

Visit With the Utays

July 2009

School Psychology and Education Specialists



Dr. **Joe Utay**, Director of Counseling and Evaluation Services for Total Learning Centers and former professor for Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Department of Counseling, is a graduate of University of Pittsburgh, a school psychologist, marriage and family therapist, author, national speaker, and father.

Dr. **Carol Utay** is Executive Director of Total Learning Centers. She is also a graduate of University of Pittsburgh and an expert in learning and special education. "Dr. Carol" has experience as a principal, Orton-Gillingham reading therapist, teacher, consultant, national speaker, professor, author, and mother. She is a national Athena Award winner for community service.

Hope, Commitment to Whatever it Takes

"I learned once again that there is always room for hope, no matter what the history or current circumstance. I was reminded - inspired - once again by a parent's willingness to commit to do ... whatever it takes."

This month, "Dr. Carol" shares an inspiring story that began with a routine fact-based parent conference to share psycho-educational evaluation results, and ended in emotional tears of hope.

I was ready. The tests were completed, scored, and ready to be shared along with specific programs that would help strengthen her child's academic weaknesses. The mother was ready too, with her own expectations, very different from mine. I could see it in her eyes as she sat down at the table, which was cleared except for a large bell curve drawn on a piece of paper and a set of multicolored markers to provide a visual aid to describe his performance.

I have seen the look in her eyes in thousands of parents before - hoping for the best yet fearing the worst; really, more expecting the worst. She was ready to ignore the positives and blame herself for the negatives. Behind the cordial greetings, a sense of dread surrounded her. I remember thinking to myself, "Why must it be so difficult to convince parents that their child has both problems **and** potential, definite weaknesses **and** definite strengths, areas desperate for improvement **and** specific research-based methods for developing weak skills?" But of course I knew the answer. We're not just in the business of sharing facts and figures, scaled scores and percentiles. We are in the business of better results -- better grades, better memory, better attention, better SAT scores -- whatever it is a child or adult needs to improve, we improve it. However, before that can happen, we are first in the business of building hope. Without hope there is no commitment, and without commitment there is no progress, regardless of the talent and warmth of the teachers or how proven-to-work are the cutting edge programs.

By the end of the conference, the fog this mother came in wearing had lifted. I had reviewed and drawn on the bell curve her son's intelligence, academic levels, and various aspects of thinking, memory, and attention. I clearly described exactly what was needed in order to improve. The mother listened carefully and asked insightful caring questions throughout, and at the end, through a sudden burst of tears, cried, "Thank you." What struck me, once again, was that incredible ability of the human spirit to search for, recognize, and then appreciate a place for hope in the midst of despair. I learned once again that there is always room for hope, no matter what the history or current circumstance. I was reminded - inspired - once again by a parent's willingness to commit to do what we as professionals eagerly do every day - whatever it takes.

As always, just call the Total Learning Center nearest you in Wexford, Fox Chapel, Murrysville, or South Hills for answers to specific questions about your particular child's needs as well as expert programs available this summer and throughout the year (877- Skill 11). If easier, email us at success@TotalLearningCenter.com. Follow Dr. Carol Utay on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/carolutay>.

Total Learning Centers was voted Best Tutoring and Best College Prep by Nickelodeon's Parent Picks.

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