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## INFORMATION TO USERS

PREVIEW

RESOLVING DIFFERENCES: AN EDUCATION IN CIVILITY

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## DEDICATION

I did not intend to dedicate this work to anyone. However, I found it appropriate to dedicate this work, that I hope raises the term of "civility" into a public awareness, to a person who embodied the term in his everyday existence. For you, Pop, a small token of appreciation. You will always be an inspiration to me and your family for your gentle kindness and natural gift of civility.

PREVIEW

RESOLVING DIFFERENCES: AN EDUCATION IN CIVILITY

by

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THESIS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	vi
Chapter One	
Introduction .....	1
Chapter Two	
Literature Review .....	10
Chapter Three	
A Quantitative Analysis of Student Concerns .....	28
Chapter Four	
Current Training for Teachers .....	39
Chapter Five	
Conclusion .....	53
Bibliography .....	58
Appendices	
A - School Climate Survey .....	64
B - Individual High School Climate Survey Results .....	65
C - Write-in Responses (Climate Survey) .....	66
Curriculum Vitae .....	67

## LIST OF TABLES

Table One	
Summary of Biggest Problems Public Schools are Dealt .....	12
Table Two	
Summary of Purposes of Public Schools .....	14
Table Three	
Climate Survey Results for District .....	32



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The present study is an academic examination of the need to teach secondary students the art of civility and skills for resolving differences. This is an in depth personal exploration of the students and their potential need and willingness to learn the skills to resolve differences with others. I began this study because of a concern with the social skills students need and the need to address those skills in our education system. Conclusions are drawn in this study through an examination of literature as well as analyses of surveys implemented in high schools in the southwestern United States. I address my belief that there is a need to teach secondary students how to resolve differences with others. Additionally, I assert that the art of civility, meaning an ability to show politeness, should be encouraged as a skill that students can use in their daily lives. The need and willingness for secondary students to learn to get along with others is also addressed, by reviewing literature that supports my views regarding the secondary students' needs to learn to get along with others.

The study includes a literature review, analyses of a survey given to high school students in a large school district in the southwestern United States, followed by analyses of current required courses at a university within its education department. The survey instrument was administered to examine student interest in their desire to get along with others on the high school campuses. University education courses are investigated to determine if the skills necessary for teaching students to get along with others are present

in university education curriculum. Finally, the study investigates the continuing teachers' educational opportunities provided to improve and enhance their teaching skills and knowledge. This investigation of teacher in-service opportunities is analyzed to determine where the potential for addressing the skills necessary to teach secondary students the art of civility and resolving differences may exist.

The remainder of this chapter establishes a foundation for the study. The need for values-based education is examined, followed by an overview of civility and its place within values-based education. Finally, a brief summary of the remaining chapters is presented.

In summary, this paper includes a review of the literature, analyses of the data, and an evaluation of the current teaching methods being encouraged at the university level and area districts within the confines of this study. As evidenced by this study and others mentioned in the review of literature, it will be shown that secondary students have a need and are willing to learn skills for resolving differences as well as the art of civility.

### Student Input and its Importance

Developments made in education should include the students in the planning stages, although typically students are left only to experience the results, whether successful or not. Witner and Anderson (1994) state: "Student empowerment is an important element in all school reform" (p.1). If educators seek students' needs, and

students perceive a new program as meeting their needs, then the positive involvement of the students may aid in the success of the program. This program success may be achieved by giving the students a sense of power in being included in the decision-making process.

A prior study in the school district under investigation produced results that indicated further examination of the students' perceptions concerning conflict. This survey was intended to analyze the effectiveness of a new block schedule format which changed the school schedule from a traditional six-period day to one that holds eight 87-minute periods in which four periods meet every other day. The question stated, "I feel that School X is a safe campus." Forty-two percent of the students disagreed with the statement. The results indicate that nearly half of the students feel safe on campus. Why do the students not feel safe? How could this situation be addressed?

As do many high school teachers, I have a great concern for secondary students, and their perceptions regarding the school environment. Unfortunately, the issue of safety on high school campuses can be interpreted in varying ways depending on the perspective. A high school teacher may see a campus area where water puddles as unsafe, while a student may see another student with a handgun and interpret that as an unsafe situation. Rather than investigate the issue of safety on campus and its many definitions, this study focuses on the students' negative perceptions of their campuses as a reason for further investigation into the elements that affect that negativity and possible methods and interventions to correct them.

