

TIME-OUT WEEKEND IN YORK - P.S.P. CONSULTANTS ON July 16th

Lou Thompson on Self-Concept

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(Taped/Edited by Don Pugh)

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1.0 Introduction: Self Concept is a Willingness to Risk Self

The ultimate test of self-concept is a willingness to risk self. Whenever in our lives we are confronted with unfamiliar situations the resource we call on is our self-concept. We rely on self-concept before our abilities, our attitudes or our competencies.

Some will say that you call upon your competencies first before taking a risk. I say that you won't call upon those if you don't have a self-concept which allows you to take the risk regardless of consequences.

I am going to encourage you to take a risk. What you have been given here is a number of items that have been taken from Mensa. Mensa is a test of superior intelligence. It is a world wide recognised test. You are required to do it individually.

A test of ones self concept is a willingness to risk self in a performance situation. When we are involved in a situation in which our first reaction is, "I don't think I can do this," then we learn a great deal about ourselves. Even when you get it wrong. In taking it on you learn a lot about who you are. So this activity is to give you a challenge. When you first look at it you are going to say, "Help! What is this? I can't do this!"

You will have a chance to do the test. This is the way it works. Look at the procedures. Have a glance through them and on the graph on the next page. Make a decision about how you will perform on them. Truthfully indicate how many you think you will be having a go at and how many you think you will get right.

School is capable of providing an opportunity for kids to wander out into some areas of the unknown. These are areas that when kids first look at them their first response to it is "Can't do, don't know, frighten of going there." When they are out in that area even if they don't succeed they learn about self. A key dynamic in all of this is our self-concept often prevents us from going into that area. Part of what is underlying our focal week is to say to schools, "Get out there and at least step into those areas of unknown."

2.0 Teachers Don't Allocate Leisure Time

Here are three measures. One is a time budget, one's a leisure attitude scale, and the third one is an introversion and extroversion scale. These are the three key data collecting measures that staff complete.

The leisure attitude scale simply gives a measure of your current attitude towards leisure. The time budget and the leisure attitude scores in our profession are miles and miles apart. For 90% of our teaching staff, there is a huge gap between their favourable attitude towards leisure and their lack of allocation of time towards leisure.

3.0 Teachers Play Roles

Examine the introversion and extroversion scales. Teachers say, "I know who I am" and often that's true. There is often a gap between who they know

they are and how other people are perceiving them.

Is too much of the teachers' time devoted to being how other people want us to be? How the educational administrators want us to be. How parents want us to be and how kids want us to be? So we live in our profession a Jekyll and Hyde existence. We have who we really are and a chalky image that we project. We project a particular chalky image for our administrators, parents and kids themselves.

This introversion and extroversion scale requires you to write down whether you are an introverted or extroverted person. The questions are indicators of behaviours that other people interpret as being indicators of the introversion/extroversion. Sometimes what you get from teachers doing it is a difference between what they wrote down as who they are and what results in the questionnaire.

Maybe you are trying to be what other people want you to be. Maybe teachers are losing sight of 'who you know you are' and indeed what you are most comfortable with. Each time I do that scale, a third of the group has a discrepancy.

4.0 Teachers Devote Too Much Time To Meeting Physiological Needs

Maslow links attitude towards leisure and the time budget. Maslow has given us an explanation for our behaviour through a hierarchy of needs. Our behaviour can be traced back to certain needs. He argued that there was a hierarchy, commencing with the basic physiological needs and working its way up to the self actualisation.

The recent literature interprets Maslow in the following way. There is two hierarchies of needs. There is one that is physical beginning with our need for oxygen. This is the most basic physiological need of all human life. Then there is needs for water, food, warmth, and shelter.

These are all dominant hemisphere based and come from the part of our brain that controls all conscious thoughts. We can identify any needs generated by the dominant hemisphere. If you are not getting any air, very quickly you know 'I am getting no air.' But more importantly, very quickly you know how to react.

Think about why you work. A good part of why you work relates to meeting physiological needs. This gives some order, some justification, some understanding of self. But it's only half of who we are. When teachers complete time budgets, they find that there is 70%, 80% or up to 90% of their time is spent on work to meet physiological needs.

