

A Mindset for Learning

Teaching the Traits of
Joyful, Independent Growth



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Introduction

Start at the Very Beginning (a Very Good Place to Start)

It is September in a New York City kindergarten and the fire alarm is going off for a drill for the very first time. Reactions from the group of four- and five-year-olds are mixed. Michael throws up immediately. Dan and Adrian yell, “Gross!”

Gabriel yells, “Fire!” and runs at full speed to the door, followed closely on his heels by two or three others.

Sophia, Kate, and Erin don’t appear to have noticed the bright flashing lights or the loud beeping and don’t bother to look up from their drawings.

We, Christine and Kristi, look at each other, wide-eyed, and share our first simultaneous thought, “Oh, please, God, no.” A fire drill on the third day of kindergarten. We haven’t even had an opportunity to walk in a line yet.

Quickly, quickly, we usher the twenty-six children to the door. Like kittens, as soon as one reaches the line, two others find something vastly interesting in a different direction. Christine keeps the back of the line moving forward as Kristi keeps the lead moving in the right direction. It looks promising; it looks like K-309 will make it out of the sch—

Bam! Claire falls down—Claire of the “bandages for everything” lifestyle—and she refuses to get up. Christine scoops her up and we keep moving and almost reach the door. . . .

Alex has lost a shoe. How? Why? How? There is no time to ponder the near impossibility that a shoe could be lost in the thirty feet the class has walked. We have one goal: the door. We finally emerge on the sidewalk outside of the school like victims of a shipwreck. Children crying, shoes lost, wild looks in Kristi’s and Christine’s eyes. Christine sets the sniffing Claire down on the sidewalk and gazes at the children in her immediate vicinity. Amelia, the ineffably resilient and intrepid Amelia, turns to her, smiles, and says, “That was an adventure, right?!”

In the face of something brand-new, something potentially very scary for a child who has never been to school, Amelia has seen adventure, and possibility, and, above all, a reason to smile.

It is our deepest wish to build classrooms of risk and resilience so that all children, not just the Amelias of the world, have an opportunity to live bigger and more bravely in the world. To live, and to engage, with hope and joy.

Before we begin this journey together, there is a small matter that must be cleared up: who are *we*, exactly? Well, there is you, the reader, and there is us, the authors, Kristi Mraz and Christine Hertz. The authors' part of the relationship began a few years ago, when Christine was completing an action research project around metacognition and play in Kristi's kindergarten classroom. We became fast friends and educational allies, the kind of partners who play a version of the "Yes, and . . ." improv game, but with instruction. "What if we themed the reading work to *Star Wars*?!" one of us asked, and the other answered, "Yes, and . . . what if the kids got Yoda ears when they mastered one strategy and could teach it to other kids?!"

The unifying thread of our relationship is our desire to exist within the parameters of the punctuation sequence *?!—*curiosity coupled with excitement, wonder matched with joy. But as Christine went back to work in her third-grade classroom in Vermont, and Kristi continued her life as a kindergarten teacher in New York City, we found ourselves struggling to maintain that vision in the increased demand of [*thunderclaps*] R-I-G-O-R [*thunderclaps*] that has accompanied the dialogue around the Common Core State Standards.

What is rigor exactly? What does "college and career ready" really mean?

Is it five-year-olds sitting silently for forty minutes? Is it second graders breaking down the themes in *War and Peace*? Is it fifth graders closely reading a three-hundred-page book for the entire year? The answer is no. Nor is rigor a teacher dumping information into an empty vessel. It is not passive learning. Rigor is not fourth graders staring at a Shakespearean sonnet while their teacher deconstructs its symbolism. Nor is rigor first graders memorizing all of their addition and subtraction facts without developing any number sense. Rigor is not a gold "Common Core Aligned!" sticker on the front of a prepackaged curriculum. It is not accepting the status quo. So what is it?

Rigor is active. Rigor is passionate. Rigor is about who we are as much as what we know. As teachers, we help shape the future with every child that walks through our doors. We cannot let fear of benchmarks stand in the way of helping children find their value and their voice. What does it matter if a child can read on level

if that same child does not believe she has power and agency? A child in passive receipt of learning will be in passive receipt of life. It is our rally cry that we create schools of joy and change. But how? How does one set the conditions for developmentally appropriate, child-centered, playful rigor?! Rigor that helps a student become a better person, not just a higher number on a state test? How do we ensure the child is not lost in the quest for standards while still reaching those standards? How do we keep the *kids* in the curriculum? And how do we make the goal for the children's future be not just "college and career ready" but "love, life, and agents of change ready"?

