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Schools step in to teach social skills

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WA schools are having to teach children table etiquette, how to tie a tie and the art of polite conversation to give them the social skills that many do not learn at home.

The Curriculum Council has endorsed a course in manners which counts towards the WA Certificate of Education. One government and six private schools have begun teaching it and Government endorsement will enable more schools to build teaching of manners into the curriculum.

Warwick Senior High School has taught a group of Year 12s from a program designed for disengaged students. Principal Lesley Wintle said she would like to see all pupils do it.

"The classes are great . . . for giving kids social and work skills. I would like to do it (all over the school), but there is often not time in the crowded curriculum," she said.

Combining traditional etiquette and modern manners, the Developing Social Skills course covers deportment, attitude, good manners, dining skills and social and workplace behaviour, as well as personal hygiene, dress codes and grooming.

Natalia Josephs, the Perth trainer

who created the manners course, said it was not frivolous or snobbish but was designed to build empathy and confidence and create social "polish". "We are not promoting the idea that going to opera is better than going to the footy or vice versa," she said.

Parents often lacked time to teach children manners and social skills.

Warwick teacher Elise Duggan said she taught her Year 12s what parents once did to prepare them for the workplace. "There was not one boy who knew how to tie a tie," she said.

For Michael Stoddart it was an eye-opener. "I learnt heaps of stuff, like how to set a table. I learnt how to introduce myself, to handshake while smiling and looking people in the eye. I use it at work heaps," the 16-year-old, from Marangaroo, said.

Mike Thomson, 16, of Greenwood, said he learnt a lot about what was polite and rude in different cultures, as well as good manners for himself.

"I always said I wanted to go to the toilet, I wouldn't just say excuse me," he said.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard said it was falling more on schools to teach social skills, but the first focus should be on lifting standards in core subjects.



Role model: Mike Thomson shows Michelle Allen, left, and Ricki-Lee Walley how to tie a Windsor knot. Picture: Barry Baker

WHAT TO DO

- Maintain good deportment by holding your body upright and walking tall.
- Maintain good grooming with basic personal hygiene and clean hair and nails.
- Floss your teeth daily.
- Polish and buff your shoes every day.
- Always say please, thank you and excuse me.
- Open the car door for a female passenger if you are a male driver.
- Make eye contact and smile when shaking hands.
- Turn off your mobile phone while at the dining table.
- Tear bread and rolls into bite-size pieces and butter each piece just before eating.
- Always stand to greet someone.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Wear thongs and shorts at any social event.
- Wear a cummerbund and a waistcoat together.
- Wear backless slip-on shoes for work.
- Wear heavy perfume or noisy jewellery to the theatre, opera or ballet.
- Mix main and dessert on the same plate at a buffet.
- Chew with your mouth open.
- Dip bread into soup or biscuits into tea or coffee and don't wipe your plate clean with bread.
- Talk about religion, politics or sad and depressing subjects when talking to someone you are not familiar with.
- Eat chicken wings, anything green and anything with pips or stones at a cocktail party.
- Expose bare midriffs or body piercings in the workplace.