

November 21, 2008

CCT 692 – Research and Engagement

Peter Taylor

Sheila O’Shea-Resto

Final Paper

Title: “Study Skills for Screw-ups” An Incomplete Book for Teenagers and a Report for My Peers

Preface:

I know who you are.

If you’re reading this book, on some level, you’re not feeling good about yourself, and, particularly, you’re not feeling good about how you’re doing in school. Maybe you’ve missed a home-work or two, maybe many. Maybe your test scores remain low despite your best study efforts. Maybe you’ve begun to lie to others to cover up your perceived inadequacies, and probably, most importantly, you’ve been lying to yourself, telling yourself that school isn’t important, “No one uses Algebra in the real world anyway.”

I know who you are because I was you, a screw-up, the daughter of a Math teacher and an English teacher and sister to siblings that achieved impossible grades in school. As for me, I hated school.

For as long as I can remember, school was a source of anguish for me, a place that seemed to confirm all that I had come to believe about myself. Even my mom used to joke that “you could wallpaper a room with Sheila’s pink slips.” As a Catholic school student, I remember the admonitions to “pay attention”, the angry red pen scratched across the top of my math tests next to some hurtful comment or judgment probably meant to motivate me to do better. It had the opposite effect. Over the years, I began to believe what those comments and test scores suggested. Somehow, I just wasn’t smart enough. I recall, at times, thinking “how could this be”? How is it that one, lame duck member of the family could manage to fail miserably at school while other family members brought home straight “A”s. And, the daughter of two teachers, no less!

Whatever the cause, I learned to protect myself and my delicate ego. I sat in the back of classes to avoid being called on. I never knew the answers anyway. And I left doing my homework until the last possible minute. “Why bother”, I thought, what’s the point, even when I do my homework, I don’t do well”! As the years passed, Junior High School, High School, I became more and more emotionally disconnected and disengaged from school. So disconnected, in fact that I managed to convince myself that I just didn’t care anymore.

The truth is I did care. And if you’re reading this book, I know you care too. You’re tired of lying to others about the many causes of your missing homework or making excuses for why you are flunking your classes. But most of all, you’re tired of lying to yourself. You know you want to succeed in school but you have no idea how to do that!

Well, you've come to the right place. In the pages that follow, I will reveal some of the causes of your academic struggles, low self-esteem and lack of motivation, show you how to address these causes and turn your academic life around!

Who am I? I am a Master certified tutor and on the Board of Directors of the National Tutoring Association. I am an author and scholar, graduating with distinction from a university in Boston, where I maintained dean's list status in two majors while holding down three academic jobs. I have presented at schools, conferences and universities across the country, and, most recently won the award for most outstanding contribution to the field of tutoring.

*But, most importantly, I am someone who understands what you are going through, and I am here to tell you that **turning your situation around is easier than you think!** But before we get into all that, let's talk about how you got here to begin with?*

The Negative Learning Cycle – How You Got Where You Are

The Negative Learning Cycle is a cycle of perception, emotion, reinforcement and belief that begins early in a student's academic career and has the power to completely undermine a student's self-esteem and motivation. It begins with the student's perception, judgment and interpretation of what is occurring in an academic environment, such as the classroom. *In other words, when you were young, you saw lots of things that seemed to suggest something to you and you believed them even though they were not true.* For example, let's say that a teacher has posed a question to your class and is scanning the classroom looking for an answer to her question. Now suppose that the question

confused you in some way but that you were not quite sure why or how? You're careful not to show your own confusion as you scan the room to see if anyone else seems lost. And, seeing confused faces, you may feel validated and relieved, that indeed, the information *was* confusing. *But, what if you find no confused faces, or worse, what if you notice that some students are eagerly waving their hands, ready to give the obvious answer?* Now, let's say that this scenario repeats itself again and again throughout your school years. Chances are you're feeling less than smart. You may begin to demonstrate this in your behaviors which your disappointed teachers interpret as "lazy" or "careless". And then, the final blow, your grades, which seem to confirm what you have suspected, deep down, all along. "I am stupid!" For years, you carry the burden of this "deep, dark, secret" all the while building your defenses and shaping your behavior to avoid anything and anyone that threatens to confirm what you believe about yourself. And through the years this negative cycle continues to eat away at your feelings of self-worth and self-esteem, like a whirling tornado, becoming stronger as it turns, the negative learning cycle has the power to destroy your academic career and your hopes of a bright future.

Uncovering Learning Myths

The problem is that for however many years you have been in school, you have been operating under a cloud of misperception - the notion that you are less than intelligent, which is, not only a distortion of the truth, it is an outright lie since it is impossible for a healthy brain to be anything but brilliant! What is most interesting, however, is that this intellectual inferiority complex is not relegated to a small portion of the population. In fact, despite research to the contrary, a great majority of people, perhaps you included, continue to believe that, not only are they not intelligent, but that their

intelligence cannot be improved and that others are likely *more* intelligent than they are. Jean Marie Stine, author of “Double Your Brain Power” believes that this phenomenon, to some extent, is one that every person from the average student to child prodigies and even geniuses experience. In fact, Stine believes that the lack of confidence in our learning ability is due to the inferior manner in which we are taught in the classroom and the fact that we are not a witness to other’s learning failures as we are to our own. Therefore it is only our faulty “perception” of events surrounding us that makes us feel less than intelligent, rather than any rational proof of intellectual inferiority. In other words, “it’s all in your head”, literally. The truth is, as Stine and others point out, we were all born to learn. In fact the brain’s own physiology is proof positive of this. To prove it, let’s take a look at some facts about the brain.

