

Friday, October 31, 2008

Perfecting Personal Talents

Developing Self-Esteem: Targeting Your Students…and Their Teacher

Building self-esteem in children and developing self-esteem for teens, building parents' self-esteem, building self-esteem for the teachers who interact with students and who model mature self-esteem for them…esteem building is a "Team Sport."Creating activities that build and strengthen self-esteem in children, teens, parents and teachers requires a "Player-Coach."

There are millions of articles (in print books and on the Internet) that focus upon helping children and their families develop the positive traits that, collected together, are referred to as "self-esteem."

These traits coalesce around concepts such as confidence, esteem, a positive attitude and the mentality of a "winner." But, self-esteem is more a "state of consciousness" that the teacher wishes to "alter" in a positive direction, than a static set of traits.

And, while improving self-esteem is a process that is hidden from view and difficult to measure, it is observable and changeable (improvable) for students, parents and teachers. Methods of Observing Self-Esteem Self-esteem is measured by the tangible behaviors that teachers can observe, and by intuitive and subjective "assessments."

Self-esteem is related to (meshed with) Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Intelligences, and lots of other variables.

Splitting self-esteem into traits results in a three-dimensional matrix

But this "trait-splitting approach" is apt to leave teachers with a splitting headache…hundreds of variables across 20 to 200 students… "data fodder" for the most robust supercomputer.

Fortunately, teachers modeling positive self-esteem functions better and streamlines the process.

All a teacher has to do is observe their own internal esteem landscape, improve the "scenery" there; and draw student along to positive self-esteem. This process is called "entrainment."

The process of improving students' self-esteem involves the teacher improving his or her self-esteem. Sidebar For a description of how teachers establish rapport and bring students to a stronger and more mature development level, see the Classroom Toolkit article, Rapport Building: How Personal can your Professional Persona Be? Methods of Changing Self-Esteem In order to change children's and teens self-esteem; the teacher/ coach must change themselves. (You had to know that was coming.)

But first you have to ensure that students' basic needs are being met. This is a teacher's responsibility because, even in this land of plenty, minimum basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, nurturing and love can be scarce for some.

Sidebar Teachers have a team that can help with these basic needs, school nurse, child protective services, local charities, etc. "States-person-ship" and empathy are necessary in communicating with families that don't or can't deliver adequate care for their children. Intend to help and remain open for opportunities to do so. Expect creative, rather than stock solutions.

But, once students' basic needs are met, teachers launch lessons that meet children's' higher-order needs. These include the need for:

Acceptance by Others

Adventure and Excitement

Community Membership and Belonging to Groups

Competence in Building Skills

Freedom to Create, to Act Independently, to be Spontaneous

Personal Power and Autonomy

Security and Feelings of Personal Safety

Self-Expression through Personal Choices

Sharing, especially sharing Information, Knowledge and Skills Teachers work these needs into lesson planning and classroom management to ensure that students strive for the rewards of these intrinsic motivations.

Tangible rewards pale in appeal as compared to satisfying these innate personal needs of students.

Teachers who facilitate these needs and prompt students towards the achievement of these needs enjoy an "easy time" in directing students toward positive academic goals. More than Meets the Eye…Also the Ear, Tongue and Lips Self-esteem is more than the observable, measurable traits that can be sensed with the Five Senses.

Self-esteem centers upon IntraPersonal dynamics; and factors such as beliefs, habits, values, aspirations, and each person's spiritual quest.

Love, caring, sharing, belongingness and the response of others play a part in esteem building.

And, these self-esteem components must remain congruent with behaviors, communication and InterPersonal

interaction; otherwise other people will react negatively to dichotomies, polarities and "out-of-snyc" personality patterns. (Others will believe that the incongruent person is lying, faking, being deceitful or is being manipulative, and the others always level social pressure against an "out-of-congruence" person).

So, external and internal honesty is a foundation for self-esteem. Remember that Self-Esteem is a

Constellation Self-esteem is complex, multi-faceted and powerful.

And building, maintaining and supporting better esteem in each student is an important goal for teachers.

Teachers must also focus upon building and maintaining their own level of esteem.

Self-esteem benefits from caring, sharing, love and respect…qualities that teachers must hold and communicate in a congruent and professional way as they work to build and nurture the esteem of their students and themselves.

Positive self-esteem is contagious (easily entrained), and evidence of collective esteem building is found in the classroom of every Master Teacher.

And, leading the way, then drawing everybody to higher levels of esteem is that Master Teacher who keeps polishing, shining and harmonizing his or her own esteem. Resources To satisfy the "left-brain hunger" for cognitive content, here are links to several professional-level research-based sites.

Kids and Self-Esteem

National Association of Self-Esteem

Kids Health

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Tuesday, September 30, 2008

Perfecting Personal Talents

The Art of Teaching is about Art

Art and creative expression are central to competent, resourceful and enlightened teaching. Art is self-expression…communication beyond the tools and media used for that expression. Art is the purpose of teaching.

