

Focus on Youth

by Lou Tice

Since the early 1970's, when Diane and I formalized the cognitive education I had been teaching, The Pacific Institute has continually focused its attention on the youth of the world. When I would do a seminar for a corporation, I would consistently hear the remark, "Why didn't I have this information when I was a kid, and how can I get it for my kids?" In our early days, we didn't have a program, per se, for kids. As I worked with them, I would simply translate the concepts myself, so that they could be understood and practiced.

In the ensuing years, the Institute has developed several programs for youth, including the *Pathways*[®] series, *Increasing Your Causative Power*[®] and the most recent program for ages five to 12, *Achieving Your Potential Through Education*[®]. Each program is focused on raising the self-esteem of the individual, as well as enhancing their self-efficacy – the individual's opinion of their ability to make things happen. Research conducted by Dr. Albert Bandura, of Stanford University, has shown that an individual's *belief* in their ability to perform a task largely determines if the task will even be *attempted*.¹

You see, in all human beings, our thoughts accumulate to become beliefs. These beliefs, then, accumulate to become attitudes, which are reinforced by our self-talk. Now, we've all heard how kids tend to talk to each other, clear up through the teenage years – negative, devaluative and demeaning – and they are harder on themselves than they are on those around them. Given one negative (often erroneous) belief (most likely given to you by someone else), that is constantly reinforced by confirming negative self-talk, and you have an attitude that won't let you even attempt math or writing, despite the fact that you truly do have an aptitude for the subject!

Our youth programs create awareness in each child of the beliefs being held and allow time for decisions about the correctness, or truth, of those beliefs. Then, the participants learn the value of positive self-reinforcement (self-talk). This goes a long way towards helping the child to change attitudes that are keeping that child from fulfilling their potential in school and in life. Studies have shown that children as young as four years old, and certainly six or seven, can understand the concept of inner speech², or self-talk, and can learn how to use it to build their confidence in themselves and their ability to take on challenges.

Results – *Achieving Your Potential Through Education*[®]

In a pilot study with a local elementary school, Schmitz Park, intermediate results showed a marked improvement in the attitudes of the students toward school in general and class subjects in particular, as well as their relationships at home. Clearly, they understood the concepts of self-talk and goal-setting and were able to apply them to school and home.

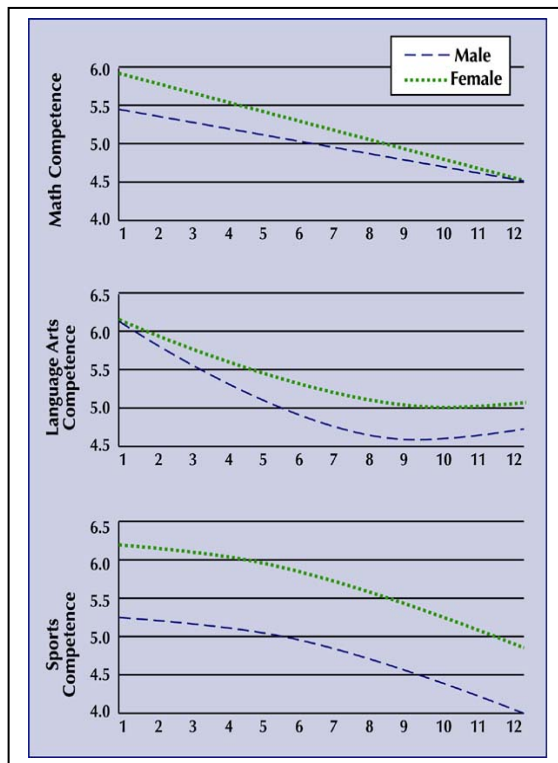
Results from an informal questionnaire showed that parents were delighted with the change in attitudes toward school, and behaviors at home, displayed by their children. School was no longer a "have-to" – their sons and daughters *looked forward* to going to school.

In the United Kingdom, over 40% of the schools include one of our youth programs, starting at age five, in their education system. With *Investment in Excellence*[®] forming the foundation for administrators and teachers, the youth programs are an integral part of community regeneration projects. The same holds true for nearly 400 schools in Northern Ireland, where our information is being used to bridge the culture gaps between Catholic, Protestant and other religious groups. Sue Sayles, President (2001-2002) of the National Association of Head Teachers (U.K.), sums it up this way:

“It is no exaggeration to state that Investment in Excellence would be the most powerful tool that this government could give to the teaching profession. It would empower and inspire teachers, and unleash a raft of untapped talent and potential which could only benefit schools, communities and their pupils.”

I think you will agree with me that the more confident we can make our children in the elementary grades, the better they will be at facing the challenges of middle school and high school. With the “can do” attitude reflected by those kids at Schmitz Park Elementary, as well as in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, I can confidently predict far higher performance than if they had had no contact with our information.

