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The Need to Teach Civility in ECE Classrooms

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The Teaching of Civility in College Special Education Methods and Assessment Classes: The What and How

## Dr. Mike Borders
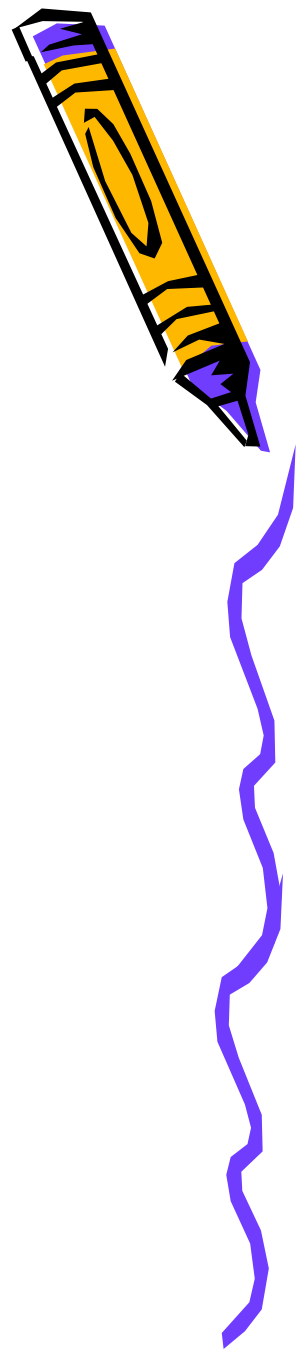## Mrs. Donna Borders
Gordon College

Context:

Gordon College's Bachelor Degree Program provides certification in ECE and ECE Special Education. Students are taught methods and strategies to utilize with children who manifest learning and behavioral difficulties. We teach numerous methods and specific strategies to assist our teacher candidates regarding the remedy for these students' difficulties. However, we find ourselves constantly manipulating strategies to fit the problems.
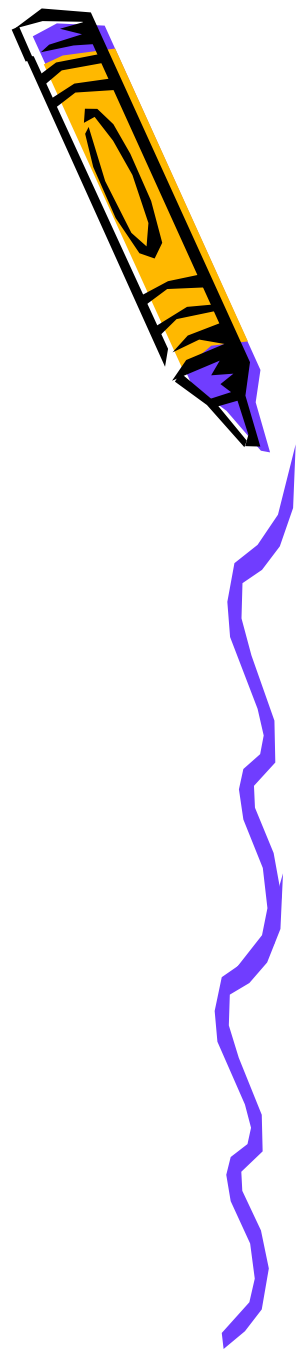
So, we suggested the teaching of civility as a general strategy to remedy children's behavior problems, especially between and among each other. This project is in its second year.
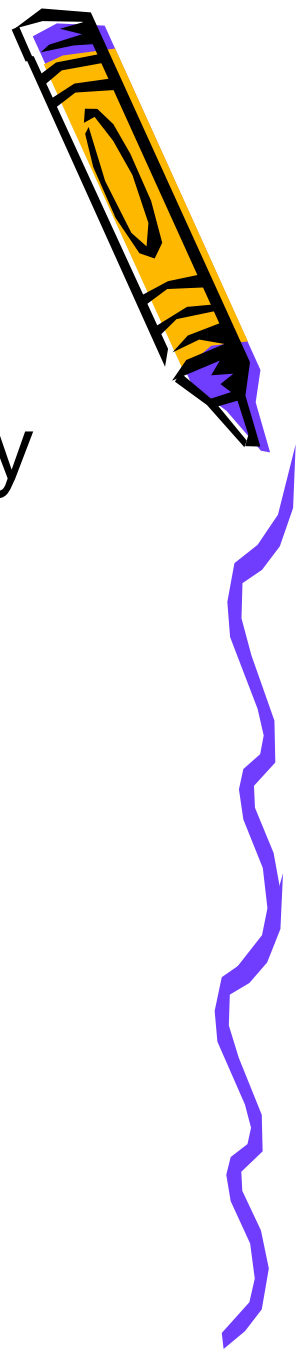
Why are students so ready to fight over innocuous, everyday occurrences? The answer sounds simple but profound; that is, students are doing what they see the adults (parents, significant others, and the media) in their lives doing.

In the journal article, "Creating Classroom Civility," Kauffman and Burback state that "one of the most effective actions that teachers can take to combat violence in schools is to create within their classrooms a climate of civility."

So, the question begs to be asked, "Are we becoming less civil?" To help answer this question, we surveyed our junior and senior teacher candidates (105); the clinical supervisors (105) of these teacher candidates were also surveyed. Of the 105 teacher candidates surveyed, 97 completed the survey. Of the 105 clinical supervisors, 92 replied. This survey represented eight county school systems in Georgia.