So, what is art?

Art is creative expression using media such as paint, ink, charcoal, water colors on canvas, paper, brick?

Art is imaginative use of sound that is produced from instruments, voice, percussion?

Art is plying and shaping clay, stone, wood, plastic, cement, iron, glass?

Art is teachingThe Experience of ArtWhat is the experience of art?

Art must communicate. Whether that communication is to an audience, to a class or to viewers who, 325,000 years in your future, travel from all parts of the globe to view scenes that you create on a cave wall.

Art is communicating across the Internet to billions of people, or to a special someone with a love poem.

Art also must be experienced by its creator. Creating art is fun, joyful, exciting. Creating art allows its creator to sidestep the feeling of time and to span the barriers of space and culture.

In some ways, art is love.

Art is expressive and transcendent. Art communicates…even across time and space.

And, art is the birthright, the innate ability, the capacity of every person.The Creation of ArtArt flows.

Sometimes art floods, surges. Sometimes art trickles and seeps.

But, art is an "inside-out" process.

Art always comes from within…whether from conscious, unconscious or higher consciousness regions of our being.

Fabrications, computer creations and natural phenomena are not art. A crystal or snowflake are not art. Art is personal, and carries the stamp of the persona that created it.

No person can create the art of another. And for its time and skill level, each work of art is the perfect expression of that person. Art is like a fingerprint, a signature…like DNA.How Art Goes AstrayArt is natural and self-rewarding. Art is sufficient unto itself.

But, art goes astray when one person tries to copy the expression of others. When this happens, art ceases and imitation begins.

Imitation art fails to express and communicate. Imitation art may seem pleasing to eye, pleasant to ear, prideful to own.

But imitation art is the hollow facade. the soulless copy, a ridicule of the real.The Purpose of Teaching ArtThe purpose of teaching art to children is to give voice to their self-concept and to help them out-picture their self-esteem.

Students are taught art, not as a way to control their voice and improve the quality of their products, but as a way to discover and express who and what they truly are.

Of course, some teachers focus upon the form and function of the expression, rather than the expression itself. In doing so, they perform a disservice to their students, and they rob others of the benefit of linking to the person of that student…either in the now, or in a time closer or farther in the future from now.SidebarThe one area that we have yet to discover a method for art communication is with the past. That is, we do not know of a means of sharing artistic expression with folks in the past. Art communicates to the now, and to the future.The Art of TeachingTeaching is art.

Teaching is the teacher's self-expression, therefore, great teaching must be artistic teaching.

And, as caring, love and respect for students merges with class content; unique and creative ideas flow, moment by moment, from teacher to student.

The Master Teacher is a performer. Whether a conductor, musician, singer, dancer or actor.

And there is an energy that passes between the Master Teacher and the apprentice students.

Content is imparted, but ideals and images are inculcated in full measure.

The Master Teacher responds to students, the communication is two-way, and students and teacher are in rapport.

Artistic communication is congruent, with communicator and recipient in congruent interaction.

The delivery of the lesson, and the learning of the lesson are also timeless.

Teacher and students lose track of time, and interruption and schedule requirements are disappointments. Attempts to capture and recreate that particular artistic experience fail.

The best that can be attained is to create and express new art anew, with each successive lesson.

There is no capturing and bottling teaching as art.

A new day, a different subject, students sitting in different places…there is no going back. There is only a new creation, a new expression…new art.

Teaching is high-level self-expression, and high-level art. Learn to prize the artist that you are.

And learn to accept and enjoy the self-expressions of your students.

It is amazing how the subtle artistry of teaching has such a solid and concrete impact on the learning of your students.

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Sunday, August 31, 2008

Perfecting Personal Talents

Teacher Creativity and Idea Incubation

Creative people may be quick of wit and nimble of tongue; but, creative people are patient people. The reason that patience pays off for creative folks much better than the dimmer sparkle of their less novel family, friend and colleagues is that creative folks have mastered the art and science of idea incubation. And the incubation process seems deceptively simple. After an intense, sometimes long-duration focus upon problem-solving; idea-creation-pondering, contemplating, grappling…the onslaught toward a solution is stopped, abandoned, shelved, put on hold.

Then, after a while, the image of the solution just "pops" into consciousness, the "aha-moment" strikes. This happens when rational defenses are preoccupied…when idle thoughts or mindless routines place the executive brain in "neutral." Like Spinning Straw into Gold…as we Sleep Creative people almost feel guilty that the ideas, solutions, innovations, inventions (that their inner-mind devises) didn't come from themselves…guilty that they didn't take part in the …work… of developing the creative expression that just revealed itself.

The often full-blown answer appears to just "pop in" to this universe from another dimension…from the unseen to the seen.

