status, academic achievement, and race,". Studies at Harvard University, Stanford Research Institute, and the Carnegie Foundation support this statement, finding that 85% of future success depends on social skills.

The Polite Child's goal is to help parents, educators and others interested in improving education to develop young people who have strong self-esteem and confidence, and are socially comfortable and proficient in handling a wide variety of social interactions and settings.

How would the schools afford curriculum in etiquette? Title I funds are allocated and awarded on a yearly basis. If funds allocated for the year are not fully used, the school loses those funds. Not only do they lose those funds, but the amount allocated to them the following year is reduced by the amount they did not spend. Some schools use left over money from the previous year to lock in etiquette curriculum for the following year. Also, schools are losing an average of \$1 million a year when they ignore the need for education in etiquette. Is it really more cost-effective not to include manners in the curriculum?

So do manners in the curriculum actually work to bring up learning in schools, or is an arbitrary assessment being made on the value of such education? Desert Sands United School District School Board made out a report on their implementation of the etiquette curriculum. Two hundred and thirty-seven students at Dr. Carreon Academy, in grades from K to 5, from Indio, California were studied. There was a 10 to 13 % increase, in one year, of academic growth for 2004. "Feeder" schools not using the Polite Child curriculum at that time only saw a 0 to 4 % increase in scores.

"They're more attentive in class," said a second grade teacher, whose class's test scores went up 58 points.

"They're not the center of the universe anymore. They look outside themselves to see what's going on and respond to that," states **Corinne Gregory**.

How do we get the greatest benefit from education in manners? Gregory suggests starting early, even as early as their birth. It is never too early to teach children manners. It will seem like second nature to them if they have it from the beginning. Why do we have so many kids today that have no manners? Part of the reason is that their parents weren't brought up with manners, so their parents didn't even know how to bring them up to be polite. There is an entire generation coming from the "Me-first" era that knows no better. It is our job as a civilization to put the "civil" back into our civilization. (Putting the civil back into civilization, by the way, is The Polite Child's motto.)

If you are a principal, or a parent, or a politician, please don't think that this is just a teacher's responsibility. Please don't expect this to be just another objective to be taught in our classrooms. Sure, it is going to be taught in our classrooms. We are already teaching core subjects, and some also the arts, or Physical Education. Etiquette needs to be a subject all on its own, and it shouldn't be an elective. It should be as required as a foreign language. How great are we as a nation if we just

have students that can speak a foreign language if we don't also teach them to have manners when they go to another country? How are they going to be polite if they haven't even learned the art of manners right here in our own country? This needs to be an explicitly taught subject, not just something incorporated into all of the other subjects.

Why is The Polite Child the only company mentioned in this article? I did a search, and did not find any other companies offering this type of educational resource to our public schools. It seems a shame. I am glad to see that at least one person has thought this up. I am also sure that there are others out there. Maybe they just haven't had the courage to come forward more publicly. Maybe they are on their way to making a mark. What is definitely true is that it is needed, regardless as to how many are out there providing this valuable and priceless service.

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