Results – Pathways[®] and Increasing Your Causative Power[®]



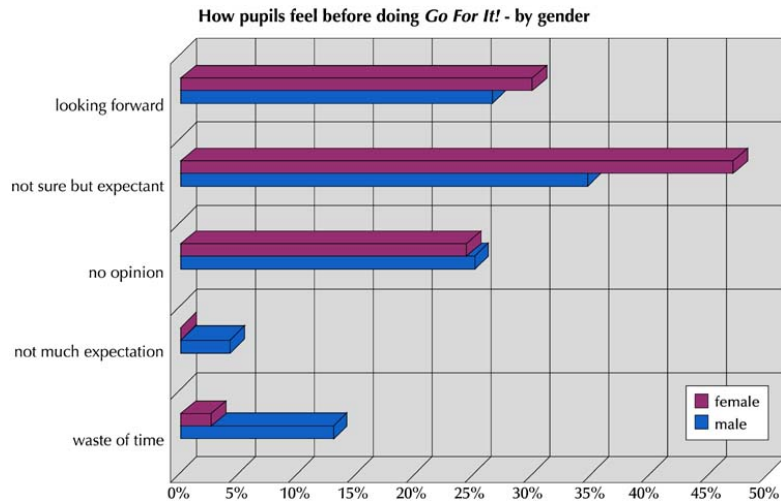
One would hope that as our children grow up, and adjust to the demands of education and learning, as they become more aware of the world around them, their self-confidence grows also. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as demonstrated by a recent study done with 761 children, from grades one through twelve³. The study subjects were chosen from 10 schools in a large Midwest city, largely middle class and 53% girls/47% boys. Self-confidence, or self-efficacy, was measured in mathematics, language arts and sports and was determined by responses to a questionnaire administered each spring.

The astonishing results (graphs at left) revealed that the children’s self-confidence actually decreased as they got older, regardless of their gender. What seems to be missing from the schools’ curriculum is not the “three R’s” but the cognitive skills that actually build self-confidence, or self-efficacy.

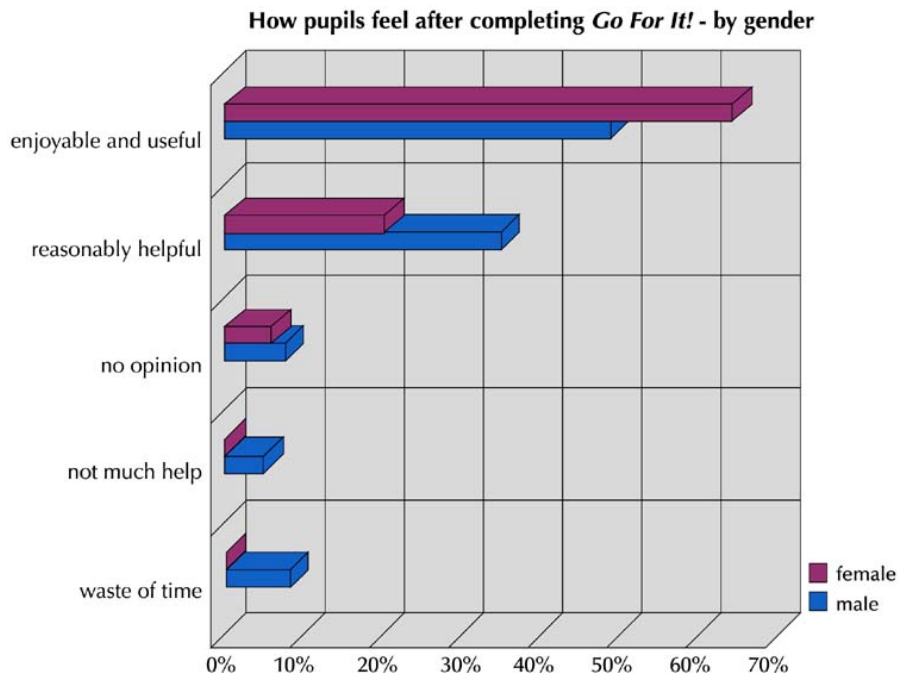
Over the years, The Pacific Institute’s youth programs have had a dramatic effect not just on the academic lives of their participants, but on their relationships with others and their confidence in a successful future. One 8th grade class who received the *Pathways* program, over the ensuing five years, was able to increase its aggregate grade point average from 2.40 to 3.20 – a boost of 25%. Perhaps even more impressive was what the principal noted: “The kids realized that they were in control of their own lives.” Parents called the school about the changes in their children.

Their sons and daughters were treating their siblings with respect and taking accountability for their actions – in short, the parents were amazed.

