

GRACE PILON--

Thoughts on WORKSHOP WAY® in the Beginning Years

Taken from Parents in the Classroom, Teachers in the Home:

Fifty years of WORKSHOP WAY, 1986.



“Students who have not done well in grades one and two are tasting failure and being insecure in the classroom. They are forced to be dependent on others...In grade three this group has tasted failure for two school years. Without a change in the school set-up, they are heading toward another year of the same situations, which are bound to become more frustrating the older they get. The lowest bracket of the class will ever be their lot.

Seeking other ways of getting the attention and approval of peers and teachers will now be their main occupation for survival. Signs of emotional disturbance might show. Teachers are now confronted with a group of youngsters well-known as “problem pupils”.

By grade four a whirlwind of classroom problems begins to form. Now appear “teasers” who hurt other children, “bullies” who must show off the only way they know, “non-readers” who must suffer in an environment prepared especially for “readers”. Remedial classes may give them a little help, but they mark the children as so-called “slow learners”.

If only children would have been allowed to learn how to learn! If only the classroom had afforded flexible programs to take care of students’ individual differences for human growth along the way!

Why all the suffering for youngsters who do not learn? They suffer because they failed from the start. Failure experienced over and over again suffocates the growing individual. We must go to the start of the educational process; and wherever we start we must start with growth.

Indeed much is known today about the capacity of the very young child to learn. For myself, I have always thought that there should be only “three important musts” for every first grader, kindergartener or pre-school student. They must learn how to think in order to learn, learn how to read, and learn how to love it all.

Students who have not done well in grades one and two are tasting failure and being insecure in the classroom. They are forced to be dependent on others.

If they miss out on any of these three basic achievements, the next 10-11 years of their lives have nothing to offer them but failure, rejection, and hopelessness. These can lead them head-on towards any of the pitfalls waiting for individuals who fail to satisfy their basic human intellectual needs:

Security and inner order,
Intellectual safety,
Feelings of intelligence, importance, and
the power of management,
Ease in talking,
Ease in creating one's own order,
Self-esteem, and
Receiving as well as giving mutual
respect.

Why is it that throngs of youngsters have passed through their classroom years hating school?

Grace Pilon's Commitment to do something
Initiating the WORKSHOP WAY design in R.T. Danneel School,
New Orleans, 1967 with Loyola Edelen, SBS

A learning lab was set up for the so-called "problem students" of the entire elementary upper grades.
(through Teacher Corps and Xavier University of New Orleans).

The children would be in learning lab only in the mornings. They spent the afternoons in their regular classrooms. We believed our students were only educationally deprived, but this is not synonymous with being deprived of human faculties. As long as these are intact they can be awakened, opened up for cultivating, whether the children live in the poor or not so poor sections of the town. Complainers only see what the children do not have instead of looking at what they do have.

*(The Learning Lab used the WW elements of
Workshop Schedule of Tasks,
WW phonics
WW oral reading techniques and
Homework vocabulary project.)*

A tiny ray of hope began to light up their faces...Tasks were chosen that would enable the pupils to taste success daily.

(Tasks were
1. Five Across
2. Tracing Hand --for concentration,
3. Educational Game THINKER, etc.)

They felt accomplishment. When this happens, children love learning. As soon as this is experienced enough times, something happens to self-concept and the personalities of the youngsters consistently change for the better.

Before the year ended, we had 53 non-readers from the upper elementary and 7th grades in three learning labs. These students for the first time in their lives were learning and were aware now that they had the power to learn. I believe this was the single factor which made such a noticeable change in their personalities and attitudes toward school work.

(Parents came to school to find out what had happened in the school to bring about such a big change in their daughter or son.)

A whole new world of hope came into their lives.

They like learning now. They were happy in school every day. Some pugilistic behavior was manifest in their interpersonal relationships at the beginning. But that soon disappeared and the youngsters showed feelings of joy at each other's success by spontaneous applause at times. This spirit was also exhibited on the playground.

We now know the creation of a new environment in the classroom and inside each student enables all of them to live in mental and emotional security as students learning and growing...A whole new world of hope came into their lives.

The WORKSHOP WAY is an innovative, non-competitive approach to learning which begins with learning how to learn, how to think, and how to manage one's life. It provides a framework of operation in which teachers have their management system for teaching all day and in which students have their management system for living, growing, and learning all day. The two management systems provide a way to sharpen senses, even the sense of order, to develop abilities of consciousness, to grow human skills, and to satisfy basic intellectual needs. All students can be reached because the system does not depend on right answers to enable all of them to feel success.

Fundamentally the WORKSHOP WAY prepares the students for independent and self-directed study. Individual needs determine what this educational system will give the children and even how the system will give it. The power sources used are:

- (1) success, that is willing involvement in living and learning, with courage to face positive or negative consequences in the process,

- and
- (2) those emotional factors (feeling important, intelligent, and powerful in the management of one's own life) which release energy in students, awaken inner drive for learning, and sustain this dynamic so that the children want to keep learning.

There is enough "immediate confirmation" to satisfy the children. Tasks are self-fulfilling because living them creatively satisfies basic intellectual needs of all students.

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Thus, success is the feeling of being alive in one's work, and learning starts whenever the child spontaneously or consciously is caught up in responding to his or her own initiative and/or courage.

This new dimension is evident early in the Workshop learning process for the child is not made to work, but now loves to learn.

Indeed, the system draws on each child's new-found self-power and self-initiative. It is the release of the power of love of learning, the greatest human energy, I believe, in the universe.

At first the teaching/learning situations are not always the source of new knowledge for everyone, but they are the source of *new* life for everyone." 