Collectively we, along with our teacher candidates, established the following operational definition of civility: "The active meaning of civility is one that focuses on **best intentions.**   The practical purpose of best intentions is to forward the disposition of civil behavior through manners, politeness, and the essence of caring and sharing with/toward others."
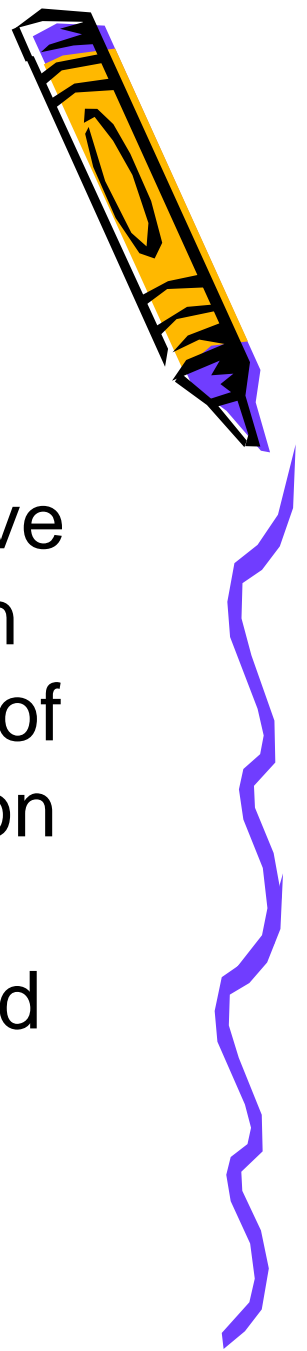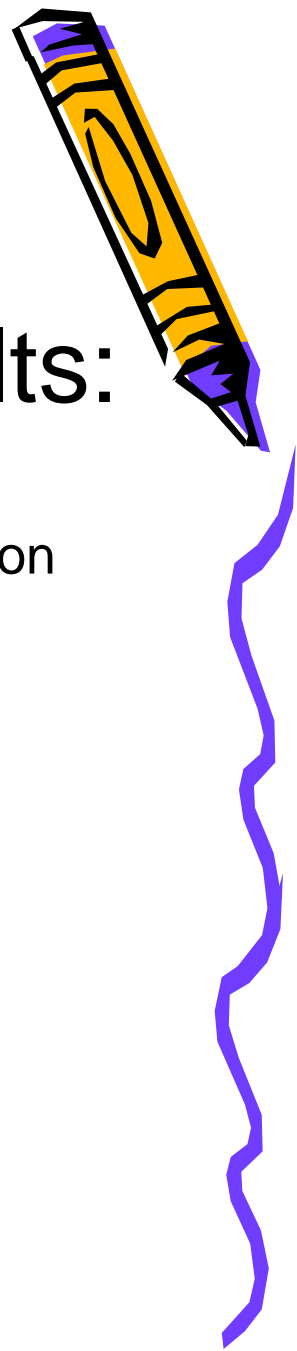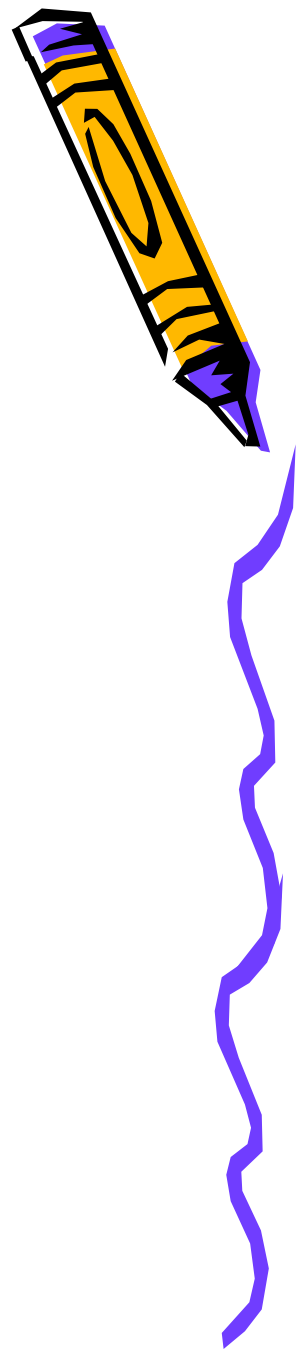
Teacher candidate survey results:

What is your status in the teacher education program at Gordon College:

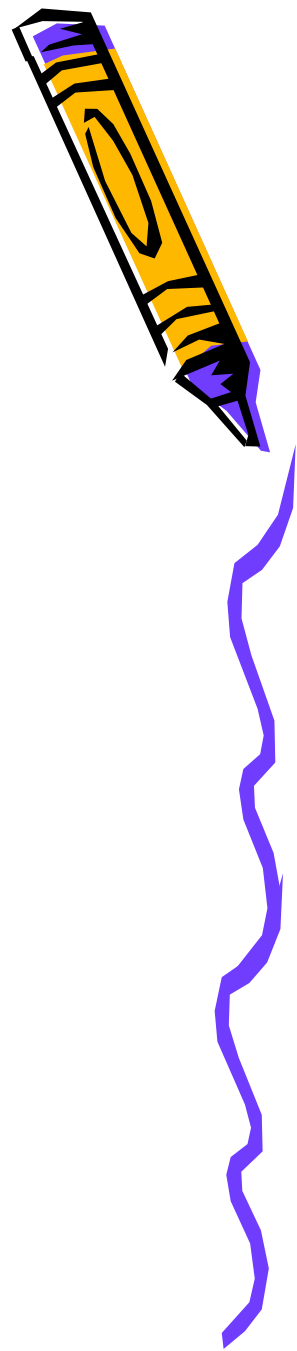|		
Juniors	46	47.4%
Seniors	51	52.6%
Total	97	100.0%

What is your ethnic background?

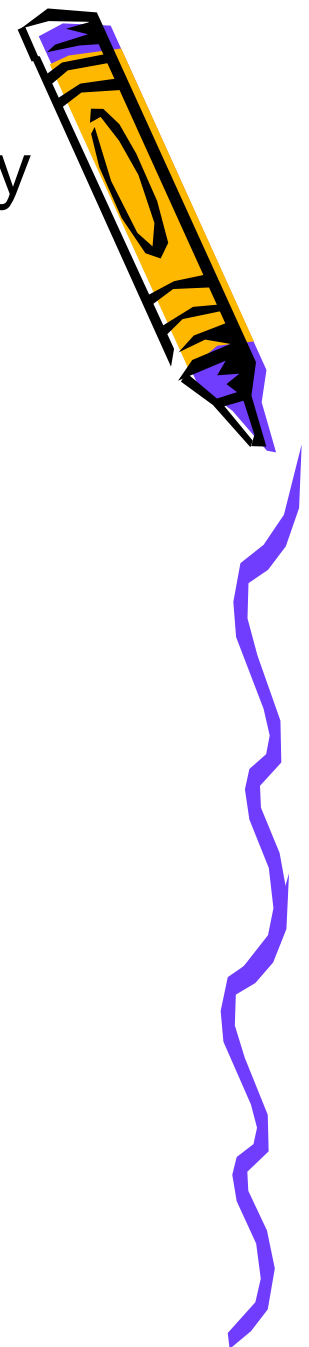|	
Am. Indian/Alaska Native	1.0%
Asian	1.0%
African American	9.3%
Caucasian	88.7%

What is your current perception of the essence of civility in our society?