- The storage capacity of the brain is sufficient to record a thousand new bits of information every second from birth to old age, and still have room to spare. Recent experiments suggest we may in fact remember everything that happens to us.
- The average adult human brain consists of some 12,000 to 15,000 million nerve cells (15,000,000,000). That is about three times the entire population of the earth.
- Scientists like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi have proved anyone – and that includes you – can be an instant learner. You already have all the critical abilities, they are hardwired into your brain. For instance, research shows it takes only one tenth of a second for us to understand the spoken or printed word.
- The human brain has about 100 billion neurons. With an estimated average of one thousand connections between each neuron and its neighbors, we have about 100 trillion connections, each capable of simultaneous calculation.

- Your brain generates enough electricity to power a lightbulb
- Neurons send information to your brain at more than 150 miles an hour
- Your brain is faster and more powerful than a supercomputer

So, now that you understand what your brain is truly capable of, let's clear your mind of some other, long held learning myths that you may have.

Myth #1 - Intelligence is fixed at birth. You either have it or you don't

The Truth: New research on the brain shows that heredity plays a much less important role than once thought. Furthermore, the latest brain theory, called "plasticity", shows that the brain is capable of increasing its intelligence in a number of ways through mental exercise and proper nutrition.

Myth #2 - The dumb kids are always confused and make lots of errors

The Truth: Confusion is the sign of an intelligent brain! When we feel confused, it is the brain's way of telling us "something does not compute." Furthermore, we don't become confused because we are not smart. Rather, *confusion is caused to us by outside circumstances*. Finally, good thinking involves both confusion and error! However, the best thinkers and learners work out much of their confusion and correct their errors before taking a test or passing in a paper.

Myth #3 - If you forget things, you are stupid

The Truth: Memory and intelligence are two different things. Though a strong memory better supports superior learning and therefore increased intelligence and a weak memory tends to lead to inferior learning and a lowered intelligence. Therefore, as students, we can increase our intelligence if we, say, review our notes each day. However, if, memory decided our intelligence we would all be in big trouble! For instance, Einstein, once, couldn't remember his home address when asked for it. Somehow, I don't think anyone would consider him stupid.

Myth #4 – Smart kids don't have to study

The Truth: Information does not get in through our skin. (Though that would be nice!) Instead, we must acquire information through one of our five senses; sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste. So, it is not possible for someone who did not study to somehow know the information. However, having worked with many of these “smart kids who don't study”, over the years, I can tell you what *is* possible. It is possible that the student acquired the information from another source, for example, I had a student who did really well in history without studying for tests and I found out later on that he was an almost obsessive fan of the history channel. This student knew more than the teacher did about World War I & II! It is possible that the student learned the material in an earlier grade and has a good memory. It is possible that the student figured out what the teacher would be looking for on a test and focused on that information. Lot's of things are possible, but

doing well on a test for which one had absolutely *NO* exposure to the test materials, is *not* possible.

Myth #5 - If you're getting low grades, you're one of the dumb kids

The Truth: If you are getting low grades, you are engaging in negative academic habits, such as: Not reviewing notes, not doing homework, not meeting with teachers etc. etc. When you become aware of what negative academic habits you have and turn them into positive daily academic habits, your grades will come back up. If you get really good at knowing the obstacles in your way and changing your behaviors to address these obstacles – one big way of doing this is to read this book and follow the advice in it – you will achieve higher grades than you ever dreamed possible! My students are a testament to this. The majority of them started out with D's and F's and, after changing their negative academic habits to the key positive academic habits that I describe in this book, they achieved and continue to maintain Dean's list status, year after year.

Now that we've talked about what your brain is *really* capable of and debunked some of the myths that may have led you to believe that you're not as smart as you really are, it's time to reveal the number one secret of high achieving students, that is:

ALL SUCCESS IS A RESULT OF YOUR HABITS !

Yes. It really is that simple, sort of. You see habits are just behaviors, like brushing your teeth, that have been repeated so many times that they have become automatic, that is, we don't have to think about doing them, we automatically do them. But, to really understand the importance of habits in our long term success or failure, consider the following negative habits:

- Over-eating
- Procrastination
- Over-spending

For each of these negative behaviors, there is, often, no immediate consequence. However, to really understand the full impact of these behaviors over time, you must consider where a person might be five years down the line, ten, twenty! The short term effects of over-eating, fullness, lethargy, are not enough to get us to stop doing it, because there is a payoff in the short term – food tastes good! But, rarely is a negative habit the result of a one time behavior. So let's consider where one might be if one overeats at every meal, day after day, week after week and year after year. Imagine yourself five, ten or even twenty years down the road, having over-eaten at every meal you have had put in front of you. You are 500 lbs., with a number of life threatening health problems. You cannot stand for more than a minute or walk even a short distance, which has impacted every area of your life. You would like to go visit your children, but you cannot fit into a plane seat. You're miserable, sick and desperate, wondering how on earth you got to where you are.

How about over-spending? You charge lots of cloths and other “must have” items on your charge card each day. Now project that into the future 5 years, 10, 20! Where are you? You are where most of the country is right now, in mounds of debt that you cannot seem to get out from under. How about smoking? Okay, okay! You get it, right!?