Finding the right questions sent us on a quest that continues in this book and with you, our reader, the final component of our *we*. So who are we, exactly? We are educators who believe in passionate and playful practice. We are people who honor childhood and joy. We see our debt to the children before us but also to the world that they will help create. We value inquiry and exploration. We are learners, we are seekers, we are teachers.

The Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with a Single Book

Kristi was on a Twitter chat one July night in 2013 when she saw a tweet by Daniel Pink, author of *Drive* and *A Whole New Mind*, encouraging teachers to read the book *Mindset*, by Carol Dweck (2007). Curious, Kristi downloaded the book and consumed it over a few nights. Christine, already familiar with the book, reread it, and we began talking. The central thesis of *Mindset* is that there are two ways people think about themselves and the world:

- 1. Fixed Mindset:** When you think about yourself and the world with a fixed mindset, you believe that your traits, habits, personality, skills, and so on are fixed and immovable. You are smart or dumb, athletic or clumsy, artistic or not. There is nothing you can do to change these traits. For this reason, effort is not particularly valued. Why try if you know you are dumb? Likewise, failure is a terrifying prospect. If you fail, does that mean you were never smart in the first place?
- 2. Growth Mindset:** When you think about yourself and the world with a growth mindset, you believe that your traits, habits, personality, skills, and so on are growing and changing. You are not smart or dumb, athletic or clumsy, artistic or not. You are constantly in progress. Effort is the linchpin of this mindset: who knows how far you will go if you try? And failures

are feedback. They may still hurt, but they are not endpoints; they are signposts on ways to proceed in the future.

This dichotomy of mindsets launched us into action. Throughout *Mindset*, we found examples of how people with growth mindsets were happier, more successful, more apt to create lasting change in themselves and in the world. What more could we want for ourselves and our students? Couldn't this be the start of an answer to what "college and career ready" means, an answer that we could believe in? Yes, we want our students to be able to read critically, to solve complex problems, and to write effectively. But more importantly, we want our students to leverage those skills to take on challenges with zeal and to see themselves not as static test scores that are either "college or career ready" or not but rather as ever-evolving and powerful agents of change, both for themselves and for their world. Could this be the new way we think about rigor in the classroom? Not as the work you do, but *how* you do the work you do, who you are, and what you believe about yourself and others? Carol Dweck's momentous book fired our engines, and our quest began. We hopped from self-help books to neurology texts, asking ourselves, "What can we do to help our children become the best people they can be, to then make the best world they can?"

A Constellation of Stances for an Energized and Engaged Learning Community

Everything we read on the quest to strive for joyful, successful, and powerful learning in our classrooms converged on a single idea (see Appendix A and the "Works Cited" section for a list of exactly what we read). There are habits or stances that we can build in ourselves that will make us more successful and happier. Just as a ready stance in baseball (knees bent, glove out, eyes on the ball) makes us more likely to catch a ball if it happens our way, the ready positions in our brains dictate how we react to challenges and new events. Variations on the same idea came up again and again: resilience, flexibility, optimism, empathy, persistence, grit, organization. It seemed that everywhere we looked, everyone was talking about the same thing we were thinking about. Even the National Council of the Teachers of English has published its own list of stances, or habits, that help learners achieve the most that they can (to see the list, go to <http://wpacouncil.org/files/framework-for-success-postsecondary-writing.pdf>).

We agreed as we pondered the lists that this all sounded like a great way to live in the world. Yet in all of this reading, we were missing the *how*. How does one

teach children to be these things? So we did what we always do: we began a game of “Yes, and . . .,” which brought us to the very book you hold in your hands. We did not invent the stances or habits, nor did we invent the different techniques we suggest for teaching them; however, we found a playful way to combine parts of our day and the elements that make up successful people to change the tone and talk in our classrooms.

