



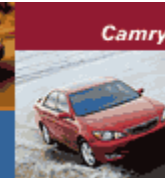
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Tuesday, February 3, 2004

Program hopes mannerly children will grow into considerate adults

By [GREGORY ROBERTS](#)
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

KENMORE -- Miss Corinne was keeping a pretty firm grip on things in Room 503 at Arrowhead Elementary School, but Kyle Ellisen wasn't necessarily buying into the program.

He slumped in his seat. He rested his head on his desk. He fidgeted. He slipped over to the water fountain for a drink. He pulled the hood of his coat over his eyes when he was supposed to hold his head up high.

"Just get it over with. That's the best way to do it," Miss Corinne said.

So Kyle did it. "Goodbye Miss Corinne, and thank you for having me in your class," he said, shaking her hand.

"Thank you for being in my class," she said. "I'll see you next time."

And then Kyle, 8, and the dozen other 8- and 9-year-olds in the "Social Smarts" session returned to their seats, ready for more lessons in good manners.

Miss Corinne -- Corinne Gregory -- owns The PoliteChild, selling lessons in civility and propriety for children from toddlers to teenagers.

A former vice president of marketing for a consulting and software firm, Gregory, 40, started The PoliteChild in 2001 in Woodinville. The dot-com implosion had derailed her plans to launch her own tech venture and prompted a career re-evaluation.

"I looked at what I was doing and said, yes, I can make a lot of money and it's very exciting and I travel all over the place," she



zoom Scott Eklund / P-I

Kyle Ellisen, 8, a third-grader at Arrowhead Elementary in Kenmore, seems to be enjoying his manners class as he learns the proper way to shake hands and look someone in the eye, in this case his teacher, Corinne Gregory, owner of The PoliteChild.

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said. "But there was so much else I could be doing to try to make the world a better place."

The world, Gregory concluded, is definitely a worse place than it used to be in "the 'Leave it to Beaver' age." Back then, she said, "on TV, moms and dads weren't even shown sleeping in the same bed. Now, they're not only sleeping in the same bed, but with someone else's spouse, and having kids out of wedlock -- all in prime time.

"We have become such a callous society that only thinks of 'me first.' It really undermines the entire fabric of the community. There really is no community if you don't have people considering each other."

Hence The PoliteChild -- which, Gregory said, is not just about "fancy fish forks" (although she does offer instruction in table manners).

"There is a much more basic level of social skills that every child should have," she said, "because it really is the greatest factor in their success. From a cultural and racial perspective, it really is the biggest equalizer you can give anybody."

Gregory and her staff have taught classes at 15 public and private schools and community groups in Seattle and the Eastside. The schools generally list the classes as an extracurricular option. The arrangement at Arrowhead, where the Parent-Teacher Association is sponsoring the lessons on Monday evenings, is typical.

Kyle's handshake was part of the first lesson in the SocialSmarts course for 6- to 9-year-olds, which includes eight weekly classes of 45 minutes each at a cost of \$145 per child (pricing and scheduling are negotiable: the Arrowhead curriculum was compressed to four classes, for example, to coincide with an evening parenting class offered by another organization).

The curriculum includes meeting and greeting, the use of "please," "thank you" and "excuse me," taking turns, handling disappointment gracefully and table manners. It concludes with a graduation tea, when students demonstrate their full repertoire of social skills.

For the first lesson, Gregory laid down some basic rules of conduct -- sit quietly and pay attention, don't interrupt, raise your hand if you wish to speak -- and conducted a sort of manners Q-and-A with the students.



zoom Scott Eklund / P-I

Corinne Gregory, formerly with a software firm, started The PoliteChild because "there was so much else I could be doing to try to make the world a better place."

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When she asked them why they should learn the proper way to behave, Meghan Hobson-Ritz responded, "If you don't use good manners, you won't have any friends and people won't like you."

When she asked the students what rules they knew already, Meghan answered, "To say 'please' and 'thank you.' "

Kira Olsen said, "Not to put your elbows on the table when you eat." Katy Sharp said: "Don't roll your eyes."

A petite woman who jokes about her size, Gregory was carefully dressed in contrasting black and white -- black V-neck sweater with white piping, white collared shirt, black slacks, white socks, tiny black slip-ons -- with her hair pulled back in a pony tail.

"People generally like people who are nice to them," she told the students, combining precise articulation with a rapid delivery.

"Good manners are how we show people that they're important to us -- that we care about them, that we respect them."

The mother of three "well-behaved" daughters aged 7, 4 and 2, Gregory has been interviewed by newspapers across the country. In December, she discussed holiday manners on the "Today" show. She fields inquiries about her program from schools out of state and even from foreign countries

Last summer, Gregory took The PoliteChild to the Desert Sands Unified School District in Southern California. Administrators there saw PoliteChild alumni at a local private school participating in a graduation ceremony and invited Gregory to pitch her program.

Impressed by her comprehensive approach, which includes advice to parents on reinforcing appropriate behavior in the home, they contracted with Gregory to train teachers in her instructional techniques at the Dr. Carreon Elementary School in Indio, where the manners lessons are incorporated in the regular classroom schedule.

"It's my favorite program," said Darlene Dolan, assistant superintendent in Desert Sands.

"It's restoring sanity to the schools."

Dolan said that at the dedication of the school, the students sat quietly for two hours without fussing.

During the school day, she said, the children move quietly through the halls; they are happy and attentive in class.

"They treat each other with respect, they treat their principal and teachers with respect," Dolan said.

"It's wonderful. We laughingly call them the Stepford children."

TO LEARN MORE

Visit www.politechild.com or call The PoliteChild at (425) 485-4089.

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