Well, the same habits principle is behind either success or failure in school. You see, your grades are not so much a reflection of your intelligence, as we’ve already pointed out, intelligence is your birthright! But your grades are a reflection of your habits, *the behaviors you practice on a daily basis*. So, let’s take a look at some of the negative habits that can seriously affect your grades once your report card rolls around:

- Procrastination and/or avoidance as it pertains to homework and studying for tests
- Not writing things down in your agenda book
- Not managing your time, especially long term assignments
- Lack of organization on a daily basis
- Not asking questions for clarification in class
- Not seeing teachers after class
- Not taking notes
- Not reviewing notes

And the list goes on and on...

In my twenty years of tutoring, I have never seen a student with these behaviors succeed in school no matter how smart they were!

That's a pretty strong statement, but it's true. Now to be fair, each of us as students occasionally battles procrastination or the occasional lapse in memory for a given task. But this is far different than chronically engaging in these negative behaviors. And, wait! Before you say it, I know what you're thinking, "I have gotten away with it! I do this stuff all the time!" But have you really "gotten away" with anything? Didn't you eventually need to lie to cover up your negative behaviors? Be honest. And, eventually, didn't you need to change the way you do things to cover up the mess you created by lying about everything? Let's face it, spending your life trying to dodge all the problems that negative habits create is *no way to live!* So, let's buckle down and establish rule for academic success #1.

Rule #1 - A high achieving student understands that *consistency is the key to success* and, will call himself on a negative behavior, correct the behavior and get back on track immediately!

Changing Habits is Simple! – Sort of...

At this point you might be thinking, "well, if success is about habits then all I need to do is change my habits and I will be successful!" Well yes and no. You see, habits are not the easiest thing to change. According to psychologists, this is because our usual habits, those behaviors we have repeated year after year have become, through repetition, hardwired into our brain. That's right! Over time, our brain begins to rewire itself in response to our repeated behaviors or habits. This is why long standing habits are engaged in automatically, a phenomenon called

“automaticity”. You might recognize automaticity operating in your own life by taking a look at your morning routine. Chances are if you have the same routine each morning, you do some things without even thinking about them. And though automaticity is great if you have positive behaviors, it is not so great if you wish to change negative behaviors. In fact, it can be downright frustrating! To illustrate just how difficult it is to break an old habit, psychologists use the example of very thick, multi-stranded rope. Now imagine cutting through this rope with a butter knife! Do you get the picture?

The good news is that you can increase your chances of developing more positive academic habits by following a few simple guidelines:

1. **Keep Habits Simple!** – To get organized, you may learn to log your daily assignments, then create a weekly assignment sheet, then log this information onto a monthly sheet. Though this strategy will indeed lead to your getting better organized, it will be difficult to establish as a habit, because it is too complex. A better idea is to begin with a simple and quick method for organizing your work. Then, when you have mastered the simple technique, set up an additional organization goal to achieve in addition to your mastered routine.

2. **Change Between 1-3 Habits at a Time** - One of the mistakes well meaning study skills books make is that they bombard students with a huge number of study skills to acquire in a very short period of time. This is NOT realistic in terms of successful habit development. Remember, it is difficult enough for the brain to change even one habit at a time, so make sure you change no more than three habits at any one time and you will be able to focus your efforts and meet with success!

3. **Set Yourself Up for Success!** - If you wish to succeed in changing a habit, you must think about how your immediate environment can be changed in order to support the new habit. For example, a person who is overweight and wishes to lose ten pounds will have a better chance of success if unhealthy foods are removed the kitchen refrigerator and cupboards and exercise equipment is placed where a person is most likely to use it. As a student, you will also want to think of the best environment to support your positive academic behaviors.

4. **Set-up Reminders!** - Remember that your brain has been hard-wired to perform your old, established behaviors. Therefore, before you set out to change your behaviors, you must be sure to create a reminder system, a buzzer or bell, that sounds to signal that you must perform your new behavior. One important note here, when trying to change a habit it is helpful to remember that we are either developing one behavior or another. For example, if I take my vitamins on one day, then forget to take them for the remainder of the week, what message am I sending to my brain? Well, since the brain rewires in response to repetition, I am, in fact reinforcing the habit of *not* taking my vitamins.

This is important to remember when using an outside signaling system, such as a bell or buzzer, because if, when the signal sounds, instead of performing the desired behavior, you ignore the signal, you are, in effect, teaching yourself to NOT perform the behavior when you hear the signal!

5. **Always Replace an Old Habit with a New Habit** - If you wish to change an old negative habit that is causing problems for you, it is not enough to simply stop the behavior cold turkey then try to resist starting it again. As a matter of fact, resisting engaging in the old behavior could make things worse, since psychologists remind us that “what we resist persists”. Instead, you should replace the old behavior with a new, positive behavior. For example, a smoker who usually smokes in the morning with a cup of coffee, might, instead go out for a walk. Likewise, a student who procrastinates and avoids studying, might begin reviewing his notes at the precise study time each day. After a while, notes review will happen right on schedule!