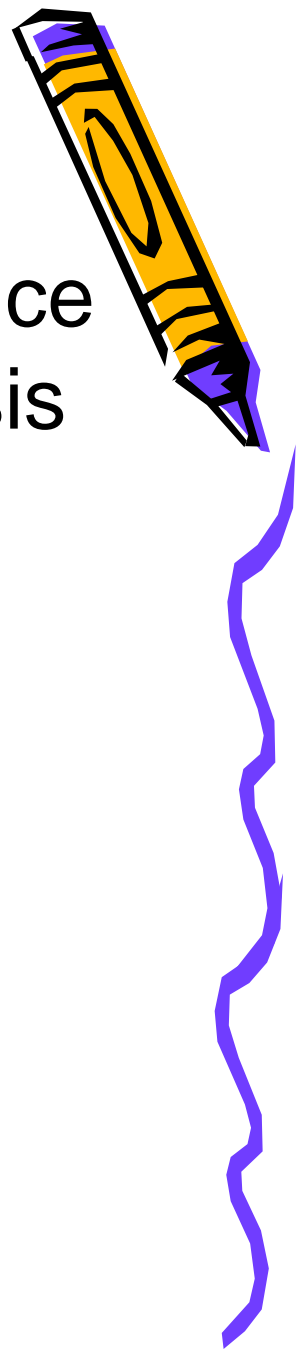|	Juniors	Senior
Mostly decreasing	10.9%	15.7%
Decreasing	82.6%	76.5%
Increasing	4.3%	5.9%
Mostly increasing	2.2%	2.0%

Thus far, what is your judgment of the civility of your students in your school(s)?

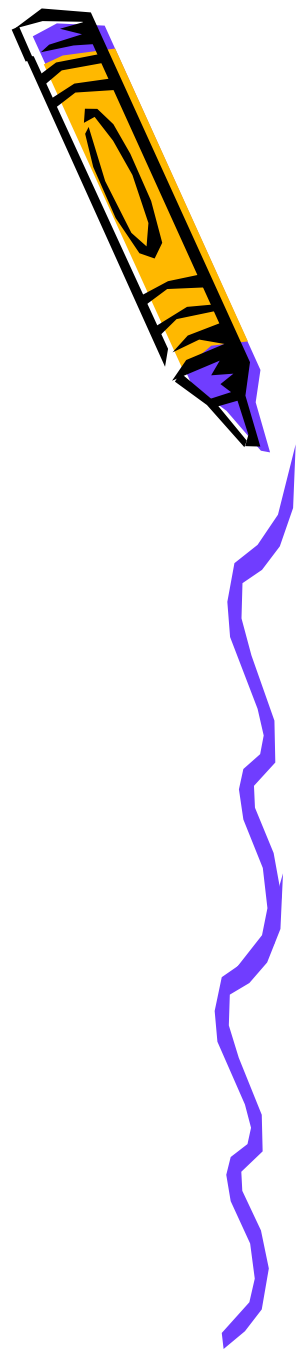|	Juniors	Seniors
A significant decrease	0.0%	13.7%
A decrease	39.1%	41.2%
Remaining the same	56.5%	43.1%
An increase	4.3%	2.0%
A significant increase	0.0%	0.0%

Who would provide most of the guidance regarding civility on a daily/regular basis for your elementary students?

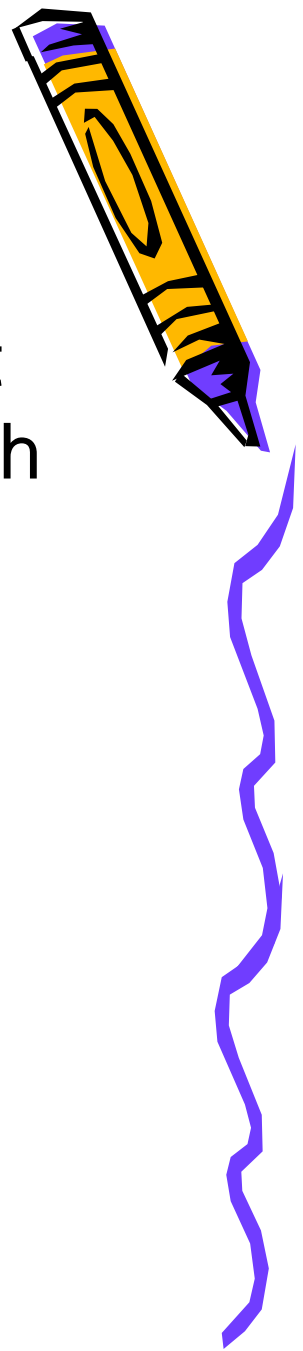|	Juniors	Seniors
Administrators	0.0%	0.0%
Counselors	13.0%	3.9%
SPED teachers	2.2%	0.0%
Classroom teachers	84.8%	96.1%

In what kind of world will your elementary students grow up?

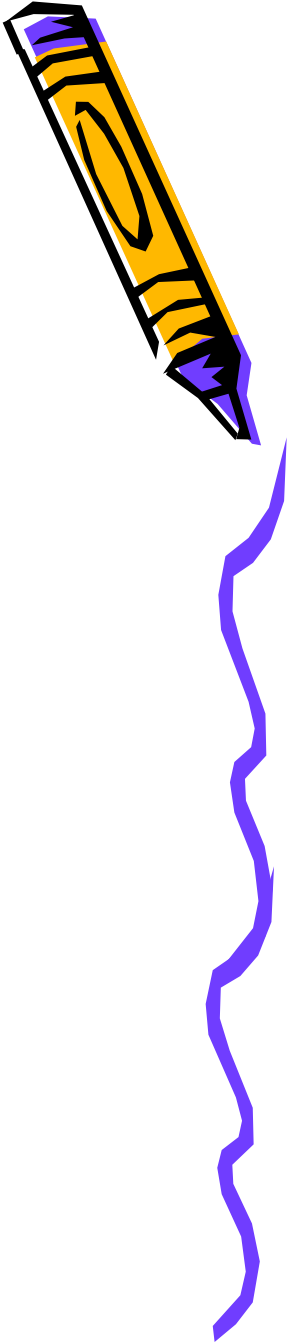|	Juniors	Seniors
The status quo	0.0%	7.8%
Much better than present	15.2%	15.7%
Same as present	13.0%	17.6%
Worse than present	71.7%	58.5%

To what degree do you believe the elementary teacher can make a significant difference in the development of civility with our future generations?

