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Incorporating Civility into Public Education: An Empirical Survey of School Professionals

Keely Wilkins, Paul Caldarella, & K. Richard Young

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October 17, 2009
Our Fading Civility

“Civility carries with it the essence of courtesy, politeness, and consideration for others. All of the education and accomplishments in the world will not count for much unless they are accompanied by marks of gentility, of respect for others, of going the extra mile.”

Gordon B. Hinckley

*Standing For Something*
“None of use needs someone who only points out our areas of weakness and the ways in which we have fallen short. We need someone who encourages us to go forward, to try again, to reach a little higher this time.”

Gordon B. Hinckley

*Standing For Something*
The 3 C’s

Character

It is well for educators everywhere when teaching the young to have in mind the three “C’s” as well as the three “R’s” mentioned so proverbially...

Conduct

In my opinion the highest, noblest purpose in all our education, from the grades to the university, is to teach citizenship and noble character.

Citizenship

David O. McKay
Goals of the David O. McKay School of Education

- Strengthen children and youth in a changing world
- Prepare noble educators for the challenges of a changing world
- Extend the benefits of our research and creative work to a changing world
• The increased focus of public education on academics has minimized the teaching of civil behavior which was once prevalent in American schools (Peck, 2002).
Civility Defined

One definition of civility relates to manners, politeness, courtesies, and other formalities in everyday life. In this view, to be ‘civil’ is to speak or interact with others in ways that are polite and socially acceptable.

- Polite forms of address (using titles)
- Saying please and thank you
- Etiquette like table manners

Civility Defined

A second definition of civility “denotes a sense of standing or membership in the political community... like ‘civil rights’ or ‘civil disobedience’, where the modifier ‘civil’ refers to the condition of being a member of a political community.”

Historical Definition of Civility

- Latin roots *civis* (citizen) and *civitas* (city)
- Ability to work as a citizen
- Maintain a functioning society
- Enjoy benefits and carry responsibilities
The Modern Need for Civility

• Has civility declined?
• Anecdotal opinions regarding civility
• Teaching civility may create a more harmonious society
Civility in Education

- Modern public education: employment, national strength, obey laws
- Early U.S. education: prepare children to be citizens, nurture civil society
The Need for Civility in Schools

- Antisocial behavior
- Violence and crime in school
- Media & technology
- Lack of civic responsibility
- Intrinsic value of civility
Prevention of School Violence

- Civility to control and reduce acts of violence

- “Low-level” aggression, such as incivility, has a negative impact on students’ fear, anxiety, avoidant behaviors, and psychosocial functioning
Teaching Civility

Moral education: develop moral reasoning
Character education: develop desirable traits
Social skills education: teach specific behaviors
Strategies for Increasing Civility

- Teaching: problem solving, conflict resolution, self-esteem, drug use prevention, & anger management
- Community field trips
- Make students aware of the actual attitudes of peers
- Building rapport between school faculty and students
Our Research
Research Purposes

Systematically gather data regarding civility in schools

1. Perceptions of students’ civil and uncivil behaviors.

2. Differences between students engaged in civil and uncivil behaviors in elementary versus secondary schools?

3. Differences between students engaged in civil and uncivil behaviors in rural versus suburban versus urban areas?

4. Perceptions regarding interventions to increase the civil behavior of students?
Method

A questionnaire was constructed based on a review of the literature

- 29 quantitative items measuring percentage of students engaged in civil and uncivil behaviors

- Final question was qualitative and asked for suggestions to increase civility
Method

- School of education alumni were emailed the questionnaire
- 251 fully completed questionnaires were received (15.32% response rate)
Participants

- 63% from Utah, 29 states represented
- 79% female
- 94% White
- 67% suburban
- 17% rural
- 16% urban

*No systematic differences were found between the respondents and those who did not respond*
Data Analyses

• First 29 items of questionnaire analyzed descriptively

• $T$-tests and effect sizes calculated to examine differences between in elementary schools and secondary schools

• ANOVA calculated to examine differences among participants in rural, suburban, and urban areas

• Qualitative data coded and analyzed independently by 2 researchers
Civil Behaviors

The majority of students

• Understood the importance of civil behavior
• Arrived to class on time
• Dressed and groomed appropriately
• Appropriately greeted the participant
• Valued civil behavior

*Relatively large standard deviation for each item
### Engaged in Civil Behavior in the Past 2 Weeks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrived to class on time</td>
<td>83.28%</td>
<td>15.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressed and groomed themselves in ways that were appropriate</td>
<td>78.83%</td>
<td>21.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriately greeted me at school</td>
<td>74.13%</td>
<td>23.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincerely listened to their teachers</td>
<td>64.48%</td>
<td>21.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used polite expressions and greetings with others</td>
<td>62.54%</td>
<td>22.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left public areas in the school neat and clean</td>
<td>60.71%</td>
<td>23.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responded respectfully to the opinions of others</td>
<td>59.49%</td>
<td>22.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were responsive to situations in which they might help others</td>
<td>58.17%</td>
<td>22.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered how their behavior might affect others</td>
<td>45.02%</td>
<td>22.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincerely complimented others</td>
<td>41.12%</td>
<td>23.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went out of their way to include others in their activities</td>
<td>36.94%</td>
<td>21.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held the door open for me at school</td>
<td>31.63%</td>
<td>26.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uncivil Behaviors

