



St James Preparatory School

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EDUCATIONAL NEWSLETTER

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I recently came across an article and a book from different authors who from very different perspectives throw light on some of the problems facing schools today.

“What is happening to us? Are we rearing a bunch of uncontrollable, noisy, impossible little monsters? Why do one in five children today suffer from behavioural problems, ADD, hyperactivity, or learning difficulties? Is the age of technology, the contemporary culture we have created, **impacting on our children’s development and well-being?** Have we gone too far? Yes we have.

Our children are showing us this in terms of temper tantrums and ‘heightened alertness’. Cell phones, the flickering screens of TV’s and computers and iPads keep their developing minds too taunt and strained. Researchers are finding growing evidence that cell phones may rob and suppress the sleep hormone melatonin and computer games are now proving to be dangerous to child development. (Calming children naturally in a high-tech world. An article by Margaret Roberts in the May 2015 Natural Medicine Magazine. Page 33.)

Roberts is alerting us as teachers and parents to recognise that the ‘high-tech’ world, which appears so appealing may also be responsible for many of the problems which this generation of children are experiencing. The quote below calls upon parents to become more conscious of what is happening in their homes, and to take more responsibility for the education of their children.

“The chief challenge for schools, however, begins at home. Contrary to what many critics of American education claim, **we don’t have a crisis in schooling, we have something much worse: a crisis in childrearing.** What have deteriorated most over thirty years are not the skills of our teachers but the **lives of our students.** The supports vital to good development (hence to schooling) are in free fall. The symptoms of the crisis – a continuing decline in the academic achievement, work ethic, and civility of many of our youth – appear vividly at school but begin well before it and extend well beyond it. Schools, even those that serve their students poorly, are much more its victims than its perpetrators.

In 1992, in *America’s Smallest School: The Family*, Paul Barton and Richard Coley forecast the failure of Goals 2000 **if it ignored the obvious: that the family is the cradle of learning, the essential socializing institution.** It was already clear, they pointed out that:

- Student achievement improves when there are two parents in the home;
- When children are well cared for and feel secure;
- When the family environment is intellectually stimulating;

- When parents encourage self-regulation and perseverance;
- When they limit TV;
- Monitor homework;
- Ensure regular school attendance.

All of these are **vital** to produce and sustain a school-ready, motivated student. And the evidence was already strong that in most of these areas the family was failing.

Today, the evidence is ubiquitous, and not just in our worse schools. Across the country, in communities of all kinds, more and more children **arrive at school less ready to learn. Not less intelligent, less ready to be students; that is**

- Less able to form a line i.e. line up;
- Listen to others;
- Share materials;
- Persevere at tasks;
- More likely to see adult expectations as negotiable;
- More focussed on immediate gratification;
- Less considerate of others

The fundamentals that make it possible for schools and teachers to influence children –

- Attendance,
- Attention,
- Cooperation,
- Courtesy,
- Industry,
- Responsibility –

are all in broad decline. Meanwhile, their parents assert less authority over them and are themselves less respectful of the school's authority and more likely to challenge its decisions, to expect the school to make exceptions to its policies. Increasingly, **they want the school to prepare the path for the child instead of the child for the path.** These trends, which occur among families from all socioeconomic levels, pose a powerful obstacle to any school seeking to accelerate student performance. They make it ever harder to improve outcomes, even when schools do raise their standards and upgrade instruction. At the ordinary, everyday end of the spectrum, students are **more difficult to reach and teach, their concentration and perseverance more fragile, their language and behaviour more challenging.**" (Seven Secrets of the Savvy School Leader by Robert Evans. Pages 63 and 64)

There can be no doubt that life has changed. Many of the customs, traditions and lifestyles of previous generations have been seriously compromised, and in some instances totally destroyed by modern living. While much of what has happened may be inevitable, it does pose the question, "have we, realised the dislocations and price to be paid for modern living"? As Robert Evans highlights it has had an effect on the children which was not anticipated. This generation are being brought up and parented in new ways to compensate for the demands which modern living is making on the home, marriage and society in general.

The jury is still out about whether this will be beneficial, but we need to recognise that the problems which are manifesting in the children, do not necessarily originate from the child, but from the parents, home and society. Many of the so-called interventions are applied to the child whereas they should be applied to the home and the adults who surround and support the child. It was Carl Jung who said that young children share the psychology of their parents. While every efforts needs to be made to assist any child, often little or no effort is made to correct the situations in the home. Each and every parent needs to have a good look at what the children are doing, what they are exposed to and whether or not it is the best quality for the natural development of the children. Home and school should ideally be talking the same language and that language needs to be based on true principle and natural law.

Mark Grace

PARENTING COURSES

- Conscious Parenting 1 – Mark Grace 10h45 – 11h45
- Conscious Parenting 2 – Mark Grace 12h00 – 13h00
- Principles of a St James Education – Mr Angus – 12h00 – 13h00