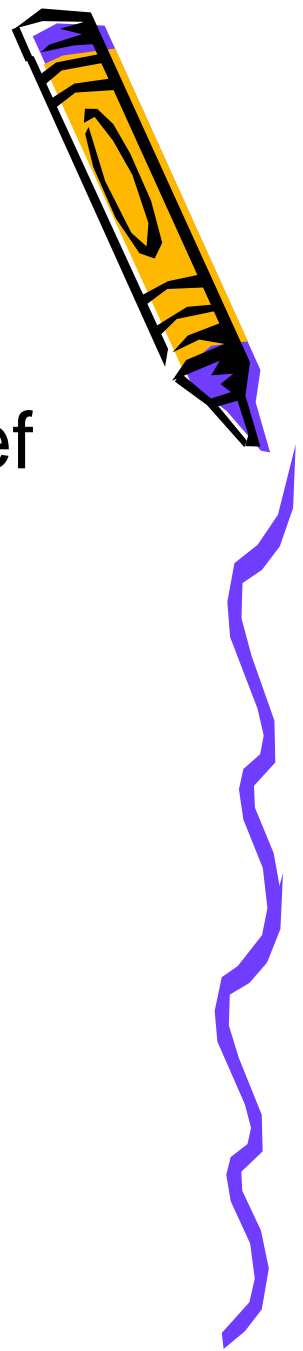|	Juniors	Seniors
Strong degree	37.0%	47.1%
Moderate degree	54.3%	43.1%
Mild degree	8.7%	9.8%
None	0.0%	0.0%

Should ECE teacher candidates in our colleges/universities be instructed regarding methods of teaching civility?

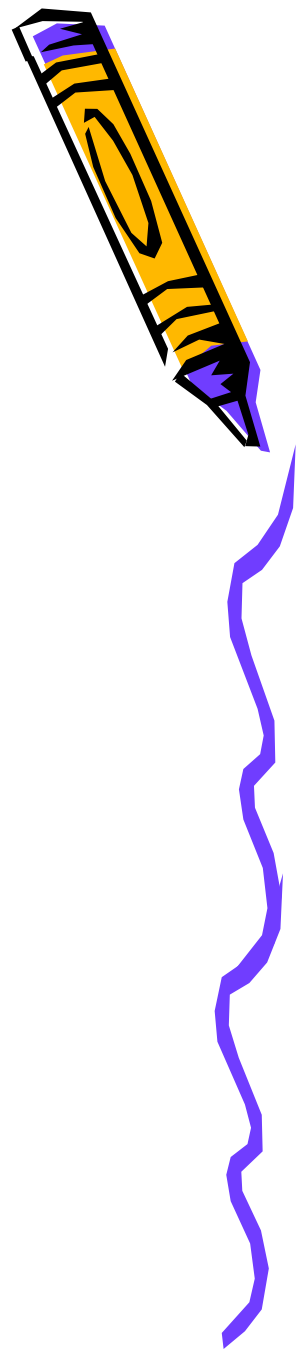|	Juniors	Seniors
No	13.0%	3.9%
Yes	87.0%	96.1%

How professionally responsible is it for elementary teachers to incorporate a brief two-to-three week unit on civility?

|	Juniors	Seniors
Very responsible	17.4%	52.9%
Responsible	58.7%	37.3%
Somewhat responsible	21.7%	9.8%
Not responsible	2.2%	0.0%

What is your perception as to the necessity for special education teachers to teach civility in their classroom?
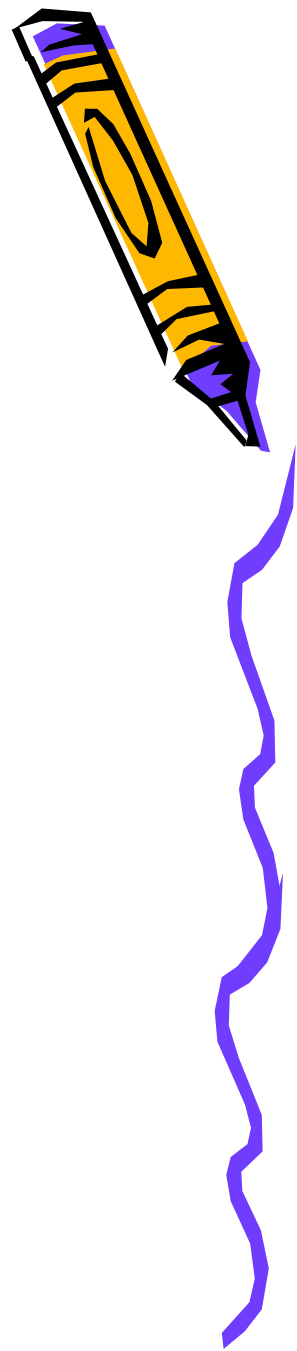
	Juniors	Seniors
Very necessary	26.1%	64.7%
Necessary	52.2%	29.4%
Somewhat necessary	21.7%	5.9%
Not necessary	0.0%	0.0%

Survey Results:

Clinical Supervisors
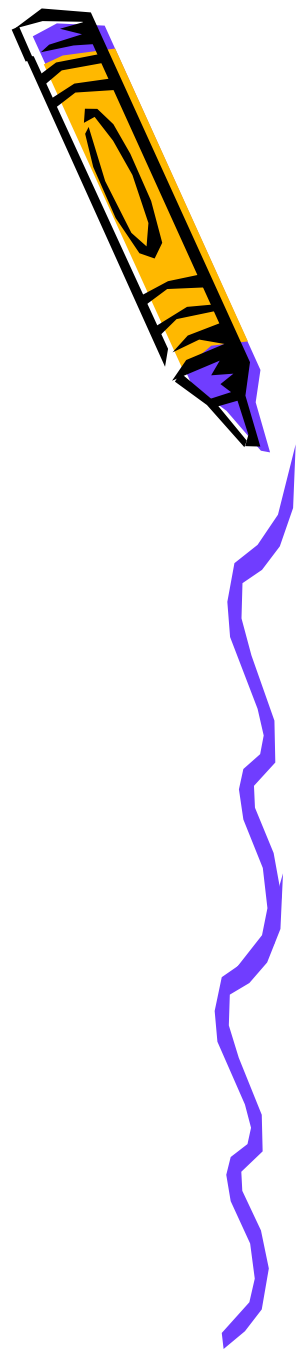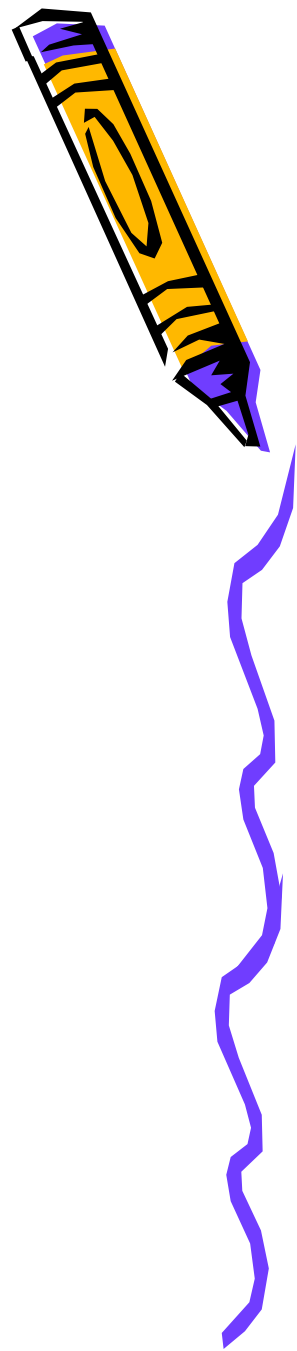
How many years of experience do you have in teaching?