We started focusing on *persistence* with our kindergarten and third-grade students and then quickly realized that persistence in isolation has its limitations. We asked ourselves, “How much are our students growing by building the exact same block tower over and over again, only to watch it continually fall? Or by using the same word-attack strategy over and over again with no luck?” At what point is persistence for the sake of persistence ineffective? Then we asked ourselves, “What should we teach our students to do when persistence alone doesn’t work? What else could help our students take risks and overcome challenges?” So we read more and talked more to our colleagues and expanded our conversations with students to include *flexibility* and then *resilience*. Soon we added in *optimism*, and then we realized none of these talks would be worth it without also having conversations around *empathy* and community (for more on these stances, see Chapter 3). We began to call this collection a *constellation of stances* because one stance by itself is not nearly as powerful as its interplay with the others. And so, over the course of two classrooms and two years, we began to focus our teaching on:

- empathy
- optimism
- resilience
- persistence
- and flexibility.

And realized, only when you embrace all of these stances do you truly begin to feel the limitless possibility of life, learning, and yourself (see Figure I.1).



Figure I.1 Christine’s Student’s Illustration of the Constellation of Stances

As we experimented in our own classrooms and others, read more, and talked with colleagues, we began to realize that the stances we were working on were akin to the needs of saltwater fish: they need a certain pH to thrive; they need a community ecosystem that values and fosters their development. In all the energized and engaged classrooms we've worked in, we've found that certain elements repeated themselves, such as workshop teaching structures and a playful, joyful approach to teaching and learning (see Chapter 1 for more on these essential elements).

Take a Leap of Faith

In her book *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown draws upon Theodore Roosevelt's famous speech, challenging us to "walk into the arena, whatever it may be . . . with courage and the willingness to engage" (2012, 2). She continues, "Rather than sitting on the sidelines and hurling judgment and advice, we must dare to show up and let ourselves be seen. This is vulnerability. This is daring greatly." As teachers, we know well that life would be easier outside the arena. Outside the arena, we can deliver the curriculum as it is handed down to us. We can push and pull our students toward academic benchmarks and teach them how to "do" school. We can pack up our bags at the end of the day and say, "Good enough." Life is safer and easier outside the arena.

But, as teachers, we also know in our hearts that our place is actually inside the arena. Inside the arena, we advocate passionately for what is best for our students while helping them develop their own agency and voice. We do all we can to dodge the judgments that are hurled at us, and we use our best judgment to help our students thrive. Inside the arena is where we do our most important work—our work as teachers is to dare greatly and to teach our children to do the same.

Thousands of miles later—or at least thousands of conversations, trials, mistakes, brainstorming, and "ahas" later—we invite you to take up your own journey. Redefine rigor in your classroom. Reintroduce joy, creativity, and play. Take risks. Embrace failure wholeheartedly. Grow as a teacher. As you go forward from this point on, know that you are not standing alone. We—the collective we—are standing, teaching, and learning side by side. And, together, we will help your students become the brave, engaged, energized learners and people we need them to be.

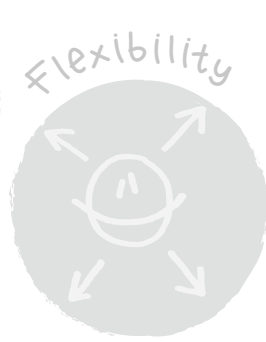
Bridging from Theory to Practice: How to Use This Book

Christine was flipping through a cooking magazine when a glossy photo and catchy title caught her eye: “Okra—the Power of the Pods.” Curious, she read on. Before the recipes, the article discussed a little bit about the health benefits, the heritage, and even the argument for okra. Cooking magazines have a knack for getting you to try something new; they justify *why* you would want to try it and then clearly lay out *how* you could do it.

We have found that the best books for educators have something in common: they balance theory and research (the what and the why) with practice (the how). Such books engage us intellectually, change our thinking, and then give us direct, practical ideas for classroom implementation. Our hope is that this book achieves such a balance.

Chapter 1 will provide you with a field guide to your classroom, and Chapter 2 will act as a field guide to your students, inviting you to think carefully about each individual student and your class as a whole.

The remaining chapters are designed to work in pairs. The first chapter in a pair focuses on theory, relevancy, and research and the second focuses on application and practice. Our hope is that these chapter pairs will leave you both eager and prepared to start engaging with this work in your own classroom.



