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2008-11-01

Civility in Schools: An Emerging Paradigm for Behavioral Problems and School Violence

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Civility in Schools

An Emerging Paradigm for Behavioral Problems and School Violence



POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT INITIATIVE

Walk the Peaceable Walk

Keely Swanson, Paul Caldarella, Ph. D.,
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Objectives

- What is civility?
- Why is civility important?
- Why should schools teach civility?
- How could schools teach civility?



What is Civility?



Civility Defined

- **Modern:** courtesy, politeness, consideration, decorum

(Hinckley, 2000; Peck, 2002, Ferriss, 2002)

- **Historical:** ability to work as a citizen, a sense of membership in a community with its attendant rights and responsibilities (Shulman & Carey, 1984; Boyd, 2006)





Civility Defined

- **Proximate**: politeness or absence of rudeness within interactions with others
- **Diffuse**: regard for the effects of our actions on others and the spaces we share with them

(Fyfe, Bannister, & Kearns, 2006)





Civility Defined

- Polite behaviors that show respect toward a person in order to maintain social harmony and recognize the humanity of that person





Elements of Civility

- **Awareness**

(Forni, 2002)

- **Self-control**

(Ferriss, 2002; Kuhlenschmidt, 1999)

- **Empathy**

(Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003; Schaefer, 1995; Berman, 1998)

- **Respect**

(Hinckley, 2000; Boyd, 2006; Marks, 1996; Youniss & Yates, 1999)



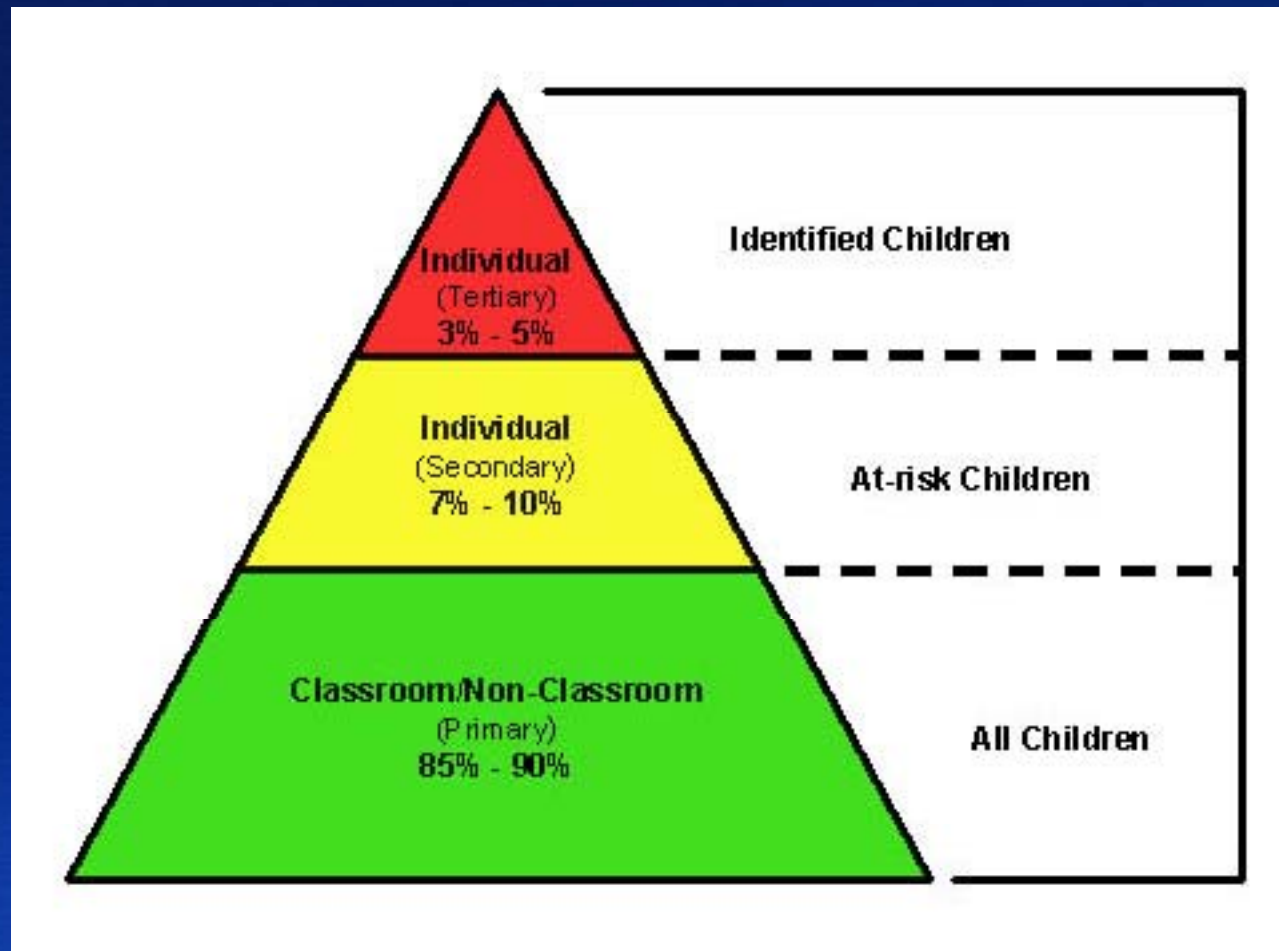
Related Fields

- Moral Education
- Character Education
- Civic Education
- Social Skills Training





Positive Behavior Support (PBS)





Why is Civility Important?