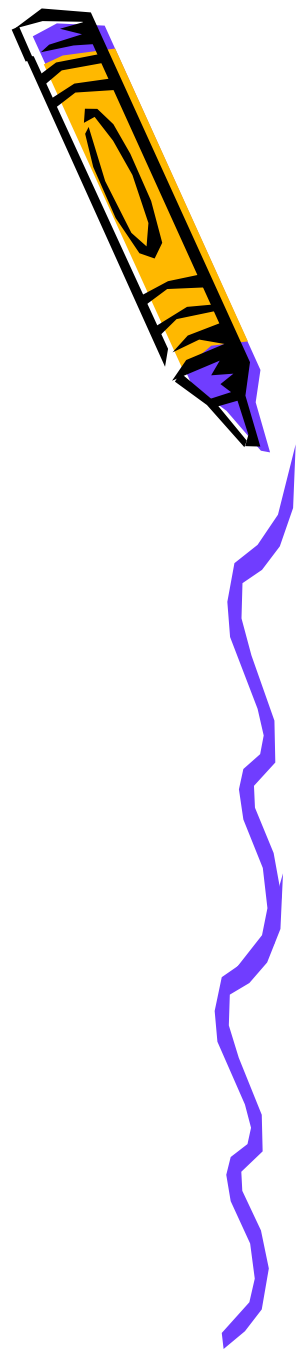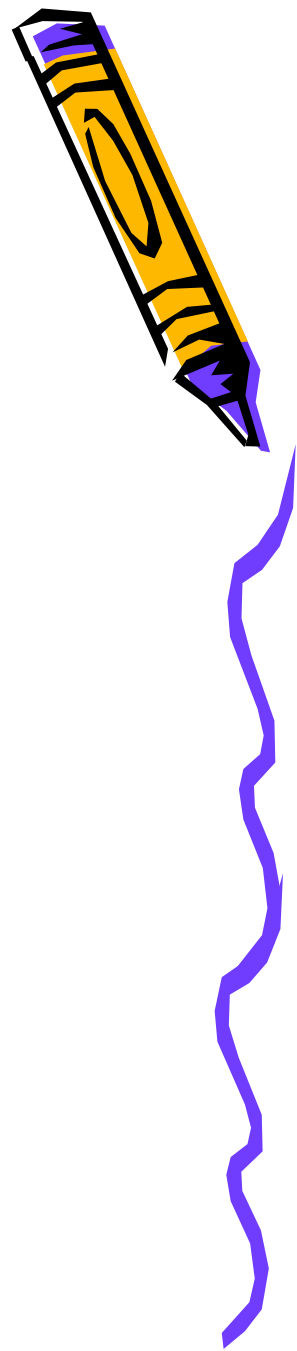|		
0-1 years	0	0.0%
1-4 years	5	5.4%
5-9 years	25	27.2%
10+ years	62	67.4%

What is your ethnic background?

African American	12.0%
Multiracial	1.1%
Caucasian	87.0%

What is your current perception of the essence of civility in our society?

Mostly decreasing	12.0%
Decreasing	76.1%
Increasing	9.8%
Mostly increasing	2.2%

In the past five years, what is your judgment of the civility of your students in your school?

A significant decrease   13.2%
A decrease   54.9%
Remaining the same   18.7%
An increase   12.1%
A significant increase   1.1%

Who would provide most of the guidance regarding civility on a daily/regular basis for your students?

Administrators	0.0%
Counselors	26.7%
SPED teachers	0.0%
Classroom teachers	73.3%
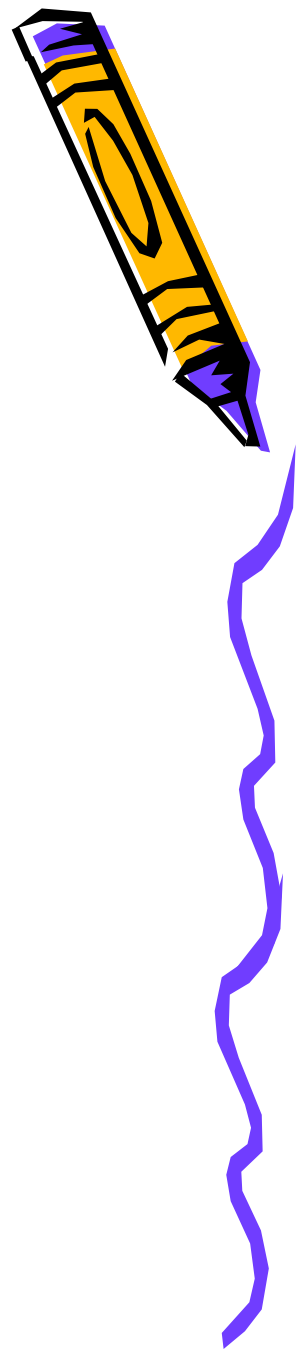
In what kind of world will your students grow up?