CHAPTER

3

Knowledge Is Power: Teaching Children the Constellation of Stances

Have you ever had this happen to you: you start thinking about something—maybe a new hairstyle or a certain color car you might want to buy—and then, all of a sudden, you start to notice that thing more and more often? One moment you might be contemplating getting bangs and the next you find yourself running into women with bangs everywhere you look. Then you start to analyze each and every one of their hairstyles. By focusing our attention on something specific, we gain an increased sense of awareness of its presence in our world and we start to think about it more critically. It's as if we put on a special pair of glasses and we start to see the world through a new set of lenses. It seems simple enough but, in reality, it can be powerful. This new lens can serve as a call to action for things we notice about our world (the litter on our block, acts of injustice in our community) as well as a call to reflection for things we notice about ourselves (our habits, our decisions, and our very outlook on life).

When Christine was running almost daily while training for a race, she started to notice a strange pattern. On days when life got busy and she had to skip her run, she would see runners everywhere she went—on the way to work, outside the window of her classroom, zipping around the neighborhood. It’s as if the runners were taunting her, “We fit it in! Why can’t you?” No matter the day of the week, or the time of year, or the weather, on the days she skipped running, there seemed to be runners everywhere. There was not a dramatic increase in the number of runners on those days, just one in Christine’s awareness of them. All day her focus shifted back to the fact that she was skipping a day of running and, by doing so, she gained a level of consciousness that she didn’t have on days when she focused on her own run instead. More often than not, after noticing just how many people got out to run, she would slip into her running shoes at the very end of the day and squeeze in a quick run. By raising her awareness, she not only changed her observations but also her behavior.

What we choose to focus our attention on—the good, the bad, the ugly, or the beautiful—can dramatically change our behavior and interactions with the world. For our students, what we guide their awareness to can have a powerful effect on their lives. What lenses will be the most powerful for them to see themselves, and the world, through?

Harnessing the Power of Awareness

Just as gaining awareness of runners or bangs can change our day-to-day decisions, gaining awareness of how we view ourselves and the process of learning and thinking can change how we react to new challenges and life’s inevitable setbacks. In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck articulates the power of shifting our awareness: “Just by knowing about the two mindsets,” she writes, “you can start thinking and reacting in new ways” (2007, 46). (See the introduction for more on Dweck’s mindset work.) The knowledge of the fixed and growth mindsets alone is enough to stop people in their tracks and change both their thinking and their actions.

Or put another way, psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman writes in *Learned Optimism*, “Our thoughts are not merely reactions to events; they change what ensues” (2006, 7). The more aware we are of our thinking, Seligman argues, the more control we have over our actions. For example, Kristi’s friend once snapped during a conversation, “Stop trying to *fix* everything; just listen!” Until that moment, Kristi hadn’t even realized that she was doing that. Now, knowing that her tendency is to swoop in and try to solve every problem, she tries to bite her

tongue when she wants to say, “Well have you tried . . . ?” Awareness illuminates the difference between choice and inevitability. We always have a choice in our own thinking and behavior. As teachers, we can harness this power of awareness, choice, and action, and use it as a natural first step in our work to foster engaged and energized learners.

Defining the Stances of Engaged and Energized Learners

Though the following list of stances is by no means exhaustive, they are the habits of mind that came up again and again in the research we read (for more on our research, see the list of works cited). For the children we teach, by intentionally and explicitly introducing this constellation of stances—optimism, flexibility, persistence, resilience, and empathy—we are laying the foundation for the work to come on self-talk, storytelling, goal setting, and reflection. Our goal is not for students to use each of these stances in isolation; instead we see these stances as a tool kit that students can use when faced with a challenge, oftentimes in coordination. We have found, however, that it is helpful to teach the stances one by one and then to notice, as a class, when and how the stances weave and work together. (See the chart “The Constellation of Stances and Their Definitions” later in this chapter for a quick guide.)

Optimism

Optimism is feeling hopeful that risks are worth taking and that problems will work their way out. Here’s a beginning definition to use with children: *When you do something new, you think, “I can try,” and give it your best shot because that’s how you grow.*

The glass is half full; every cloud has a silver lining; if life has given you lemons, you might as well make lemonade. You know and have heard these expressions countless times. But the truth is that optimism is actually very powerful.