FIGHTING BACK WITH “SELF-TALK”

So, at this point, you are beginning to understand why it is that your habits will determine your future. You have also learned that habits, especially long held habits, are very difficult to change. BUT, before you get too discouraged, remember, it’s not a losing battle if you know how to fight back! In fact, you have one powerful ally on your side that will help you change your habits on a daily basis. What is this ally? It’s called “Self-Talk”.

You see, we all behave the way that we do, to some degree, due to the thoughts that are in our heads. These thoughts, though we may not even be aware of them, are even powerful enough to create belief systems about ourselves. In fact, your belief that you are not smart enough did not come about as a result of any REAL proof, but because you repeated the “I am not smart” thought so many times and in so many different ways, that it became the truth! And from the moment you believed this truth, you began behaving according to that truth.

This happens because our thoughts become our belief about ourselves and this belief affects our attitude about ourselves and about life. For example, if you believe you are not smart, you will likely develop a poor attitude about school-work and school in general. This attitude begins to affect your feelings, that is, likely you will begin to feel down about yourself, perhaps anxious about school and maybe even depressed at the thought of having to face school each day.

And, it is our FEELINGS that affect our actions!! That is, when we feel negatively, we will tend to behave negatively. But, the opposite is also true. When we feel positively, we will begin to behave positively because...

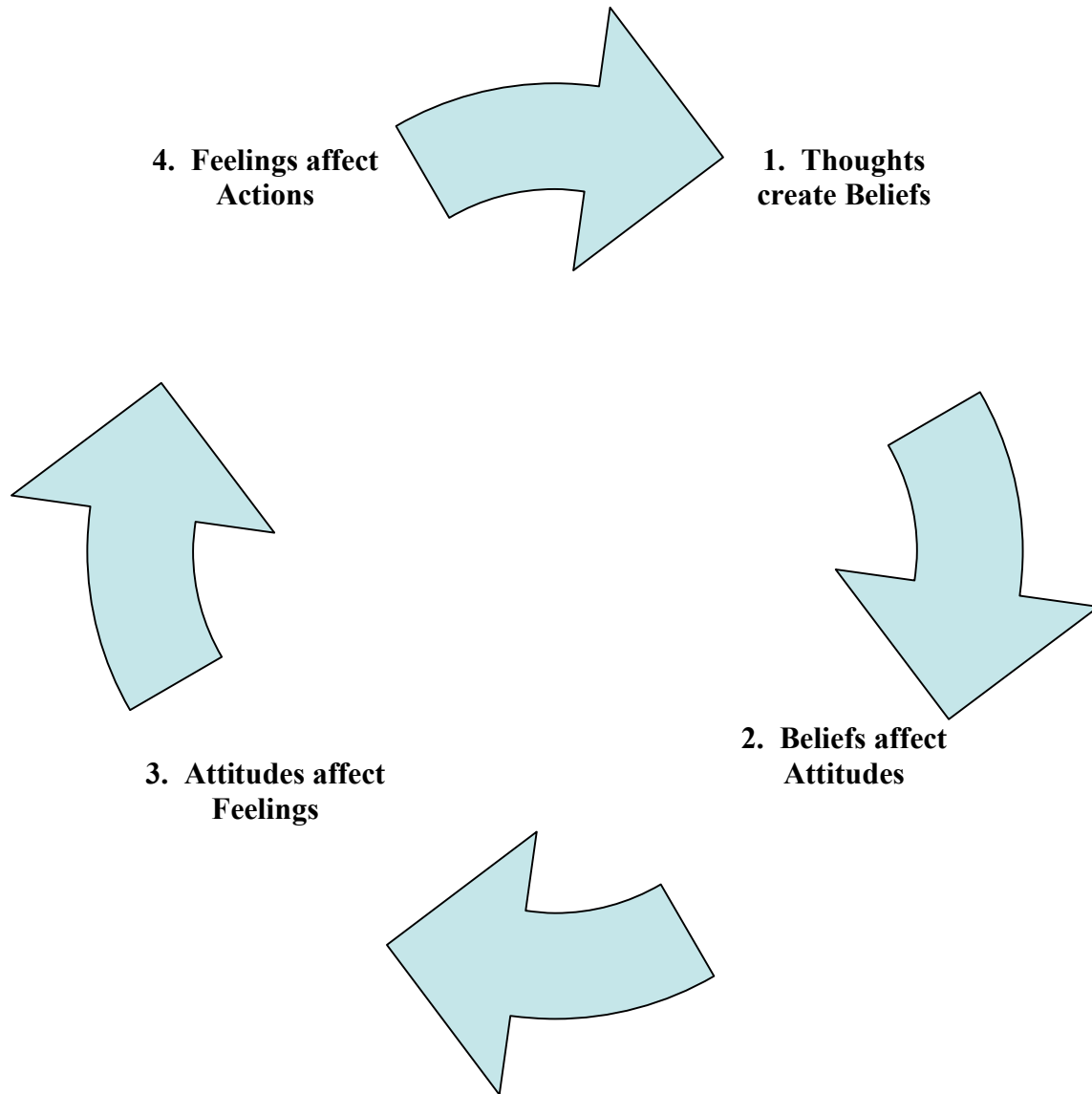
THOUGHTS CREATE BELIEFS...

BELIEFS CREATE ATTITUDES...

ATTITUDES CREATE FEELINGS...

And...FEELINGS AFFECT OUR ACTIONS!!!

The following diagram shows how this cycle works.