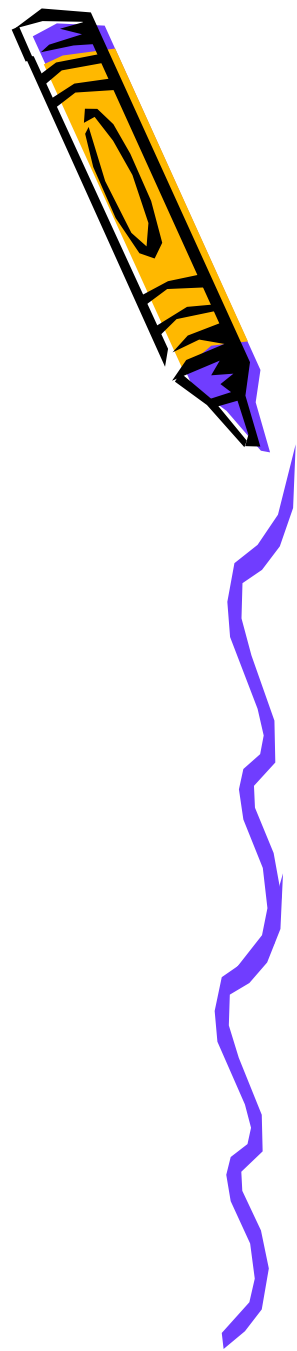|	
The status quo	6.7%
Much better than present	8.9%
Same as present	28.9%
Worse than present	55.6%

To what degree do you believe the elementary teacher can make a significant difference in the development of civility with our future generations?

Strong degree	23.6%
Moderate degree	46.1%
Mild degree	30.3%
None	0.0%
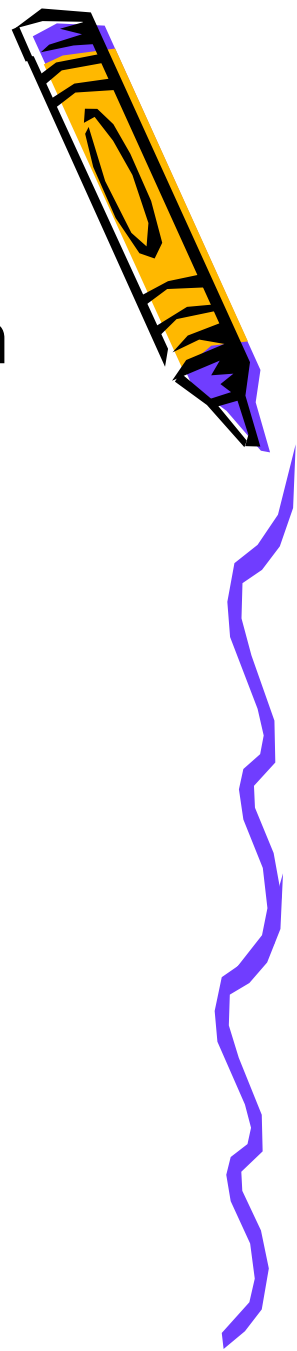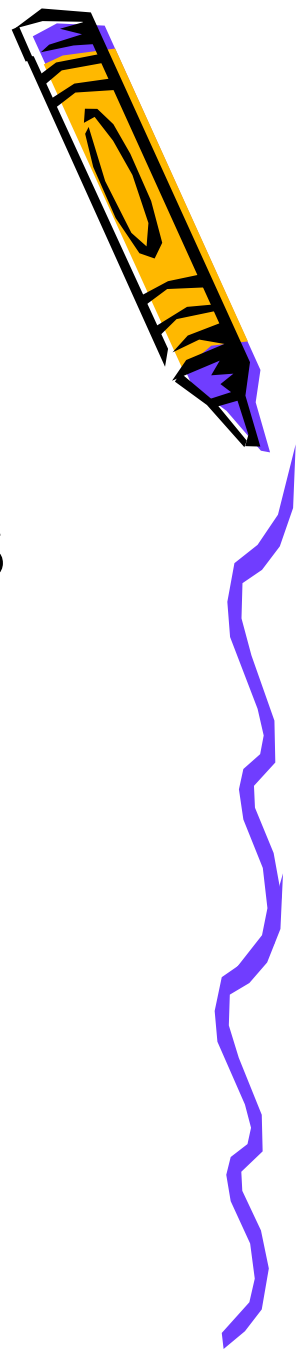
Should ECE teacher candidates in our colleges/universities be instructed regarding methods of teaching civility?

No   7.7%
Yes   92.3%

How professionally responsible is it for elementary teachers to incorporate a brief two-to-three week unit on civility?

Very responsible   17.8%
Responsible   43.3%
Somewhat responsible   31.1%
Not responsible   7.8%

What is your perception as to the necessity for special education teachers to teach civility in their classrooms?

Very necessary	31.5%
Necessary	52.2%
Somewhat necessary	16.3%
Not necessary	0.0%

Review of the Literature

Civility vs. Incivility

Popular culture, particulary television reality shows whose currency is humiliating participants, is a likely influence on recent incidents of incivility (**Education Week**, Maxwell, 2006).

According to Stephen Carter (1998), civility is a moral issue--a moral issue that deals with how we view and relate to each other. We must express ourselves in ways that demonstrate our respect for others. The concept of civility assumes we will disagree; it requires us not to mask our differences but to resolve them respectfully.

In USA Today (2009), the question was posed, "What happened to civility?" In response, the answer blamed the internet in that it is an age of total disclosure and total expression, with very little concern for the feelings of others.   In fact, Jerry Bowles, co-founder of SocialMediaToday.com, lamented that the impact of social media on society is an erosion on civility.
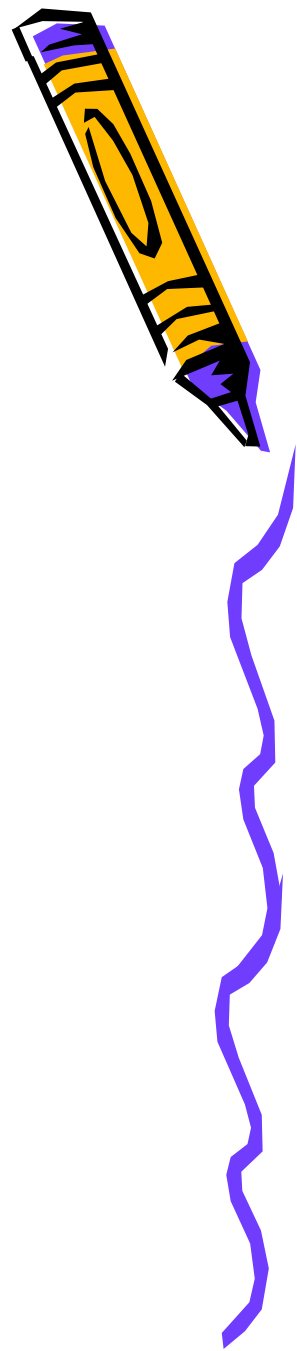
Colosimo (2004) in "How Shall We Learn? How Shall We Live?" discusses the need to teach and model civil and respectful behavior. She goes on to list five ideas to "jump start" the teaching of civility in the classroom. Emphasized among these five ideas is the utilization of proper oral expressions.