5.0 Teachers Have Psychological Needs

There is another half of us. We have got another half brain and this is psychological self or the emotional self. That part of self is not dominant hemisphere, it's the frontal lobes and it's right brain. You have to accept that it is an equal half. The second hierarchy includes our need to be loved, our need for security, our need for social approval and our needs for independence, and self actualization.

This part of the brain is non logical. It's much harder to identify these needs and it is even harder to know how to satisfy them.

What are teachers do is concentrate on meeting physiological needs. They have totally devalued the significance of the left hemisphere. They have failed to recognise that this is a basis upon which all of us build.

6.0 Need For Belonging Is The Basic Psychological Need

I think there is a basic basic psychological need that under pins all of those physical needs. We do all sorts of crazy things to substitute for not meeting our psychological needs. We don't recognise that what we are trying to find is psychological needs, principally, the most basic need, the need to be belonged.

One cannot understand the need to be loved unless one feels belonged to something. Our doctors recognise that in the bonding from birth. This is the thing that is most under threat. When we get a barrelling from a superintendent, when we get a barrelling from anybody the question that we ask about ourselves, although we don't state it literally, is 'do I belong? Do I belong to this profession, do I belong to this group, do I belong to this marriage, do I belong to this job, do I belong, do I belong, do I belong.'

In time budget inventory until we recognise that part of our own self-concept is dependent on belonging, then our own self-concepts are under real threat. What happens in the time budget - if you have done your own over several days you will find, I am sure, that at the very least you will have a 70-30 split. 70% of your time has got to be work. A person with a healthy self-concept allocates 40% of time for leisure for meeting psychological needs and 60% of time to work to meet physiological needs.

7.0 We Need To Be Real People To Be Significant Others

As long as we spend most of our time at work, I say 'How real a person are you?' When you stand in front of the kids as a significant other, how real are you then?

The documents I give try to highlight that. The reason that chalkies are cracking is that they have given absolutely no time to their non-physical needs.

Even when I am at a barbecue on a Sunday afternoon, very often I think I should be home doing marking and my programmes. I bet there are a few of you sitting here now saying, "I really should be back at the office or I really should be preparing for the next week." Now that's the dominant hemisphere brain taking over. As long as that is happening, the other part of self doesn't get a chance.

8.0 We Must Take Responsibility For Setting Aside Leisure Time

There is only one person in my opinion that can determine your time management. That's yourself. You will only do that if you value the argument why non work time is as crucial to you as your work time.

The people at grass root level must say to themselves that it is okay to finish work at six o'clock at night, it is okay that to have the weekends free.

Stress management is about the use of particular techniques to relax. Use techniques, meditation and all but use it in 40% of your time rather than ten percent.

9.0 Set Objectives For Your Free Time

We don't set ourself every single day a one specific objective. We don't set our own special time, be it Sunday afternoon, be it a Sunday morning, be it any time that is precious. We don't put barbed wire fence around that time. Even if that's all you end up with at least you know you have your own personal space.

We've got to have our own time somewhere. Start small and protect it and value it as a most important thing.

10.0 We Our Insecure About Physical Self

Here is a time out time sheet for yourself. I want you to respond to some phrases I am going to give you with what first comes to your mind and to write them down until I tell you to stop.

1. "I am a person who can... "
2. "I am a person who cannot..."
3. "I am a person who looks like..."
4. "I am a person who often feels..."
5. "I am a person who really enjoys..."

Let's total up the number of responses you had to each question. Now you need to make a decision. To which one of the five questions did you find it easiest to respond.

When I do this with a staff two areas clearly stand out. 'I am a person who looks like...' as normally being the one that has the least number of responses and the area in which we find most difficult in responding. I could also say to you 'which one of those questions would you find most difficult in talking to other people?' No.3 normally comes out again as the same.

Number 3 is about physical self. Knowledge of physical self begins at birth. It causes us concerns on both side of those triangles all the way through life.

This is a basic component to development and to a knowledge of self. When we are down in junior primary haven't we been telling kids to draw pictures around themselves? Knowledge of physical self is where we start. We need to encourage along the notion of communicating self.

Number 5 is easy to answer. Think back to that time budget. I often say to teachers, 'How much of your leisure time activities are you actually building into your life?'

Go away and think of putting some of your leisure activities into your teaching.