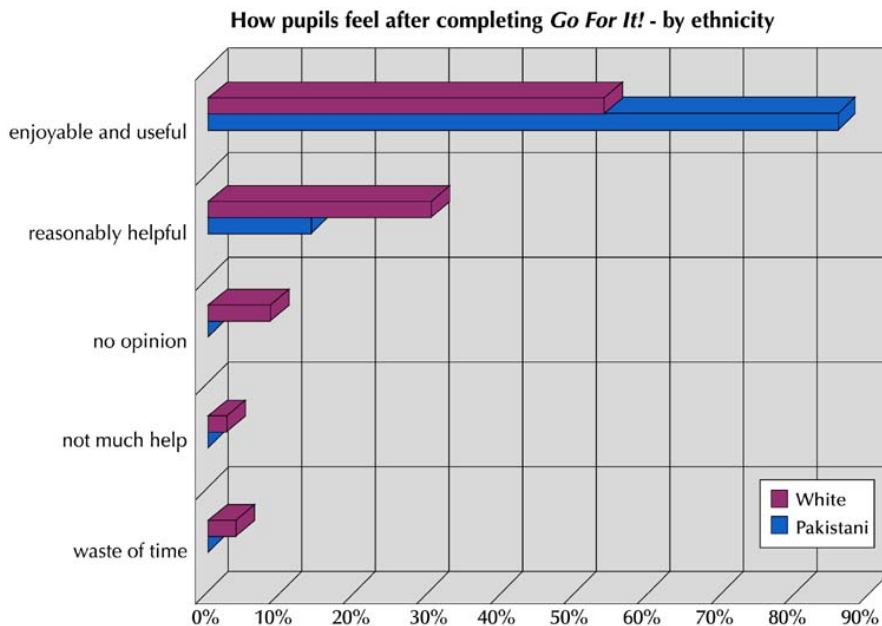
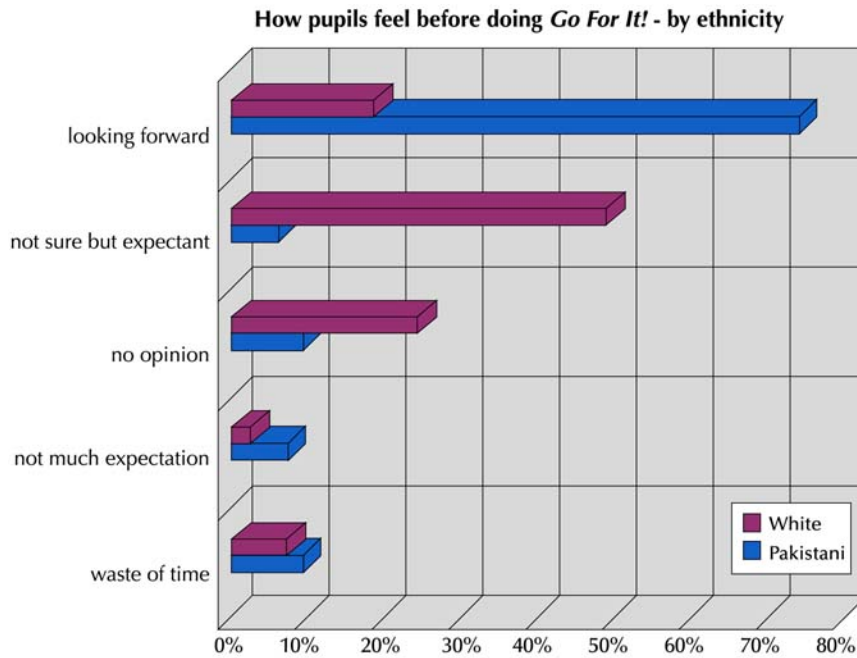
Also, I can report that our youth programs are actively embraced by teens far beyond the shores of the United States. In the United Kingdom, *Go For It!* (derived from *Pathways*) is enjoying tremendous success and powerful results. In a study done by our office on the effects of the program on Year 10 students at Thistley Hough High School in Stoke-on-Trent, prior to the implementation of *Go For It!*, only 26% of the boys and 30% of the girls were actively “looking forward” to it. Another 34% and 46% respectively were “not sure but open minded.”



After the program, 49% of boys and 64% of girls found it “enjoyable and useful” with another 33% and 21% respectively finding it “reasonably helpful.” When all was said and done, only 7% of the boys and *none* of the girls found it had been of no value.



Ethnicity does not seem to be a factor in the acceptance and use of the curriculum concepts, either. Results from the Thistley Hough group were also divided by ethnicity, between white and Pakistani populations. In the following graphs, you will see that there is a marked – and positive – difference between the two groups, with 71% of the Pakistani group actively “looking forward” to the program, compared to 20% of the white group. Another 5% and 49% respectively were “not sure but expectant.”