Paula Franzese, a law professor at Seton Hall University, teaches a class entitled "Civics, Character, and Leadership" to students in her town's elementary school. Her premise is "the words we use matter; one of the best ways to model civility is to use the right words."

Sears (2004) in "Not Whether, but How to Civilize," asks the question, "Should education civilize?" The answer is Yes, as education is an exercise in civilizing young people. The question is **how**.
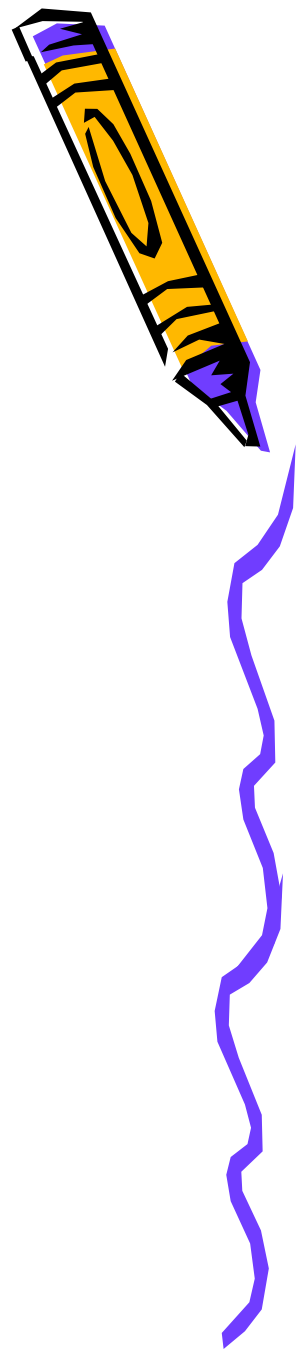
In the article, "Teaching Character Education to Students with Behavioral and Learning Disabilities through Mentoring Relationships," Muscott and O'Brian (1999) reported there is no research that specifically examines the effectiveness of character education programs on students with behavioral and learning disabilities. Their discussion centers around the need to teach responsibility, cooperation, teamwork, and respect.
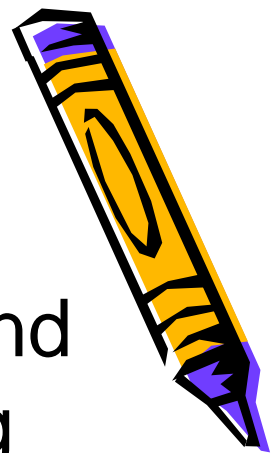
So, we decided to incorporate an assessment project related to the teaching of civility in one of our college's Special Education classes. In this particular SPED course, assessment techniques are merged with methods, strategies, and interventions.
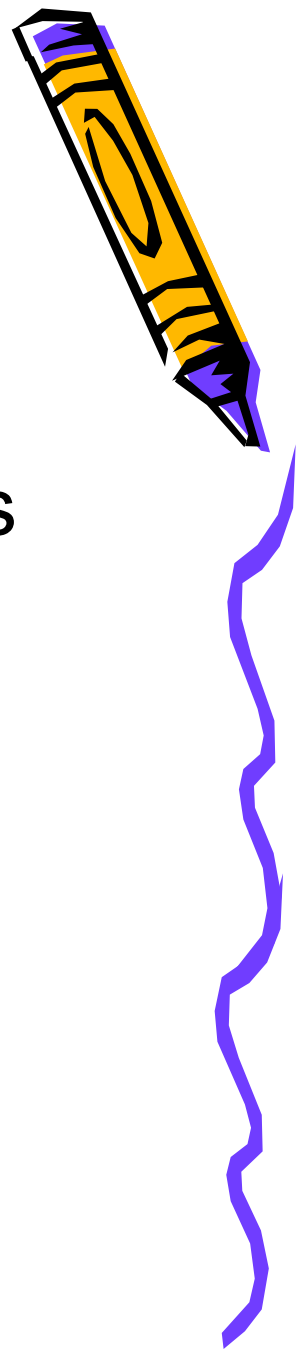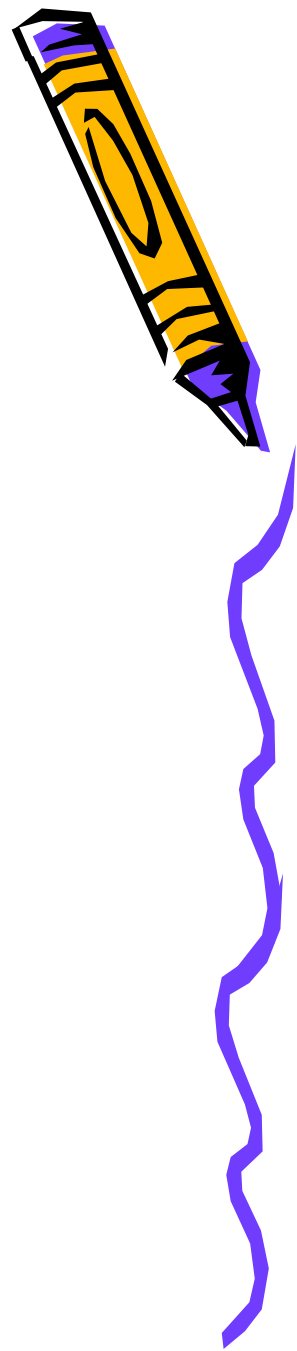
The assessment project, incorporating Georgia Performance Standards, was composed of five-week thematic units for second, third, fourth, or fifth graders. The following slides manifest the Georgia Performance Standards that were utilized in the students' lesson plans.