Imagine this scenario: You teach about adding dialogue to a narrative only to have the lesson flop miserably (and we know they do sometimes). Students leave the lesson confused, and you start conferring with students despite a nagging sense of failure. That afternoon after school, when you jot down notes for tomorrow’s lessons, you have two choices: you can choose optimism or you can choose pessimism.

According to Martin Seligman in *Learned Optimism*,

the defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do and are their own fault. The optimists, who are confronted with the same hard

knocks in the world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is just a temporary setback, that its causes are confined to this one case. The optimists believe that defeat is not their fault: Circumstances, bad luck, or other people brought it about. Such people are unfazed by defeat. Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder. (2006, 5)

If you face your lesson setback with pessimism, you're likely to think things such as, "I'm such a bad writing teacher," or "I really messed up and now my students will always be confused about adding dialogue." Or you might even blame others for your own feelings of failure: "Dialogue is too hard for kids." It's easy to see how this kind of pessimism spirals into helplessness and unproductivity.

If you face your setback with optimism, you'll likely reflect on just why the lesson didn't work out and plan a new way to teach the lesson. You'll see the setback as temporary and you will accept it as a challenge that you can work through and ultimately overcome with all you know as a teacher. You will find learning in your struggle and use it to become better.

Young children are, on the whole, very optimistic. When children are young, many take risks almost without a second thought: jumping off rocks into puddles, playing experimentally with words and sounds, and seeing just what will happen if they pull that worm up from the soil. Seligman writes that for young children, "bad events just happen along, melt away quickly and are someone else's fault" (2006, 126). As children grow up, they often become more wary of taking risks and more helpless in the face of defeat. Children can lose their sense of optimism in several ways: by seeing adults model pessimism, by hearing critical feedback after a failure, and by experiencing early loss or trauma (Seligman 2006, 133). They can grow timid and afraid to take on challenging tasks, happier to just coast along where they are comfortable and maintain a high level of success. As teachers, many of us know these children well. In many school settings they look like the ideal child—well behaved, quiet, and on task. However, these students shrink away when faced with a challenge and are rarely truly energized about their learning.

The good news is that optimism can be taught and that, as Seligman writes, "when the skills of optimism are learned early, they become fundamental" (253). When we teach children in our classrooms to practice optimism, we teach them to launch themselves into difficult tasks with the belief that even if they fail, they can learn and grow and that any problems they face will work themselves out one way or another. We teach them to hold on to that sense of curiosity and wonder from their earliest years and to continue asking, "What if?" unafraid of what the answer might be.

Flexibility

Being flexible means seeing and trying many possible actions within a task. A beginning definition to use with children is: *When one thing doesn't work, you try a different way.*

Try to remember the last time you were lost. What did you do? Did you check the map on your phone? Refer back to the directions? Stop and ask for help? Retrace your route? Chances are, you thought carefully about several of these options and then used the one that you thought would be the most successful. Now, what if you decided to check the map on your phone and you found you were out of cell phone range? You'd most likely use this new information to rethink the problem and choose an alternate solution—maybe now it would be time to pull into a gas station and ask for directions. Whatever the solution, the important thing is that you were flexible. You didn't merely drive around in circles, hoping that your destination would magically appear in front of you.

This flexibility in thinking is critical to solving problems. In *Discovering and Exploring Habits of Mind*, Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick describe flexible people: "They have the capacity to change their minds as they receive additional data. They engage in multiple and simultaneous outcomes and activities, and they draw upon a repertoire of problem-solving strategies" (2000, 25). Thinking flexibly requires you to consider all of the possible approaches to a problem, to assess which will be the most helpful, and to employ it. Thinking flexibly also requires you to reassess the problem and your actions every time it changes or you receive more information.

Costa and Kallick go on to suggest that flexibility includes being able to see a problem from one's own perspective (or what Jean Piaget called egocentrism), another's perspective (allocentrism), a bird's-eye view (macrocentrism), and a worm's-eye view (microcentrism) (2000, 26). By quickly shifting between these perspectives, flexible thinkers can "approach a problem from a new angle, using a novel approach" (22) what Edward de Bono called "lateral thinking." It is this lateral thinking that allows us to know if finding our way will simply mean taking the next left or changing routes entirely.