Intrinsic Value of Civility

- If we agree that all human beings are of worth, then we have an obligation to behave civilly toward all



(Boyd, 2006; Forni, 2002; Hinckley, 2000; Youniss & Yates, 1999)

- **Personal satisfaction** (Hinckley, 2000)



The Modern Call for Civility

- Anecdotal opinion vs. empirical data
- Advertisements and other media model uncivil behaviors (Leo, 1996)
- Many young adults have difficulty thinking in terms of the whole community (Schaefer, 1995)



School Violence

- 10% of males and 6% of females reported threat or injury from weapon on school grounds (Mayer, 2008)
 - National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) reports
 - 86% of schools reported at least one theft, violent crime, or other crime (total 2.2 million crimes)
 - Students 12-18yrs:
 - 4% reported victimization
 - 3% reported theft
 - 1% reported violent victimization
- In past 6 months





Why Should Schools Teach Civility?



Prevention of School Violence

- Physical precautions are not enough to create a safe school (Mayer, 2008)
- Civility as a tool to alleviate negativity in schools (Hatch, 1998)
- Civility to reduce acts of violence

(Feldman, 2001; O'Mara, 2007;
Hatch, 1998; Peck, 2002
Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003)





“Acts of violence are often the result of an exchange of acts of rudeness that spiral out of control. Disrespect can lead to bloodshed. By keeping the levels of incivility down, we keep the levels of violence down. . . . If we teach youngsters of all walks of life how to manage conflict with civility-based relational skills, we will have a less uncivil society, a less violent one.”

-P. M. Forni

(as quoted in O'Mara, 2007)



Civility in Schools

- Modern education focuses largely on academic instruction

(Mourad, 2001; Berman, 1998; Peck, 2002)

- Teaching civility in schools can encourage a more civil society

(Hatch, 1998)





Public Education Historically

- Aimed to prepare students to nurture civil society by teaching them to be good citizens (Peck, 2002)
- Civility and manners were valued equally with academic material (Berman, 1998)





McGuffey Readers

- Used from 1830's to 1920's
- Helped students learn to read while exposing them to culture and civility
- Emphasized character, moral integrity, and individual responsibility
- Along with the Bible, they were the sole source of enlightenment in many homes



(See Peck, 2002; Field, 1997)



Civility in Schools

- A need to reintegrate some of what has been removed from public education
- Combination of current curriculum with early ideals of civility





Twofold Purpose of Teaching Civility

- Buffer against school violence
- Serve to develop future citizens





How Could Schools Teach Civility?



Suggestions for Improving Civility

- Explain the rationale of civility
- Make expectations clear (Burns, 2003)
- Increase adult civility (Ludick, 2001)
- Help students be more aware of their community's needs
(Boyd, 2006; Berman, 1998)
- Teach empathy & perspective taking (Berman, 1998; Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003)





Suggested Civility Interventions

- Training in problem-solving, social skills, anger management, self-esteem
(Stover, 1999)
- Integrate themes of civility into academic curriculum (Nilsen, 2008)
- Make students aware of actual beliefs of their peers (Stiles & Tyson, 2008)
- Build rapport between students and faculty
(Stover, 1999)
- Empower students to take a stand against harassment and hurtful speech (Wessler, 2008)



Civility and Adolescents

- Secondary students are willing to learn skills for resolving differences (Hatch, 1998)
- Creating social ties and building community are main developmental needs (Schaefer, 1995)
- Identity formation (Youniss & Yates, 1999)
- On the verge of full formal citizenship and cognitive ability to reason more effectively (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006)



Caveats for Civility



- Forcing civility
- Discriminatory civility
- Limitations of civility



Need for Research

- All intervention ideas are supported anecdotally, but empirical data is very limited





Our Current Research

- Civility survey created
- Pilot tested with 10 school professionals
- Distributed via email to 2,000 college of education alumni
- Currently in the process of collecting data



Sample Survey Questions

- Held the door open for me at school
- Responded inappropriately when they did not get what they wanted
- Sincerely complimented others
- Called others offensive names
- Left public areas in the school neat and clean
- Inappropriately used a cell phone or other electronic device in class



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