ELA2R1 ELA2R4
ELA3R2 ELA3R3
ELA3LSV1 ELA4R1
ELA4R3 ELA4R4
ELA5LSV1 ELA5R1
ELA4LSV1 ELA5LSV2
ELA4W1 ELA5C1
ELA4W2 ELA5R3
ELA5W2
ELA4W3 ELA5W1
ELA5W3

SS4CG4	SS4CG5
SS4CG2	SS4H4
SS4H7	SS5CG1
SS5H1	SS5H6

HE 5.7   S 5CS1
PE 4.3   S 5P2
PE 4.5   M 4D1
PE 5.6   M 5P1
TAES 4.3   M 5P3
TAES 5.3
VA 4PR.1
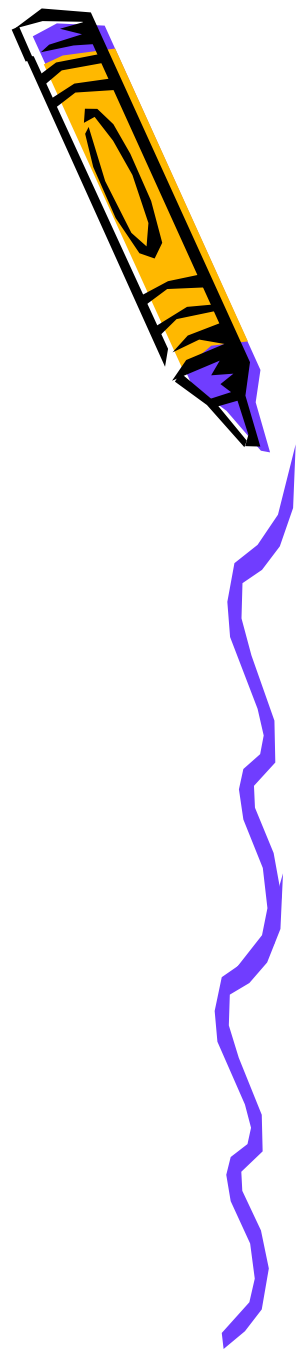VA 5C.2
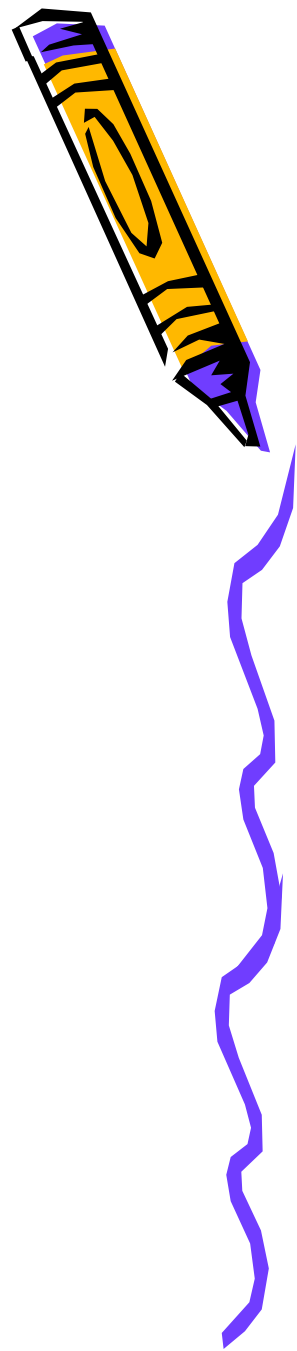
What was taught in these classrooms?

Students implemented many qualities of civility (total=33) throughout their instruction. However, the qualities most frequently taught were:

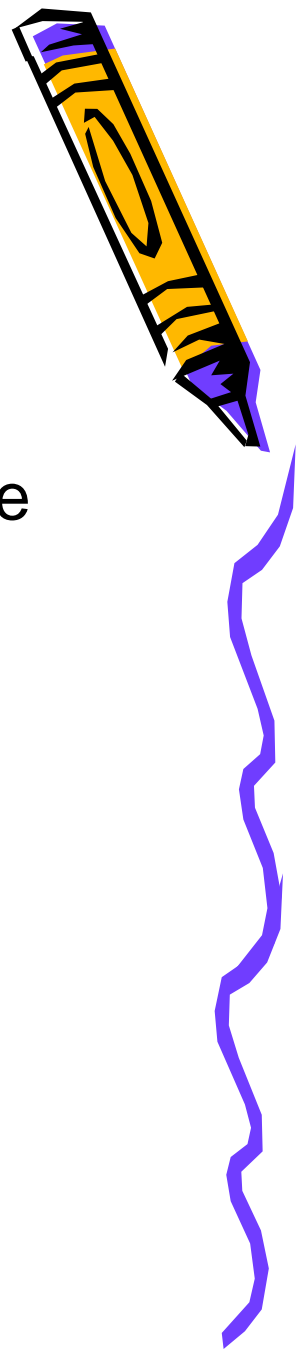|		
Friendship	Responsibility	Honesty
Trustworthiness	Fairness	Caring
Citizenship	Compassion	Manners
Kindness	Self-Control	Respect

2010-2011
Total number of 4th and 5th grade students = 882

Total number of teacher candidates completing pre- and post-testing = 40

Total mean pre-test score = 72
Total mean post-test score = 86
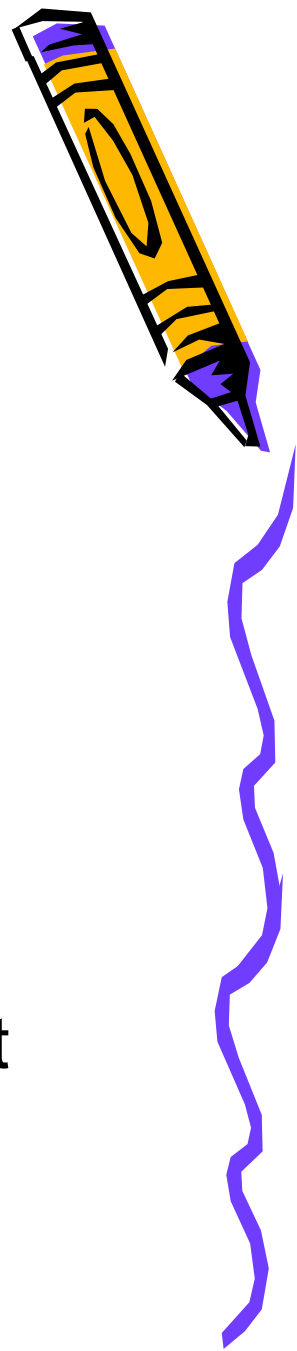20% increase in test scores from pre- to post-testing

2011-2012

Total number of students=553

Total number of teacher candidates completing Pre-post testing=28

Total mean pre-test score=75
Total mean post-test score=85

14% increase in test scores from pre to post testing

Future use: We will critique and refine our establishment and implementation of the teaching of civility in SPED assessment classes:

1. Check and balance for thorough teacher candidate completions
2. Possible application of statistical measures for significance
3. Implementation of civility lesson plan units for the lower grades

Power Point references and additional references are located in the handouts