



## Smarter or Kinder?"

"To be or not to be? That is the question." Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet poses this existential question, contemplating the meaning of life and death.

"Smarter or kinder?" That is the question I pose to you, contemplating the meaning of education.

As a teacher, would you rather your students leave your classroom smarter or kinder? As a parent, would you rather your child leave home smarter or kinder?

Smart versus kind. Thoughtful teachers and parents could line up on different sides of this dilemma. In favour of the smart side: A smarter student is better equipped to excel in higher education, get a better job, contribute more to society, attain a higher socioeconomic status, and lead a happier life.

In favour of the kind side: a kinder student is better equipped to work well with others, contribute more to family and community life, seek more compassionate solutions, and lead a happier life.



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is built into Kagan Structures..."**

Make no mistake about it, smart and kind are two very noble objectives of the educational enterprise. In fact, if you really analyse it, much of what happens in the classroom aims at these two targets: to either help our students become smarter or kinder. We teach maths, science, literacy, and

social studies to educate our youth and impart on them the academic knowledge of the world. Curriculum mastery is usually a worthwhile pursuit in and of itself, but it is also a vehicle for sharpening the mind's ability to retain, synthesise, and apply information.

In addition to smarts, schooling has been an institution for instilling good values in children. From the virtuous role model of the teacher to the persistent disciplinary approach of rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour, schools have endeavoured to turn out kinder citizens. Personal and social skills programmes have been developed to build students' character and emotional intelligence. Some theorists have gone as far as saying EQ is even more important than IQ, citing how smart kids can do dumb things.

In the balancing act of smart versus kind, the educational scales have always tipped in favour of smart. Academic courses far outnumber personal and social development classes. In a recent

national survey conducted by Harvard's Graduate School of Education, it seems students also favour smart over kind: "a large majority of youth across a wide spectrum of races, cultures, and classes appear to value aspects of personal success—achievement and happiness—over concern for others."

The Harvard report laments the low priority of these virtues and the consequences: "But when youth do not prioritise caring and fairness over these aspects of personal success—and when they view their peers as even less likely to prioritise these ethical values—they are at greater risk of many forms of harmful behaviour, including being cruel, disrespectful, and dishonest. These forms of harm are far too commonplace."

The Harvard report identifies a gap between what parents say is important and reality. While parents report developing caring children is a higher priority than children's achievement, students come away with a very different message: "youth were also 3 times more likely to agree than disagree with this statement: 'My parents are prouder if I get good grades in my classes than if I'm a caring community member in class and school.'"

Education, parents, and even students themselves seem to weigh in in favour of smart over kind. Where does Kagan stand on this issue? Is it more important for schooling to develop smarter or kinder kids?

At Kagan, we refuse to choose between these options. But before you call us flip floppers, wafflers, or fence sitters, consider this: Unlike Hamlet's dilemma, maybe this is a false dilemma. Maybe we don't have to make a choice. Maybe we can help students become much smarter and much kinder at the same time. Maybe we're doing it already!

How, you ask? The answer: If you want different results, you have to think and do things differently. Kagan departs from tradition by having students work cooperatively in teams. The research on cooperative learning is unequivocal. Cooperative learning outperforms traditional learning strategies academically. Students working together become much smarter than those working independently. But here's the kicker: Students working together become much, much kinder, too!

Here's why: In the traditional classroom, students work in relative isolation. The teacher provides direct input, and students, for the most part, practice independently. In contrast, in the Kagan classroom, students work together. Not only do we encourage students to help each other, we structure learning so that helping, coaching, tutoring, praising, and celebrating are all built into the learning process. Teaching kindness is not a lesson in a social skills curriculum that may get shelved in the pressure to reach high academic standards. Teaching kindness and a host of other important social skills is built into Kagan Structures and practiced daily.



This approach aligns very well with the first recommendation of the Harvard report. The report states that if we want to help children become more

caring, ethical family members, workers, and citizens, we need to have our students practice caring and helpfulness. “A good person is something one can always become...” The report emphasises daily repetition. In the independent classroom, it is difficult to practise kindness without taking time off from the academic curriculum. It's a binary either/or proposition. In the Kagan classroom, cooperation is built into how students learn. Cooperation is the “cooperative” part of cooperative learning.

When we have students work together in a positive and productive way, we are ensuring that students practise their social skills on a daily basis while they master academic curriculum. This is a sure recipe for turning out a kinder, more caring generation of students. Yes, schools using Kagan report higher test scores. Their kids are smarter. But let's not overlook the important fact that they also report fewer disciplinary issues, increased positive behaviours, less bullying and violence, and overall a kinder group of students. Year after year, we hear teachers and Headteachers who turned onto Kagan gloat that their students are just so much kinder toward each other. When you put students on the same team and have them work on the same side, they create bonds and treat each other more respectfully and as friends, rather than as complete strangers.

Hamlet grappled with the life or death question: To be or not to be? With Kagan, you don't have to struggle with the question: Smarter or kinder? With Kagan you have an approach to teaching and learning that promotes high academic achievement in tandem with developing kinder, more caring, more cooperative students. Kagan—smarter, kinder kids!