Of course, the work had been completed hours, days, weeks earlier. And the cause and effect connection between the solution and the earlier priming of the creative process is invisible and may never be discovered. Transformation, but not Magic Even the elves need straw before they can work their gold-generating magic. And, the inner mind, the incognito dynamo that powers the creative process, also needs raw materials.

Fortunately, those raw materials are the "stuff" that learning is made of; and, the more "idea raw materials," the better.

The reason that "smarter" people seem to be more creative is that smarter people have more "idea-fuel" and "idea-fodder" to work with. No Monopoly on Learning Channels and Multiple Intelligences Creative thought and creative expression might seem to give an edge o the channels that construct knowledge, but creative ideas are as likely to cross learning modalities as they are to remain in the person's most-favored mode of thought.

This means that multi-sensory, Multiple Intelligences-type examinations of thought and ideas should foster creative output. But, the process is less than predictable, and more dynamic.

Therefore, the best strategy for setting up, launching, then harvesting creative output is the "intent" to accomplish this "miracle thought processing" on a deadline, or to meet time requirements. Voyage Destinations: Taking Creative Thought where No One has Gone Before Some folks believe that creativity involves the evolution of ideas, or that creativity encompasses combinations of concepts that no-one has ever thought before. But empirical evidence suggests that truly new ideas seem to burst fourth around the globe at about the same time.

Amazing! Without collaboration! And each innovator believes that they were the first; believes that the others, thieves, stole their "original" idea.

Of course, this is narrow (anti-creative) thinking. Creativity is much like what happens when the Spring season awakens dormant blossoms. No blossom claims that they are the first to emerge from their seed-buds. Countless flowers bubble up, in the same way that heat on the bottom of a cooking pot brings fourth effervescent action. Neither blossoms nor bubbles stake their claim to being first, and self-aware creative people know that ideas just come to them like fleeting waves on a sandy beach. Sidebar But ideas cannot be owned by anyone. And, that is the reason that ideas are ineligible for copyright protection. But, the form that the ideas are expressed in are eligible for copyright.

The exact rendering of ideas in identical forms is unlikely. The reason: There are too many permutations and combinations of intelligences at play when the ideas are filtered into form and action.

So, rather than believing that you are in sole possession of a unique idea, beating everyone else to the finish line; just set the idea into form, knowing that, out of 100 others who "receive" the same ideas, 97 or 98 will do nothing with it. You may not be able to claim "first-thought" for an idea, but you can certainly be the first to "take action."

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Thursday, July 31, 2008

Perfecting Personal Talents

Personal Goals and Professional Skills

If teaching was a science, then meticulous practice could be driven by observable, measurable skill-set checklists. This might be similar to the pre-flight, in-flight and landing routine checks that professional pilots tick off as each step is encountered.

But, such and approach fails if an artist is painting a portrait or a landscape, or if a musician is composing.

An artist's sketchbook contains ideas, experiments, what-ifs, compositions, composites, trial designs, juxtapositions, perspectives.

What is important is the freedom to express, the freedom to experience and the freedom to make errors…flexibility, choice…options.

Musicians play, create snippets, test melodies, compare harmonies, balance chords…play (as in the sense of enjoyment of activities as a child enjoys).

A by-the-numbers painting or a by-a-formula song lacks texture, layers, depth, intricacy.

And, the emotions of human experience are absent, too.

Human Experience means Mistakes

So, does a teacher perfect teaching skills by allow the imperfection that is associated with experimentation, experience, exploration?

The answer: Personal Goals and Professional Skills are developed in a manner similar to sailing a boat. When sailing a boat, winds gust and change direction, currents push one way or the other, waves drive (or push back), and weights shift. In addition, navigation sometimes uses the sun and a compass, sometimes stars and maps.

But even when the port is in sight, the course heading requires constant adjustment.

But the goal (the port) is kept in sight as adjustments to the heading are made. This is the model of improvement talents and skills…by focusing upon a goal or destination, keeping your bearings pointed toward that goal, and gathering course-correcting feedback along the way.

Feedback is the self-correction mechanism that we use to reach our goals.

But, focusing on getting everything "right and perfect" the first time does not speed us toward our goals. Rather, waiting to get everything perfect, or over correcting before we start, retards our progress and stagnates our performance improvement.

Visualization and Rehearsal

Fortunately, the learning capacity of the human system is more efficient than a sailboat. For one thing, each return to port requires a trip away from port. This is time consuming. Second, conditions are always different. The tides and currents differ each day by 50 minutes, and the wind and weather change in abrupt disdain.

But, the human mind and emotions can practice success with imagery and mental rehearsal. And, as the mental practice progresses, the speed of the practice can accelerate.

This means that learning time (the dreaded learning curve) can be shortened. And this also means that more complex, intricate and valuable skills can be developed.