THE POWER OF SELF-TALK

So, if you are able to get at the root of the problem, the “Thought Stage”, you can turn your negative thoughts into positive (or more rational) thoughts and turn the Negative Learning Cycle around! And! You can do this all by just talking back – in your head – to your negative thoughts!



For example, let's say that you notice that you are procrastinating on getting your homework started. You know you need to do it, but you just don't feel like it. What do you do? Well, since you know that negative behaviors result from negative thoughts, your first step should be to become aware of what negative thoughts are swirling around in your mind. The following step by step approach will help you do this.

1. First, consider what it is that is making you think negatively about the work. Here are some possibilities

- This homework looks so boring!
- I know it's going to take forever!

- Why do I have to do this? It has nothing to do with real life?
- I think my teacher just wants to overwork us!

2. Now, taking a look at these thoughts, is it any wonder you don't want to go anywhere near your homework? Okay, so now, let's try turn each of one of these statements around. No, you don't have to lie to yourself, by thinking for example, "this work is so exciting!" That's not realistic and it won't work, but you do want to be more rational. Let's take a look at how the following statements accomplish this:

- The homework is pretty boring, but that's okay! I can always break it into pieces and take small breaks in between so it's not so bad.
- Let me take a look at what I need to do. Maybe I can do all the easy problems first and skip the harder ones for now. That will give me momentum and leave just a few problems left to do.
- This homework is helping me to sharpen my skills and good skills are always needed for good jobs so it's not a wasted effort
- Our teacher probably just wants us to be prepared. I know I can complete this work, if I use my strategies and keep a positive attitude. Maybe I can imagine how I will feel when it is all done. Or maybe I can give myself a reward for completing each part!

Now, try thinking of a bunch more negative statements, maybe 8-10 more and add them to what is listed above. Read through all the negative statements you have written down. How do you feel after reading them? Down, depressed, negative? How will these thoughts lead you to behave? Do you get the point?

WHY YOU SHOULD FORGET ABOUT GRADES!!!

Okay, I know this advice sounds crazy. “How can I forget about my grades!?” you might ask, “when my parents are on my case, and I won’t get into a good school and then I won’t get a good job and...” Okay, Whoah! You do have legitimate concerns, but let me explain if I can.

First of all, remember that all success is dependant upon your habits, and that all habits are a result of the behaviors you repeat. Therefore, by repeating positive behaviors, over time we will realize a cumulative result, which just means that positive behaviors accumulate results until we reach our goal. So, wouldn’t it make sense to focus on and improve your daily behaviors and stop obsessing about the goal!!! Yep! It sure does make sense. And, to make the point even more, let’s think about some of the positive goals that people attain in life:

- A World-class athlete
- A Millionaire
- A Dean’s List Student!

An athlete doesn't obsess about a race, he simply improves his daily workouts. Most millionaires did not start out thinking about Rolls Royce's, they simply worked hard each day and thought about how they could improve their business. And, most high achieving students who maintain their grades year to year, don't focus on the grades themselves, but how to improve their *daily* performance.

Let's face it, if you are trying to reach a long term goal, the road will be long, but one thing is for sure, any long term goal is reached *one step at a time*. Secondly, keep in mind that you may still be feeling negatively about yourself and deep down inside, you may not really believe that you can get good grades. Therefore, every time you think about your grades, all you will be thinking about is getting poor grades - or the anxiety that comes with not knowing how to get good grades! If you can't *see* a positive future, how can you head toward a goal that is not in your sight?

Let's take the athletes example to illustrate how you can reach a long term goal by focusing on your day to day behaviors. For fun, we'll make you the athlete. Let's say that you spend most of your days eating junk food, watching TV and playing video games. Then a friend tells you that he is going to run a 10 K race. You decide that you would like to do this too, so you slip on your sneakers and head outside for a run. Within minutes you are feeling completely winded, sick and exhausted. You think, "Oh, I'm just not an athlete, why bother?" You then head back inside for some more Cheetos and TV.

But is it true that you are not an athlete? Or is it more true that you did not support yourself so that your present body could transform into an athletes body??

Let's continue with the opposite scenario. You spend most of your days eating junk food, watching TV and playing video games. A friend tells you he is going to run a 10 K. You decide you would like to as well, so, for the rest of the day, you eat a properly balanced diet, drink lots of water and get a good nights rest. The next day you head out for a very short run, one that you can handle. You feel somewhat winded but let yourself know that that is normal considering your past health habits. You repeat this positive pattern every day, eating well, drinking water, training sensibly, supporting yourself through self-talk and a positive environment and getting plenty of rest. Through grit and determination and an admirable support system, you stick out the first few difficult weeks of training and are now feeling amazing! You look forward to your runs each day and each time you run, you try to beat your best time. The day of the race, you are feeling fit and healthy, running your best time ever and finishing over twenty minutes ahead of your friend! You are feeling very proud of yourself and looking forward to training for your next run.

Now do you see why you should focus on improving your daily habits?

So, which set of behaviors describe you as a student? Do you skip doing homework on a regular basis, think reviewing notes is a waste of time, stay silent in the classroom, never ask for help? If so, how well prepared do you think you are to take tests, contribute in class, complete your homework?

The two athlete scenarios above differ in only ONE way. In the first scenario, the person who wanted to be an athlete wanted the goal but mistakenly believed he could not

attain it because he mis-perceived his performance, convincing himself he was no good at running, and he did not support himself properly.