11.0 Self-Concept Is Knowledge of and a Belief In Yourself

I introduce myself in Maori because I am part Maori. There is no way that any of you sitting there would know that by looking at or watching me. Who I am has to do with the inner self. When we think about self-concept in terms of our own self and in terms of other people we make many of the judgements purely on what we see on the outside. We are not taking enough time and thought to review the part of self that's inside the cover.

People have asked, 'Why are we so concerned with self-concept?' Why suddenly in priority schools in the last three years has it been important? Ask ourselves 'why suddenly rather than reading, writing and arithmetic do we take time out to look at this particular thing?'

The better you feel about yourself the more of self that you use. I illustrate that by referring to someone like Ita Buttrose. Ita Buttrose, who is probably one of Australia's leading public orators, has no real reason for her being there. She has taken put downs in her life, likely for her speech idiosyncrasy. Yet she is able to take that same idiosyncrasy and make it her strength, not because of any God given gift, but because of knowledge of self and her ability to risk self.

There is a direct link between your self-concept, perception of self and how much of self you will use for risk.

12.0 We Cannot Communicate Feelings To Others

The second reason why we need to be taking some concern with self-concept is our inability to communicate with others. We are in a society, whether we like it or not, that doesn't encourage honest communication of self to others.

We feel that there is self that we have to keep within ourselves. So much of our self is devalued that more and more we are looking for substitutes.

13.0 We Seek Substitutes Because of an Inability To Communicate

Statistics about adolescent suicides are frightening. Blokes take on the cops at the moment. Why at 180 kph do you go and ram your car into a power pole? People feel totally inadequate to find real self and to communicate that. So they go for a substitute.

All those things are in some way or other are substitutes. It was a little easier for you and I because there was less change going on. It is getting harder and harder. What kids are doing is keeping their feelings inside. The quick way out, the quick answer, are the substitutes.

14.0 We Need Knowledge of Self

The bottom line is knowledge of self. Knowledge that 'I am a person who' or 'I am a person who can't...' indicates healthy self-concept. Some begin with an assumption, 'am I a person who...?' 'Am I a person who is going to

be a good wife or husband?' 'Am I a person who has an ability to mix well with other people?' As long as we operate on "am I" we are at risk.

Further as long as we operate on "am I" we won't risk self. "I ams" come from two processes. They come from testing out "am I's." If you continue saying 'I wonder if I should,' it is self destructive. What you build is self doubts. The more doubts, the more 'am I's' that you nurse and do nothing about the less healthy your self concept is and the more risk you're at.

15.0 Knowledge of Self Comes from Risk Taking and Opinions of Significant Others

You have got to test your self-concept out, you have got to test the water. That's not enough and this is my bit about significant other. Let's assume your own lives for a moment. Wherever you are going, certain things you do are going to be checked out. Maybe a new job, maybe a new activity, and you check your progress out by asking, "How do I go, how am I doing it?"

You look to other significant others in your life. Key people whose opinions you respect. In schools the teachers role as a significant other is a crucial one.

16.0 Summary

In review, six things you need to consider are these:

Firstly the teachers own self concept, (how real is the teacher as a significant other, how real a person are they).

Second point related to consistency in the class rooms and by that I mean how consistent is the teacher being their self in the class room. I mean her own values or his own values and standards as she or he consistently models.

Third point that I emphasise is encouraging kids to take risks. That's where they find out about themselves, and the self awareness comes from there.

The fourth thing is providing kids with the opportunity to test out assumptions about self.

The fifth one is the need for teachers to provide for kids the opportunity to communicate self to others. That's where that focus week comes in by communicating self to the broader community.

The last point is providing the classroom climate in which there is empathy.

Teachers own self-concept is important since the more real the teacher is the more powerful they are as a significant other. The kids need to see the teacher as something more than a chalky. They will only do that if the teacher sees themselves as something other than a chalky. When the kids take the risk, the teacher has to share the risk taking with them.

The thing that wraps it all up is the shared experience and the risk taking. The real test is when you communicate what you have learned to someone else. Through that activity in class or with teachers in the staff room identify, first of all, an activity in which kids are going to find something out about themselves. Present them with the challenge, which is where they are going to take the risk, and then let them to try and communicate that to others.