Flexibility, for the children in our classrooms, means seeing all of the possible actions they could take in a given scenario. It means that when one strategy to subtract three-digit numbers doesn't work, they can switch to another. It means knowing when a book is too challenging for them and choosing something just right. It means when they have a problem with a friend, they have a menu of options to stand up for themselves or repair the relationship. But in the long term, flexibility

will also allow these children, and the adults they will become, to see large, complex problems and find ways to tackle them efficiently and creatively.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back and recover from setbacks or failures. Here's a beginning definition to use with children: *When you have trouble, you bounce back and try again.*

In their book *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, Kenneth Ginsburg and Martha Jablow (2011) use a beach ball metaphor to illustrate resilience: Imagine a ball floating on the ocean, they suggest. No matter how far down you push it, it will always come back to the surface.

Our own resiliency is tested and measured every day. How quickly do we recover when we lock ourselves out of the house? Or burn dinner? Or get lost? Do we rebound within a few moments, solve the problem, and move on? Or do we linger with the issue and let it define our day or even our week? Of course, how resilient we are is directly affected by the nature and scope of the situation.

Resilience is important in our day-to-day lives, but it is essential to learning. Resilience is what allows one to be persistent. It is the ability to stand up after a fall, try again after a mistake, and love again after heartbreak. It is the ability to come back into yourself and try again. The tried-and-true bike-riding analogy fits perfectly here: when you're learning to ride a bike you will fall, you will probably get scraped up a bit, and you might even have some scary close calls. But what is most important is that you get back on the bike and keep trying. You do not melt into a puddle of frustration and never ride again; you bounce back and get back on the bike again and again. Without resilience when learning something new, learning becomes next to impossible.

Ginsburg and Jablow suggest, "Some children seem naturally graced with an ability to recover from obstacles, while others need extra support" (2011, 4). As teachers, we see this every day, even if we haven't named it as resilience until now. We see some students who are buoyed quickly back to the surface and others who seem to spiral farther and farther downward with every setback. While giving up on the task at hand meets students' immediate need for escape, there are longer-term consequences at stake (Ginsburg and Jablow 2011, 14). Students who do not develop their resilience can instead develop an aversion to taking risks. Edwin Catmull, the CEO of Pixar, and his coauthor, Amy Wallace, warn against this aversion to failure: "If you aren't experiencing failure, then you are making a far worse mistake: You are being driven by the desire to avoid it" (2014, 109).

Resilience can be learned and can be developed in ourselves and in the children we teach. By creating an environment where children feel comfortable with taking just-right risks and failing (see the section “Understanding Development in Order to Create Just-Right Risks” in Chapter 1 for more information on setting up just-right challenges), we are allowing them to experience the predictable pattern of attempting, running into difficulty, and resetting. This is not to say that the difficult moments won’t feel bad—of course they will—but rather that those bad feelings can be overcome and do not define their personhood. The more often they feel that bounce-back, the more habitual it will become.

Persistence

Sticking with something even when it is challenging requires persistence. You might describe it for children this way: *Having persistence means you try and try again even when it feels hard.*

Persistence, sometimes used in the same breath as grit, is one of the more debated stances in the research we have read. To understand why, it is useful to consider persistence in our own day-to-day experiences. Relationships are the perfect lens to think critically about the pros and cons of persistence.

Persistence in relationships can be an unhealthy approach; imagine the time you worked and worked at a relationship that just seemed to go nowhere. Maybe the scenario was calling and calling someone long after he or she ceased calling you back. Maybe the scenario was believing that if you just kept up your end of the bargain, the other person would change and start treating you differently. Either way, persistence in such cases is more harmful than helpful. Doggedness in the face of clear callousness, disregard, or unrealistic expectations is damaging to a degree beyond measure. There are some things you should just let go.

Yet persistence can also save and strengthen relationships. When a beloved friend goes through a challenging time and seems to disappear, it is persistence on your end, through calls, visits, and check-ins, that ensures you will still have a friendship in the future. Even great marriages can have tough spots, but a desire to try and try to resolve the issues can lead to stronger and more powerful connections. As Ernest Hemingway said in *A Farewell to Arms* “the world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places” (1957, 249).

To persist or not to persist? That is the question. The answer: sometimes. We refer to these stances as tools; sometimes you need a hammer and other times you need a screwdriver. We value reflection (see Chapters 11 and 12) for this purpose: so we can fine-tune our personal understandings of when and why each stance helps (or hurts) our growth.