In the second scenario, the person changed his daily behaviors so that they would be more in line with his goal, running the race. He did not think about the race each day, he only thought about how he could improve his daily performance, how he could eat properly for top performance, sleep for recovery and how best to hydrate his body. In time, he and probably without his even realizing it, he is ready for the race.

Get the picture?

Author's Note: The remaining sections of this book will focus on techniques developed by the author to address three key areas. These areas are: Organization, Memory and Learning and Meta-cognition. Students are shown how to use these techniques daily so that they become habits. These techniques were designed and developed to adapt to the students changing needs from grade to grade, providing cumulative results when used as directed. The author believes and her fieldwork has proven that students who develop habits in these three key areas are better able to remain organized, have an easier time with homework, class participation and test study and develop a greater awareness of testing obstacles. Because of this, students enjoy an enhanced feeling of self-esteem, increased motivation and confidence in their work, and higher GPA's. A brief description of the techniques follows:

Description of Remaining Text to be Developed

HABITS THAT LEAD TO SUCCESS

- Record/Review – Record Review shows students the basics of memory support. Students learn to make an image column in their notes which they will use to practice “calling back” their class information at spaced intervals. Because Record/Review uses an image base, it stimulates both hemispheres of the brain, while spaced repetition helps students ascertain the degree to which the information is being processed. Since most test materials are taken from the notes, it is the perfect vehicle for students to strengthen their memory stores and become aware of how a strengthened memory supports their learning long before they are tested. This awareness, otherwise known as “meta-cognitive” ability is continually strengthened leading to a cumulative effect for tests and quizzes as well as mid-terms and finals.
- Organization - In order to make organization a habit, the technique must be all encompassing, that is, it must be set up to handle all of a student’s needs and it must be simple. Overly complex organization systems often go unused by well meaning students. The “SOS” program receives rave reviews from students who find it, not only easy to use but extremely effective in managing their paperwork

as well as their time. Students assessment skills are also exercised as they estimate and timeblock their long term assignments.

- Analysis – Completing the cumulative cycle is Analysis, an “SOS” technique that is used when tests, papers and quizzes are returned to the student. Analysis shows students how to establish the testing problem, get to the “exact” cause of the testing problem and to generate a solution that is uniquely the student’s. This is important as well for developing students long term meta-cognitive abilities as well as helping to strengthen assessment skills. Students who practice analysis learn how to uncover whether a testing problem resulted from a memory issue, study issue or behavioral issue.

These three areas will be fully described and demonstrated and the student will be given practice exercises and a daily checklist to help the student remember to repeat the use of the techniques and allow him to integrate them into his daily schoolwork. Students are also given various indicators to look for that show that the techniques are working.

APPENDIX A

My Journey

This report describes my research journey for the past three months in CCT 692. I chose my original research topic based on a dilemma that I was having professionally. I have tutored students in every age group for the past twenty years. However, it wasn't until I began publishing my written work in the National Tutoring Association Newsletter and the Crossroads of Learning Journal that I started to get attention for my work. I later completed a book called the "SOS" Binder System which was published by the National Tutoring Association in 2005. Subsequently, I was asked to present my materials at the NTA national conference. This was a bit nerve-wracking for me because I was the only speaker in my category without a Ph.d. Though I knew my work was good and that, in fact, it had been approved by a panel of learning experts, I couldn't help but feel a bit insecure owing to my lack of credentials. Because of this, I was always thinking of ways to better support my work and provide more in-depth research to validate my techniques. I discovered the opportunity to do this when I set out to research a topic in CCT 692 – Research and Engagement. A synthesis of my readings in this initial area can be found in Appendix B, under "Synthesis of Original Research Conducted".

I was certain that further validation of my work was warranted and that this would help me to progress in my field. But as I began reading the research, I soon realized that it was a much more difficult task than I thought it would be. To address this, I sought the help of other experts/consultants, (See Appendix B – Section I - “Outside Sources That Provided Assistance in Understanding Terminology”) but soon realized that I would need a good deal of hand holding from them to understand my readings and what research was applicable to my work. It was not long before I realized that my true voice was at odds with what I thought I wanted - validation. Also, the very technical readings in the fields of psychology were more than I could handle with or without help. Slowly, but surely, I began re-focusing on what I was trying to express. With the help of the CCT students and Professor Taylor, I was able to get closer to what I was trying to convey.

At first, I believed the message was to help students become self-directed learners. Since I had decided to write directly to students, I chose the demographic of High School students. After another meeting with Professor Taylor, I further established that it was a certain group within the group of High School students that I was trying to reach. (See Appendix B – Section II). I called them the “Screw-ups”. I knew I could identify with this group owing to my own difficulties in school and my subsequent academic successes. I knew as well, that I could not only relate to this group but also be a good role model for them. I set out to do research on what failing students need to do to succeed in school. Appendix C – Section I, defines the research I engaged in during this time.

A final meeting with Professor Taylor helped me to focus on further research that would help me to understand not only “what” to write to these students but “how” to write in order to reach them. Appendix C – Section II, explains the research that I conducted in order to find out more about the teenage market, and how to reach teens through writing.

I believe that the materials presented in my paper will help failing students better understand why they are not achieving in school and what specific things they can do to turn their situation around. The applied research pays particular attention to helping the student recognize a negative learning cycle, showing the student how best to keep himself motivated and how and why habits are the key to academic success.