After involvement with the program, 86% of the Pakistani group and 55% of whites found it “enjoyable and useful” with another 14% and 31% respectively finding it “reasonably helpful.” It is worth noting that *none* of the Pakistani group had a negative comment about the course. This is

further evidence supporting our decision to make this information available to the youth of South Africa, initially in the seven (7) Centers for Excellence schools in Soweto, through the Institute's office in Johannesburg.

Not only is there a proven *need* for our critical thinking skills education, but a deep *desire* on the part of the world's youth for positive information that will help them live happy and fulfilled lives.

Serving the “Hard to Serve”

Despite the best efforts of parents, teachers and school administrators, some kids remain a challenge to traditional education situations. Unfortunately, these kids too often end up on some form of welfare, or in some form of correctional facility. Most need to get their GED before they can get employment, so the agencies we work with, in addition to their academic studies programs, offered *Increasing Your Causative Power*[®] or *Achieving Your Potential – Youth*[®]. These kids develop that “can do” attitude that allows them to move beyond their past and into productive, successful futures.

Many of these programs are run during the summer through local job training centers, such as the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, which has generated some tremendous results. With typical results, one particular group showed that *71% achieved Academic Competency*. After just nine classroom hours of our cognitive education, Academic Skill Level *improvement increased 1.81 grade levels* (against a .64 grade level increase the year before), based on improvements of:

- 1.35 grade levels in Reading (nearly a 200% increase)**
- 1.69 grade levels in Math (over a 260% increase)**
- 2.49 grade levels in Language (nearly a 400% increase)**

In this same class, a Special Ed student's progress is particularly noteworthy. Having just completed the 10th Grade, he showed the following scores:

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Language</u>
Beginning Scores	4.1	3.4	1.9
Ending Scores	7.7	12.9	5.0
Improvement	3.6	9.5	3.1

This student told his instructor that he had learned a great deal during summer school. In fact, the instructor reported that on the last day, she had a great deal of difficulty getting this student to go home! Additional benefits of the program include a significantly higher “wage at hire” for those who have taken one of The Pacific Institute's programs.

Comments from the Trenches

There are a multitude of “before and after” stories, including:

- For “Travis,” *before* meant cutting class and poor grades; *after* meant better attendance, better grades, better family relationships, a job, a car and goals for adult life.
- For “Shawn” (whose principal admitted that Shawn had been “a disagreeable little twerp”), *before* meant that “life sucks” and not caring; *after* became better grades, better attendance and a basic change in the way he saw the world.

- “Chris” recounts a huge boost in self-confidence, with shyness beginning to dissolve, a listing on the Honor Roll and enough credits to graduate early.

As one director of a Local Area Network put it, the *Pathways* program used there, “is a positive approach to addressing youth issues and enhancing and nurturing strengths, as opposed to the usual approach of identifying problem areas, or only looking at what is *wrong*, and then focusing efforts on the reduction of these problems.”

With the students in the Thistley Hough study, it wasn’t just about doing better in school, but feeling better prepared for life, having the skills and confidence they will need to succeed, and making them better decision-makers.

Conclusion

The pressures on our children are, perhaps, greater than they have ever been. Often, we tell them they have to learn to “deal with” the pressure, without giving them any clue as to how to do this. What they need is a thorough understanding of *why* they are feeling the pressure, *why* they react the way they do, and that they truly are *in control* of the choices they make.

There is much truth in the saying that “knowledge is power.” Knowledge of the way the human mind works, knowledge that they can control how they react to what happens to them, and knowledge that they can set the course for their own futures is the kind of power we want to give our children. As adults, we are counting on them to constantly improve what they have inherited from us – to make this a better world. Is it not vitally important that we give them the tools to do this?

***If you want to build a better world,
then build a better you.***

References

- ¹ Bandura, A. (1994) *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York; Freeman.
- ² Flavell, John H.; Green, Frances L.; Flavell, Eleanor R.; and Grossman, James B.; “The Development of Children’s Inner Speech,” *Child Development*, Feb. 1997, Volume 68, Number 1, pages 39-47.
- ³ Jacobs, Janis E.; Lanza, Stephanie; Osgood, D. Wayne; Eccles, Jacquelynne S.; and Wigfield, Allan; “Children’s Self-Competence,” *Child Development*, March/April 2002, Volume 73, pages 509-527.

Additional Resources

The LETTER, *Go For It! – The Thistley Hough High School Personal Development Program*, Winter 2000. Editor: Glenn Terrell, Ph.D. Published by The Pacific Institute, Inc., Seattle, WA.

The LETTER, *Children’s Self-Competence*, Spring 2002. Editor: Glenn Terrell, Ph.D. Published by The Pacific Institute, Inc., Seattle, WA