Almost half of students

- Blamed others for their actions
- Argued or quarreled with others
- Complained about common school experiences

*Relatively large standard deviation for each item*
### Engaged in Uncivil Behavior in the Past 2 Weeks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shifted responsibility and blamed others for their actions</td>
<td>45.27%</td>
<td>25.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argued or quarreled with others</td>
<td>44.54%</td>
<td>25.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complained about common school experiences (grades, tests, etc.)</td>
<td>44.05%</td>
<td>30.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responded inappropriately when the did not get what they wanted</td>
<td>37.68%</td>
<td>26.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made sarcastic remarks to others</td>
<td>36.93%</td>
<td>28.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected teachers to grant them special favors</td>
<td>36.20%</td>
<td>29.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were inconsiderate of others in their use of classroom supplies</td>
<td>33.04%</td>
<td>24.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littered in hallways, classrooms, or on school grounds</td>
<td>31.97%</td>
<td>22.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Called others offensive names</td>
<td>25.35%</td>
<td>21.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language on school grounds</td>
<td>24.38%</td>
<td>23.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriately used a cell phone or other electronic device in class</td>
<td>12.46%</td>
<td>22.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalized property of the school or others</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
<td>13.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elementary vs. Secondary Schools

Participants in elementary schools reported

- Valued civil behavior
- Held the door open for the participant
- Dressed and groomed appropriately
- Argued and quarreled with others
- Blamed others for their actions
Elementary vs. Secondary Schools

Participants in secondary schools reported

- Inappropriately used a cell phone or other electronic device
- Used offensive language on school grounds
## Elementary vs. Secondary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value civil behavior</td>
<td>69.04%</td>
<td>21.61</td>
<td>63.68%</td>
<td>26.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held the door open for me at school</td>
<td>32.51%</td>
<td>27.95</td>
<td>29.33%</td>
<td>23.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressed and groomed themselves in ways that were appropriate for school</td>
<td>81.84%</td>
<td>19.92</td>
<td>67.85%</td>
<td>27.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argued or quarreled with others</td>
<td>44.69%</td>
<td>25.87</td>
<td>38.73%</td>
<td>21.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifted responsibility and blamed others for their actions</td>
<td>44.85%</td>
<td>26.46</td>
<td>40.38%</td>
<td>21.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriately used a cell phone or other electronic device in class</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td>31.15%</td>
<td>29.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used offensive language on school grounds</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>19.73</td>
<td>36.03%</td>
<td>26.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05  ** p < .01  ***p < .001
Rural, Suburban, and Urban Differences

An ANOVA did not reveal significant differences on any of the civil or uncivil questionnaire items.
## Intervention Ideas Reported by Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct instruction</td>
<td>62.53%</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home and societal influences</td>
<td>43.53%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling by school professionals</td>
<td>36.47%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-wide positive behavior support</td>
<td>31.76%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules, expectations, and classroom structure</td>
<td>29.41%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Education</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero-tolerance policies</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34% of participants answered final questionnaire item.
Discussion

- Participants reported that more students engage in civil behaviors than uncivil behaviors.

- Although civil behaviors may be more common than uncivil behaviors, school environment could be improved.

- Range in participant reports for each behavior make it difficult to identify specific behaviors to target for intervention.
Discussion

• Results provided some support for ideas expressed in the literature regarding teaching civility in secondary schools.

• No significant difference found among participants in urban, suburban, and rural areas suggests that perceptions of civility were not associated with geographical location.
Discussion

Although many participants noted that civility needs to be addressed in the home first, they also indicated that civility could be fostered in schools in a variety of ways.
Limitations and Future Research

• Participants’ perceptions were measured, rather than actual occurrences of civil and uncivil behaviors
• Majority of participants were females from the western United States
• All participants were graduates of Brigham Young University
• Questionnaire was created solely for this study
• Intervention ideas were only anecdotal
Conclusion and Implications

• Those working in schools are encouraged to model and directly teach civil behaviors.

• No definitive answers for what specific behaviors should be addressed, but this research provided ideas for what might be done to increase students’ civil behaviors.
http://education.byu.edu/pbsi/

Keely Wilkins: keelywilkins@gmail.com
Dr. Paul Caldarella: paul_caldarella@byu.edu
Dr. K. Richard Young: richard_young@byu.edu