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HOW TO CON YOUR TEACHER

Bernice M. Wilson

It is my observation that some students seem to know intuitively how to impress their teachers with behaviors that lead to positive reactions and good grades. Actually, I knew this as a child and could ensure my own place as a superior student during the first week of school by how I arrived in class, where I sat (up front, of course), and other maneuvers which will be described later. It is my impression that the large majority of "good" students have a grasp of the interactive necessities for survival in our power-driven educational arena.

Unfortunately, the very students who need these strategies the most seem to know them the least. As Lipson and Alden (1983) have pointed out, failures in mainstreaming children with learning problems are caused more by social incompetence than by academic failures.

What are these behavioral strategies that are second nature to some but a blank tablet to others? Let us list a few:

1. Come to class on time.
2. Bring all necessary supplies--books, notebooks, pencil or pen.
3. Sit up straight. Don't look at the floor. Establish eye contact with the teacher. Don't hide by sitting in the back of the room. (Many teachers only call on those who volunteer.)
4. Nod a lot.
5. Laugh at the teacher's jokes.
6. Do not talk to your neighbor when the teacher is speaking.
7. Avoid fidgeting, tapping, squirming, yawning, banging chairs.
8. Try to figure out what parts of the curriculum are important to the teacher. Emphasize them in your studying.

It becomes obvious at once, of course, that only some of these behaviors are manipulative; others are simply sensitive interactions with other human beings. Is it productive and ethical to teach chil-

dren who are lacking in social skills so specifically? If so, which skills should be addressed?

Specific and detailed instruction in social awareness is as important to teaching the child with learning problems as the teaching of reading. What is not always understood is that children with problems in reading may also have problems in reading other people's behaviors. A class discussion about behaviors that "bug" not only the teacher but the students as well can help raise awareness of individual differences and the influence of students' and teacher's behaviors on each other.

Another benefit of such discussion is possible increased teacher consciousness of his/her own predilections and behaviors that might distress or confuse students.

A light touch is recommended for this important and heavy topic, which can have a valuable payoff in mutual understanding.

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