### The Need for Values-Based Education

Teaching students the social skills necessary to succeed in their communities is an on-going and dynamic notion in education that has returned to the public forum as a necessary element for student success (Straughan, 1988). The developments in education occurring with or without student input have been numerous, and the practice of using a similar idea in education over different periods of time is common. For example, techniques such as student group investigations, cooperative learning, and student team learning are recurring themes or practices in education. In the 1970's, students were taught how to do "group investigations" which enabled them to get along with other students, take responsibility by assigning and assuming tasks, and accepting the results formed by the group (Sharan & Sharan, 1976). In the 1980's, this idea of group work was reintroduced as "cooperative learning," which was designed to promote learning in groups of two to six students (Ornstein & Behar, 1995). Unlike group investigations, this approach incorporated terms such as facilitator, timekeeper, and recorder into the curriculum. The goal of teaching young people to work together toward one end was the same for group investigations and cooperative learning, yet the terms were different. More recently, Student Team Learning (STL) techniques, created at Johns Hopkins University, embody the same concepts in group work, but add the concept of team goals (Ornstein & Behar). Every member of the STL group has a job to do, and all members must work together to accomplish one goal. The concept of teaching students appropriate social skills within group activities has evolved through the years and adjusted to each phase of education (Slavin, 1992).

The evolution of group work is an example of a concept in education that has been adjusted to address the ever-changing needs of education. The social skills encouraged through group work can be compared to the concept of values-based education which has endured its own evolution. Ornstein and Behar (1995) state: "The subject of values education has surfaced, and currently, our educational system is experiencing some turmoil in its need to teach non-academic subject material to its students. The public debate in education and on all social issues has shifted profoundly to the right in the past decade" (p. 34). A need for values-based education exists as evidenced by the problems of today's youth and the apparent lack of family values. Educators as a whole must come together in the pursuit to teach values-based education, rather than leaving these concepts to be pursued by the right-wing side of the forum. Two statements from different sources exemplify the need for students to learn values: one written by a high school student says a lot by itself, "If the parents would teach their children not to hate, things would be better" (Hatch survey comment, 1997). The second statement is expressed by Quillen and Hanna (1948): "Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties facing many adolescents in modern culture is the lack of value standards to which they are able to give wholehearted allegiance" (p. 27).

As students enter the classroom, they carry with them many outside attachments and concerns. Teaching may be seen as a form of social work, as well as education. Teachers and administrators do not want to feel responsible for such a diverse and controversial set of topics within values education, and their fear of these subjects is quite understandable. If education exclusively involved the basic subjects of reading,

writing, and arithmetic, teaching may possibly be an almost trouble-free occupation with a few pleasant rewards. Noddings (1992) states: "First, we must understand that the school, like the family, is a multipurpose institution. It cannot concentrate only on academic goals..." (p. 63). To assume that high school educators can teach only those three basic concepts is a bit naïve. If teachers were to enter a high school today and attempt to "just teach" their subject, the frustrations could be insurmountable. The changes occurring in students' lives are numerous and "adolescence entails not only great physical changes in development of the individual, but emotional, intellectual, and social changes as well" (Quillen & Hanna, 1948, p. 25).

Physical, social, and emotional development that occurs during adolescence can be distracting to students. If given adequate training, teachers can use the students' distractions and negative influences to introduce the skills needed to cope with changes within society in a positive way: "Bringing emotional literacy into schools makes emotions and social life themselves topic, rather than treating these most compelling facets of a child's day as irrelevant or intrusions..." (Goleman, 1995, p. 263). Problems students face today, and the obligation for teachers to handle them in a positive manner, suggest that student needs and their concerns can be used to actually open the door to teaching values-based education. By allowing the adolescents' developmental issues into the classroom, skills needed to solve diverse and potentially serious problems can be discussed with and taught to the secondary students.

### Civility Within Values-Based Education

Values-based education includes topics such as morals, ethics, values, teenage parenting skills, safe sex procedures, and courtesy to others. Courtesy to others is embodied in the term “civility,” as defined by Rockler (1996): “Citizenship must entail forming of opinions through evidence. Civility is an active behavior that promotes a positive manner and politeness to others” (p. 575). More specifically, the verb “civilize” can be compared to a method of handling relationships as defined by Goleman: “involved in more sharing, cooperation, and helpfulness” (1995, p. 284). Generally, civility is a skill that is important in the goal of getting along with others

Historically in education between 1903 and 1932, the idea of respect and courtesy to others was included in everyday classroom activities. “One of the dominant themes reflected in educational writings of the progressive era was that schooling had both personal and social consequences and therefore could be an instrument of both child development and social betterment” (Davis, 1976, p. 65). The authority of the teacher was all that was needed to keep the children “in line” and attentive. Often, the teacher was the first educated adult the students became familiar with and the teachers’ own behavior was very important to their development. The skills to succeed in a less complex society were easily immersed within a day’s lesson.

More currently, due to accountability for all levels of education and the many specific objectives dealt the schools, politeness and social skills seem to have been relegated to the informal curriculum, which is a curriculum that is not always addressed. There is still a need to teach students skills which would enhance students’ lives without