I believe that this information is necessary to help failing students succeed and I plan to continue adding sections to this work with specific techniques for students to address every aspect of their academics.

APPENDIX B

Synthesis of Initial Research Conducted:

A. The research conducted in the initial stages focused on my original governing question concerning what I needed to know about educator research and application of meta-cognitive principles to academic work. My plan was to fully support the efficacy of the techniques that I had developed so that I could properly defend their publication and use for the population of students for which the work was intended.

I began researching websites and professional trade journals in the areas of:

- a.) Wikipedia – Terminology Overview
- b.) Journal of Social Psychology – In-depth professional articles on the nature of Meta-cognitive Judgments
- c.) Journal of Experimental Psychology – Articles on Learning and Memory Principles
- d.) American Journal of Psychology – Articles on Making Feeling of Knowing Judgments in Meta- cognition.

The following references apply to this original research:

Barrell, J., Beck, G., Brown, A., & Burke, K. (2005, November 9). Metacognition. *Metacognition*. Retrieved October 6, 2008, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/metacognition>.

Clore, G.L., & Parrott, W. (1994). Cognitive feelings and metacognitive judgments. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 24, 101-115. Retrieved October 5, 2008, from the JSTOR database.

Gross, R. (2000). *Peak learning: How to create your own lifelong education program for personal enlightenment and professional success*. New York: Tarcher.

Hart, L. A. (1975). *How the brain works*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Leibert, T.W., & Nelson, D.L. (1998). The roles of cue and target familiarity in making feeling of knowing judgments. *American Journal of Psychology*, 111 (Spring), 1st ser., 63-75. Retrieved October 5, 2008, from the JSTOR database.

Metcalfe, J., & Bjork, R.A. (1991). Composite models never (well, hardly ever) compromise: Comment on Schooler and Tanaka (1991). *Journal of Experimental Psychology, General*, 203-210. Retrieved October 5, 2008, from the JSTOR database.

Metcalfe, J., & Shimamura, A. P. (1994). *Metacognition*. Cambridge: The MIT P.

Shimamura, A.P. (2000). What is metacognition? The brain knows. *American Journal of Psychology*, 113, 1st ser., 142-146. Retrieved October 4, 2008, from the JSTOR database.

Widner, Jr, R.L., & Smith, S.M. (1996). Feeling of knowing judgments from the subjects perspective. *American Journal of Psychology*, 109, 3rd ser., 373-387. Retrieved October 5, 2008, from the JSTOR database.

However, due to the specific nature of the terminology involved in the works referenced above, I realized I needed to seek outside, expert assistance in deciphering the technical language and discerning which materials were central to my research. I contacted the following experts/consultants.

I. Outside Sources That Provided Assistance in Understanding Terminology

1. David Martin – Professor, Critical and Creative Thinking, UMass Boston
2. Pat Davidson – Professor, Mathematics, UMass Boston
3. Carol Smith – Professor, Psychology, UMass Boston
4. Other experts in Learning and Memory

II. My Process of Realization

It soon became apparent that in-depth research would require a close partnership with one or all of the experts I consulted. This was neither feasible for the experts/consultants, nor was it the best use of my research time. It also became clear to me that what I really wanted was to write to teenagers and reach them on their level. I realized that if I had already published in the aforementioned journals, and my work was approved by a panel of learning experts, there was no need to do further research at this time. This in-depth research could be done at a later date or a later time, perhaps, at some point, overlapping in the final stages with the current research. I decided to switch my focus completely and began doing research on what failing teens would need to know to do well in school and also what types of writing would appeal to this age-group.

APPENDIX C

I Research Conducted on What Failing Students Need to Succeed

My original research focused on finding data that would validate the efficacy of techniques that I had developed over a ten year period. However, my focus shifted significantly following my foray into the various psychology disciplines with the realization that, given my practical background, I would need a great deal of assistance in understanding the research. Though I initially contacted various professionals (See Appendix A), the task ultimately proved monumental and clearly insurmountable given the time-frame provided to complete the work.

I decided instead to shift my focus from researching data to writing directly to the teenage market (See Appendix B – Section II). I began by thinking of the unique needs of teenagers. I knew that teenagers would need emotional support and guidance throughout their school experience and that failing teens suffered from low self-esteem which tended to complicate their academic problems. I set out to establish guidelines within which to frame the actual instruction.

Guidelines to Follow in Writing to Teens:

- Teens would need to trust me
- Teens would need to understand that “they” are not failures and that there are real reasons for their situation
- Teens would need to know the mis-perceptions that are holding them back
- Teens would need evidence of their own capabilities
- Teens would need to know how to set themselves up for success
- Teens would need to know how to keep themselves motivated throughout the process

In order to accomplish these goals, I set out to research and write with the specific goals in mind:

1. I researched the teen writing market (See Appendix B Section II) and decided to write an introduction directly to the student, telling the student why I understand his dilemma and why I am qualified to help.
2. I used my research in the areas of Learning, Memory and Meta-cognition to uncover some of the common “hidden” factors that cause student’s to fail, assuming that the student can identify with these factors in his own experience. This would serve the purpose of gaining the student’s trust while also letting the student know he is not alone.
3. I used research in these same areas to uncover popular learning myths and provide factual information so that students could rationalize their experience and not assume themselves to be inferior learners.
4. I used my research on the brain and learning to uncover facts about the human brain and it’s potential. This information will help students to understand their true potential and help to motivate them to continue reading.
5. I included a section on habits and how habit formation is the key to success. I explain why habits are so difficult to change and provide the student with a step by step approach to changing negative academic habits.
6. The last section is devoted to a discussion of “Self-talk”. This section describes what self-talk is, how it works and how to use it. This section will help the student to maintain motivation throughout the academic year by supporting his efforts in a positive manner.

