

Teacher Emphasizes Old-Fashioned Etiquette

(Feb. 21) – In addition to the three R’s, boys at one Arizona public high school have spent the past year learning to open doors for girls, pull out chairs for their female classmates and stand when a girl enters a room.

Incorporating etiquette lessons into the classroom was the brainchild of Cord Ivanyi, a Latin teacher at Gilbert Classical Academy, a public college prep school 30 miles east of Phoenix.

Courtesy of Cord Ivanyi

Male students in Cord Ivanyi’s Latin class at Gilbert Classical Academy high school have learned such etiquette techniques as seating the girls at their desks.

“I teach old-fashioned subjects,” Ivanyi told AOL News, “so I don’t think I’m doing anyone a disservice by promoting old-fashioned traditions.”

A teacher for 14 years, Ivanyi said he was inspired to start demonstrating what he considers proper etiquette after witnessing the coarse behavior that some of the boys in his classes displayed toward the girls.

“Boys treat girls pretty roughly,” he said. “And there was so much disruption, so I decided to do something about it.”

The informal lessons began with Ivanyi standing up one day after a girl in the class had left the room to go to the bathroom. As she returned, Ivanyi held open the door for her.

“She had this funny look on her face,” Ivanyi recalled. “And the other kids giggled a little.”

Soon, however, Ivanyi was schooling the 10th-grade boys on how to seat their female counterparts at their desks, by pulling out their chair and sliding it underneath them as they sat. As a show of respect, the boys were encouraged to stand any time a girl entered the room.

Behavior that was once utterly foreign has become routine. “Ninety-eight percent of the boys stand now when a girl enters the room, and the girls love it,” Ivanyi said.

As a result of the emphasis on politeness, the overall mood in the classroom has changed markedly.

“There’s a different tenor in the class, a gravity attached to the girls. They’ve been more feminized in the boys’ eyes,” Ivanyi said. “These girls are reading Jane Austen novels in class. For them, chivalry hasn’t gone out of style.”

Courtesy of Cord Ivanyi

Cord Ivanyi, seen here with his dog, Toby, said that he started incorporating etiquette lessons in response to what he felt was a distressing lack of civility in his classroom.

Melissa Leonard, an etiquette instructor in New York for the past 13 years, applauds Ivanyi’s efforts. “I think it’s great if it’s practical etiquette instead of the white-glove, snobby kind.”

Leonard argues that learning proper manners helps kids navigate a variety of social situations. Sadly, too few have an understanding of the basics.

“There are some fundamental rules that are important for kids to learn, like looking someone in the eye when talking to them,” Leonard said. “And there can be a role for the school to play, especially if etiquette isn’t being taught at home.”

But is teaching gender-specific etiquette perpetuating what some consider sexist traditions?

Gilbert Classical Principal Brian Rosta stresses that the emphasis Ivanyi places on social graces is not an official part of the school’s curriculum.

Rosta has no plans to expand the politeness training, but he is a firm believer that

schools can play a vital role in teaching manners.

“We often use the Latin phrase *in loco parentis*, ‘in place of parents,’ and sometimes we find that we need to fill the gaps that parents miss,” Rosta said. “If there are any life skills our teachers can help with, I encourage that.”

What’s more, the parents of the students in Ivanyi’s class don’t seem to mind, either.

“The only negative thing I’ve heard are parents calling to make sure that their daughters say ‘thank you’ to the boys,” Rosta said.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

2010 AOL Inc. All Rights Reserved.