

From the Principal's Pen
April 2017
Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of the Atwood Primary School



I remember when one of my sons was 18. We had just had a whopper of a snowstorm! I was outside shoveling, and hollered into the house to ask him to come and help me shovel off his grandmother's steps. He half-heartedly came outside wearing untied sneakers and a sweatshirt and shoveled off Nanny's steps in about ten minutes...and started to head back inside.

By this point, I had been shoveling for over an hour. I had ice crystals clinging to my eyelashes and my good humor was frozen along with my fingers! "Where do you think you are going?" I asked my 6'4" son.

"What?" he said, shocked at my tone. "You asked me to shovel off the steps, and I shoveled off the steps."

Mind you, I was standing knee deep in the driveway...with about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the driveway shoveled....leaving $\frac{3}{4}$ un-shoveled. I just stared at him....glaring...looking at all of the work in front of me.

"What?? I did what you asked," said my teenage son.

I flipped my lid. "Seriously?? Seriously?? You don't see your freezing cold elderly mother in front of you, shoveling...ALONE?? You are going to go inside to leave me out here while you play video games?"

The steam coming out of my hot head melted a puddle at my feet. He got the point. In stony silence he helped me shovel the rest of the driveway...both of us silent.

Work ethic. Interesting topic. Interesting parenting challenge. Interesting teaching challenge.

I remember shoveling on that stormy day, super mad at my son, but also super mad at myself. Why was it he would go inside and leave his mother to do the work? Was it something I hadn't taught him as a parent? Was he going to be a lazy adult?

The other day, I walked into a classroom that was pretty messy at the days end. I explained to the children that EVERYONE'S job is to keep our classrooms tidy and to take care of our classroom materials. I told them there should be nothing on the floor, the desktops should be clean and all of their ipads and workbooks should be carefully put in the proper location. I then stood back and watched.

Some of the children dove into the work. They scurried on hands and knees underneath tables. They scoured every surface, helping however they could. Some of the children half-

heartedly picked up just the very area where they stood. Some of the children sat back and did nothing. It was an interesting study in work ethic. Why is it that some children work hard, and others do not?

Having a good, strong work ethic is one of those Habits of Mind that serve people, and communities, well for a lifetime. How do we make sure all children learn the value of hard work?

When I reflect on my parenting, in the rush and hurry of every day life, I think I did way too much for my children. Rather than wait for them to do the dishes or laundry, I would just do it myself. Sometimes, it just “seemed” easier or less messy to complete the tasks on my own. Ultimately, however, hindsight is 20/20. My children were on the cell phone with me when they were in college, while I talked them through operating a washing machine, like they were navigating Apollo 11!! If only I had taken the time when they were younger.

In the classroom, we work on developing stamina. We use timers and graph the amount of time the children spend reading, or writing, or working on mathematics. Showing them their gradually developing ability to sustain working on a task is such great feedback on how to “keep at it” ...grind through. Developing stamina to continue working on something that is tricky or difficult, is excellent practice that will ultimately become a strong work ethic! We all know the feeling of just wanting to quit...give up...but in the future, we want all children to have experienced the feeling of “working hard”.

If I could turn back the hands of time, I would slow down and begin gently with my children. While I folded laundry, I would have handed my children washcloths to fold or socks to bundle. While I did dishes, I would have handed them a dishtowel to wipe the utensils and sort them in the drawer. Sometimes when you speed through all of those household chores for the sake of ease, you miss an awesome opportunity to develop work habits, to build stamina and to teach the feeling of accomplishment for a job well done.

Last year, we had a giant family gathering. At the end of the evening, my husband and I stood at the sink while our adult children chatted and visited around the table. At one point, I handed my son a dishtowel, and he looked at it. I said, “Ummmm, start drying.”

He looked at me and said, “What? I thought you guys *LOVED* doing the dishes.” Oh my. Just like he thought I *loved* shoveling I guess.

Educationally Yours,

Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School

Dates to Note:

April 14: No School/ Teacher Comp Day

April 17 to 21: No School/ Spring Vacation

For future preparation: May 1 will be our tenth annual Atwood Relay for Life Parade (one mile) from 8:30 to 9:30 for the American Cancer Society. Please join us if you are able. Freely invite friends and family to come along.