Even better, mental rehearsal responds to the specific details of your individual learning style. This means that you are the world's greatest expert about how you learn.

Besides that, the learning that you can acquire, the skills and abilities that you can perfect, are limited only by the models that you can install within your mental system; and by the patterns that you can practice.

Since models and mental practice are unrestrained by "shouldn't do, can't do, must not do" boundaries; your ability to learn is "limitless." Restraints of Conscience There are restraints to the "shouldn't do, can't do, must not do" boundaries; but these have to do with "ethical, moral, legal and professional" constraints.

For example, classroom behavior management is a learnable skills. But, coercion, domination, brainwashing and subversion fail to meet the test of professional behavior. And these tactics may cross ethical or moral lines, or fail to meet legal standards. Sidebar The subject of Mental Rehearsal deserves an article of its own,. Expect a major article in an upcoming issue of Classroom Toolkit. The mental rehearsal process relies upon vivid and meticulous attention to details, just like actual, practical applications do. But, practice speeds can accelerate and multiple practice sessions can occur in a compressed timeframe. Creative Imagination Creative Imagination is the mental rehearsal process that is carried out to its most useful conclusion.

Creative Imagination builds an experience from outcomes "as though those outcomes have already happened."

This is a process of carrying mental rehearsal to its "illogical conclusion." There is nothing connected to magical outcomes of intense imagery with real-world occurrences, yet strong intentions paired with multi-sensory imagination for the "event as already happened" precipitates amazing stories and successes. Sidebar Creative Imagination deserves a feature article of its own, and will be the subject of an upcoming Classroom Toolkit article, too.

Note: Classroom Toolkit explored the limitation of cognitive-academic learning (and the unlimited potential of the human psyche) in a previous newsletter article, *Unlearn what you Learned in College: A Quick Way to Improve Teaching Effectiveness* Summary Whatever the personal or professional skill that you aspire to, the most intricate skill sets can be expanded, developed and improved by visualizing, mental rehearsal and Creative Imagination. Amaze yourself by practicing this most important skill of personal improvement.

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Monday, June 30, 2008

Perfecting Personal Talents

Creativity: Fountain of Ideas…Temple of Awe

Left-brain exercises, with vise-like squeezes of words and ideas, struggle to cage a crafty and elusive creativity. But the tools designed to capture creativity; i.e., words and language, prove to be elastic bars of putty and smoke. Creativity remains aloof and a large, dancing inside, dancing outside, dancing around and through the nets that language sets to trap and capture it.

But why constrain and constrict and mold what's fresh and free? Compartmentalizing creativity, dissecting its processes…as though it was an object, turns its active and dynamic energy into stagnant short circuits, converts exciting into boring, transforms alive and growing into frozen and dried out.

An animal, alive and pacing is creative…a taxidermy (mummy of its former self) is the equivalent of creativity defined and analyzed.

Creativity is like a barnstorming--bi-wing airplane…shuddering, dangling, spinning and thrilling. Definitions of creativity are like commercial airlines with flight paths, schedules, control towers and taxi lanes.

Of course, no one wants the jumbo jet's landing gears to be tickling trees on the airport approach. Sparking run-ins with fighter-interceptor Top-Guns over military air space is equally to be avoided. So, avoid danger. But, freezing and capturing creativity by taking the over-safe route, by avoiding heart-pounding, white-knuckle, out-of-breath exhilaration is the boring path.

On the other hand, simile and metaphor fail to save lives when simple commands such as, "Stop! Turn Right, Duck!" are called for. Times of real danger call for stock phrases, drilled routines and canned responses. Real Experience Creativity bubbles up from a primal, intuitive, organic spring within our conscious (and unconscious) experiences.

Creativity is like a well. You can tap into it, prime a pump (incubate ideas and solutions) and dip out refreshment. You can also stop it up, poison it, pressurize it, and let it go to waste after you have drained it.

And just as a spring or underground river forms from a myriad of cracks, fissures, pools and reservoirs, sinkholes and cisterns; creativity wells up from myriad constellations of impulses, images, memories and intuitions within human consciousness.

And just as different methods find water…dowsers, test wells, study of hydrology land forms, blind luck…so too many methods turn the creativity spigot to the flow-position.

How each teacher stakes claim to the wellspring of creativity that lies within; how creativity surges with a desire to spout fountains, geysers or hydrants of creative expression; this is our unique stamp…our creative expression.

How each person stakes claim to the wellspring of creativity that is within represents access, but not source.

The articles in subsequent issues of the Classroom Toolkit Newsletter will examine these creative abilities…from many angles, from views with multiple perspectives…discoveries sounded as shouts, echoes, whispers, or thunder crashes.

Prepare for stories, sagas odysseys, explorations and sojourns into the unlimited abilities of psychic and creative consciousness.

Your journey to creative expression begins within. So, let's begin, now.

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