

# “You have to do hard things in order to learn.”

....the wise words of a five year old

In a nation-wide survey conducted in 1993 and 1994 on what the public thought should be taught in schools, “Persistence and follow through” received a 93% public approval as did “Industry or Hard Work.” In a similar study, “Teaching the value of hard work” ranked third among the essential lessons we want our children to learn in school. Yet despite the wishes of parents, there remains a big gap



between parents’ expectations and reality. Far too frequently children quit, drop out, and/or stop caring about their education and often this transformation is seen around the ages of 12 or 13. It is not uncommon for students at this time to lose interest in school and to rely less and less on their parents for direction and more and more on their peers.

To help us understand this phenomenon better, it may be useful to recognize the 4 natural stages many children experience as they discover the relationship between effort, achievement, and ability:

**Stage 1** - Children 3 to 5 years of age believe that by simply trying, they can accomplish anything.

**Stage 2** – Between 6 and 10, children begin recognizing people’s strengths and weaknesses, though they tend to continue to believe that hard work will produce success as in stage 1.

**Stage 3** – Between 10 and 12, the emphasis shifts from effort and achievement to ability and achievement. At this pivotal point, many realize that some “able” students appear to succeed with little effort and they begin resenting the fact that their own success was hard-earned, while that of some of their “gifted” peers was not.

**Stage 4** - Those who fall into this last stage are the students 13 years and older who begin to equate success with innate ability only. This stage comes full circle from the stage 1 notion that effort determines success. Instead, stage 4 children think that only the most able succeed. Their explanation for failure is not lack of effort, but rather, lack of ability. Consequently, many choose not to try at all.

Of course, everyone is different and not all children stop trying. Nevertheless, many psychologists believe it is essential that we promote the value of effort while children are still in stages 1 and 2 of their lives. They recommend that parents do this by praising their children, teaching them patience as well as good work habits and time-management skills. Kumon is a wonderful vehicle that allows parents to teach these kinds of skills at home. Because Kumon is really about getting a head start on high school math and reading while students are still in elementary or junior high school, it helps parents set goals such as having math students reach level G while still in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, or reach algebra before junior high. It’s about having children value persistent effort for its own sake. By continuing to study Kumon over a long period of time, children learn to sustain their effort even when they think the task is boring, and they learn to do work that is not only fun and easy, but also challenging. Think of it this way. Trying to turn around adolescents in stage 4 is a societal nightmare that we can ill afford. By that time, it is often too late to make them change their mind about achievement. Nevertheless, Kumon can help pave the road to success for older students by helping them regain their lost confidence.



The wise 5-year-old who inspired this article understood his part when he said, “**You have to do hard things in order to learn.**” We parents need to do our part so our children will have the best opportunity to learn and to succeed.

References: [Good Education: The Virtues of Learning](#) by Ivor Pritchard, Ph.D.

[How to Raise a Child With a High EQ: A Parents’ Guide to Emotional Intelligence](#) by Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

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A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Andrea Pastorok".

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