

*What would give Grace Pilon, a first*

*grade classroom teacher most of her life, the impetus and courage to promote the WORKSHOP WAY approach she developed over 40 years? Perhaps the bits of research she compiled over the years may have helped her unabashedly to become steadfast in promoting WW as a system of human growth for education to as many teachers as would listen to her. She was ever an advocate for students and worked to alleviate the frustrations that teachers had which she knew from her own teaching first hand.*

### **Beginning Chicago Data—**

Grace Pilon's own first grade classroom data from St. Elizabeth School in Chicago from 1959-1967 pre and post tests of the Stanford Achievement Test and Pinter-Cunningham General Ability Test first alerted Pilon to the possibility of her approach being something unusual. Uncommon gains were seen that had not been present in the schools' data before her years at the school. After Grace left the school, the first grade data returned to its more ordinary, familiar pattern. (*pp. WW, 169-177*)

### **The St. Paul Data**

The St. Paul Public Schools achievement test data from 759 students who had WW for one, two, or three years with Grace Pilon as the coordinator from 1973-1975, also shows

some impressive scores. At the invitation of St. Paul, Minnesota Independent School District Superintendent George Young, Grace worked with thirty teachers in three schools.

Dr. Douglas Rose of Tulane University analyzed SRA Achievement Test scores starting in the first, second, or third grades in 1973-1975 and continued with a long range analysis of these students for the next several years. He, too, concluded that WW students' scores show a unique pattern—one that shows consistent, continual growth at an unusual rate. Of the z-score data, he remarked:

*We begin with composite z-scores because they are the best basis for a scientific assessment of overall WW impact. As with IQ scores, z-scores for groups of students are not supposed to change over time. If an individual starts with a low score and the same individual later achieves a high z-score, this is surprising. If a whole group of individuals starts with low z-scores and the same group of individuals later achieve high z-scores, this is even more surprising and unusual. (pp. WW, 177-205)*

After her St. Paul years, Grace returned to the National WW Office at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans and went full speed ahead with developing materials for teachers at all

grade levels. Teachers from several states became interested in WORKSHOP WAY and studied at Xavier University Graduate School to take courses. Teachers using WW in their classrooms across the country saw their students succeed. It became an in-house thing that WW be used to help teachers and students.

While in New Orleans, Grace's dream to have a WW school was on the way to reality after she met Judy Massey and others who became known as Friends of WORKSHOP WAY. They petitioned Orleans Parish School Board that R.T.Danneel School should become a WW magnet school in the 1987-88 school year and they were successful. Over 250 students transferred to Danneel at the advertisement that WW was a good place for students for learning and growth in behavior.

The beginning months at Danneel were very difficult, but Sr. Grace was not discouraged, and inspired the teachers and her staff to continue. She had the belief that if the WW human growth focus was consistently used, combined with the daily variety of routines using teacher artistry to preserve the dignity of learners during the growing and learning process, that eventually, students would show their growth in behavior and learning.

By February of the year, Students and teachers had settled into the WW routine. A WW serenity had become evident to visitors, faculty, and staff. The principal, Rudy Detiege, teachers, and Sr. Grace, the Friends, and WW consultants all attest to the interest in learning, the high attendance rates, the outstanding improvement in student behavior, and the learning community that became evident at the school after challenging months of overcoming huge obstacles in student behaviors.

Interestingly enough, Danneel School did not receive one extra penny from the Orleans Parish School Board for the implementation of the WW Magnet School. WW provided the teacher professional development, Sr. Grace and her staff did the consulting, and provided the materials. A state of Louisiana \$30,000 grant initiated and procured by Judy Massey paid for WW consulting services. Community members interested in seeing Danneel succeed under the umbrella of Friends of WORKSHOP WAY also contributed various kinds of assistance in services. While there are several testimonials of the growth of many students, a systematic data collection and analysis were never completed for various reasons. Growth does take time,

Pilon has reflected:

*WORKSHOP WAY evolved over a period of thirty to forty years as I kept trying to find a way to give all children person power so they could keep what they learned as they moved from grade to grade knowing they could handle the negative consequences of the educational process. It was important that they could hold on to feelings of self-worth, self-confidence in their own powers to learn and to think, and especially keep their love for learning alive from year to year. (pp. WW, 169-70)*

Many teachers from across the country have studied WW in summers with Grace Pilon and her staff and returned to their classrooms to use this approach. Pilon's files are filled with letters from

these teachers letting her know how WW has helped them, even saved their teaching careers, and how WW has helped their students who needed a new way to grow and learn in the classroom.

Much remains to be done to establish WW as a nationally recognized and research-based program that has been in use by many teachers since the early 70's. WW is recognizable, reproducible, resourceful, and resilient. If WW instructional organization could help teachers get some peace of mind in harnessing the bucking bronco of curriculum and open up the learning capacity of their students who seem to be frozen and without hope, it ought to be given a chance by national researchers! Perhaps it is time to get

WW on the research roster. It will stand up to tests of all sorts because it has time and time again.●

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