The following sources helped me to write the sections mentioned Appendix C – Section I

- Abdullah, M. (2001). *Self-directed learning* (Publication No. ED459458). Eric Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication. Eric Document Reproduction Service. Bloomington: Eric Digest. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 169)
- Bailey, D. (2003). Self Esteem. *Family Center*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from <http://www.familycenter-pirc.org>
- Bassett, L. (1997). *From Panic to Power : Proven Techniques to Calm Your Anxieties, Conquer Your Fears, and Put You in Control of Your Life*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Connor, C. (2004, December). Developing Self-Directed Learners. *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from <http://www.nwrel.org>
- Costa, A. L., & Garmston, R. J. (2001). Five Human Passions: The Origins of Effective Thinking. In A. L. Costa (Ed.), *Developing Minds : A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking* (pp. 20-21). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Costa, A. L. (2001). Habits of Mind. In A. L. Costa (Ed.), *Developing Minds : A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking* (pp. 80-81). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

- Hay, L. (2001). Thinking Skills for the Information Age. In A. L. Costa (Ed.), *Developing Minds : A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- Helmstetter, S. (1986). *What to Say When You Talk to Your Self*. New York: Grindle P.
- Hooper Ph.d, T. (2000). Anima Agronomics. *Coaching USA*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from <http://www.coachingusa.net>
- Khalsa, D. S., & Stauth, C. (1999). *Brain Longevity : The Breakthrough Medical Program that Improves Your Mind and Memory*. Grand Rapids: Grand Central.
- Lowry, C. M. (2005, August). Supporting and Facilitating Self-Directed Learning. *The National Teaching and Learning Forum Journal*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from <http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/89dig.htm>
- Luciani, J. J. (2001). *Self-Coaching : How to Heal Anxiety and Depression*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Limited.
- Markowitz, K., & Jensen, E. (1999). *The Great Memory Book*. New York: Corwin P.
- Quantum Learning : Unleashing the Genius in You*. (n.d.). New York: Broadway Book

II Research on the Teen Writing Market

The various authors I researched, believe that the following points must be taken into consideration when writing to the teenage market

1. That the information has to be “cool”, which, in and of itself would require research, perhaps a focus group made up of my students. Experts agree that one must not rely on what one believes is “cool”, but must, instead look at trends such as what information teenagers tend to forward to each other via websites.
2. Also, it is essential to know the teen market to know what teens like and what would interest them. Assuming what teenagers like, according to experts, can be disastrous since tastes are often fickle and subject to change at a moments notice.
3. It is also helpful to know that teens have short attention spans, usually get what they want and are often drawn to novelty. Therefore, any writing to teens must intersperse short periods of writing with amusing anecdotes, pictures and/or bulleted information.
4. Additionally, experts agree that writing to teens means thinking about four key features; make it cool, edgy, current and community based.

Though I found the above information helpful and definitely useful, I opted to focus more on writing styles, tone. I referenced the following works:

Evans, M. K., & Stroll, F. (2005, June 7). Marketing Challenge: Three Sure Ways to Reach Teens. In *Market Professionals - Smart Thinking, Pass it On*. Retrieved from <http://www.marketprofessionals.com>

Liu, C. (2008). *Writing for children and teens: A crash course (how to write, revise or publish a kid's or teen book with children's book publishers)*. Pivotal.

Perry, U. F. (2004). Writing for Teen Magazines. In *Writing World.com*. Retrieved from <http://writingworld.com>

I discovered that authors writing to teens must be:

1. Careful not to talk down to their audience, since teens often enjoy many of the materials that adults read. The best format, experts suggest, is informative, brief pieces that won't bore teenagers. Additionally, it is important not to try and be cool, since, this often backfires with teens. It is recommended instead that one write in a straightforward fashion, avoiding the use of slang and being careful not to oversimplify sentences.

2. Additionally the writer should be careful not to choose a certain angle that they feel teens will be interested in, since this could be interpreted, on some level, as manipulation. Other suggestions in this area include avoiding overused subject matter or phrases such as “how to study”. Phrases such as these are so overused that teens tend to pay no attention to them. To avoid these errors, staying informed is important so that the writer better understands his audience. In fact, many experts believe that a writer for the teen market must be perpetually doing research in order to stay abreast of what is interesting to teens. Finally, it is also helpful to recollect as much from one’s teenage years as possible, considering thoughts, interests and attitudes.

3. Writers aiming at the teen market should consider writing to a niche market or in any case, try to distinguish oneself from what everyone else is doing. One last bit of advice concerns marketing and selling. Experts recommend that writers keep parents in mind as well as teens, since, often it is the parent that is paying for the product. However the teen market has greatly increased in spending power as well. So teens are, not only are making more money, but can turn to their parents if need be.

4. Finally, it is important to keep information positive. Teenagers interested in self help products want to see information that convinces them that they will succeed.