Grit is a term that we've been seeing more and more in education circles. Angela Duckworth, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, has defined grit as “staying with one path. Grit is choosing to show up and again” (Lewis 2014, 182). Anders Ericsson defines this type of practice as “deliberate practice.” By trying something over and over again—even in the face of setbacks—students can harness their grit to propel their growth.

On the other hand, there are times when persistence or grit is no longer helpful to growth. In an article published in the *Washington Post*, education author and lecturer Alfie Kohn defined these times as “non-productive persistence” (2014). He wrote,

[Gritty people] try, try again, though the result may be either unremitting failure or “a costly or inefficient success that could have been easily surpassed by alternative courses of action,” as Dean McFarlin and his colleagues put it in the *Journal of Personality* [1984]. Even if you don't crash and burn by staying the course, you may not fare nearly as well as if you had stopped, reassessed and tried something else.

But what if having a greater purpose for your work actually made you grittier when you needed to be? People who change the world do so in part because they have grit. In a recent study by David Yeager of the University of Texas at Austin and others, the researchers found that teenagers who wanted to make a positive impact on their community or society found their schoolwork to be more meaningful: “Initial promising results suggest the psychology strategy could encourage pupils to plug away at homework or learning tasks that are challenging or tedious, yet necessary to getting an education that'll help them reach their greater life goals” (Chen 2014). When students see the link between the task at hand and their potential future impact on their community or society, Yeager reports, their “grittiness” actually increases. Daniel Pink has written extensively on the link between purpose and drive; for more on motivation and the importance of purpose, including Pink's thoughts on the subject, see Chapters 9 and 10.

As teachers, we must teach children when to use persistence to catapult them up and over a learning hurdle and when that tenaciousness is what it will take to be successful. However, for persistence to be an effective tool, it must be coupled with the other stances in the constellation.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to feel how another person is feeling and imagine what it would be like to be in another's position. A beginning definition to use with children is *You have empathy when you feel someone's feelings in your own heart.*

Do you have a friend, or a partner, whom you go to in times of need? A person who seems to radiate warmth and good intention? A person who *understands* you and what you are feeling? Now also imagine the opposite. Do you know someone who is almost clinical in his or her treatment of others, seemingly cold and detached, incapable of seeing your point of view? One of these two people has high levels of what we call empathy.

Empathy, in the words of Daniel Pink in *A Whole New Mind*, “is the ability to stand in others’ shoes, to see with their eyes, and to feel with their hearts” (2005, 159). This may seem like a mushy, feel-good idea with no inherent value in learning and leading, but in his foreword to *Roots of Empathy*, Daniel Siegel writes, “Children who develop social and emotional competence are happier, have more rewarding relationships with their peers, are resilient in the face of stress, and even perform better academically” (Gordon 2005, xiv). From doctors, to lawyers, to leaders, Daniel Pink (2005) has found that empathetic individuals deliver better care, make better decisions, and experience greater joy. There is a clear logic to this outcome: the better you understand people, the better you can help them. Beyond this added value, it is worth being empathetic just for the sake of it.






As teachers, we must stay cognizant of the future world we are contributing to. Who do we want in the world? What do we want to foster in our students? Empathy is first and foremost about connecting to and understanding others. All the other stances are meaningless if we fail to value and teach empathy. Empathy provides a system of checks and balances for all other thinking. Is persistence in this goal harmful to myself or others? Can I best support this community through optimism or through flexibility? A world where people exhibit persistence, flexibility, and resilience at the expense of the quality of others’ lives is a dark future indeed.

Empathetic children will fight for social justice, equality, and fairness in the classroom, just as we hope they will one day do in the world. Empathy, like every other stance we mention, can be taught starting first, like all the stances, with awareness.

Introducing the Stances: Guided Inquiry and Concept Construction

Let’s turn now to introducing this constellation of stances to children. With each stance you introduce, you’ll be providing them with a new lens through which they can see the world and themselves. These are exciting moments. Your students will start to see challenges, setbacks, and their own learning in an entirely new light. They will likely feel a greater sense of agency and control over their growth, and the

The Constellation of Stances and Their Definitions

Stance	Memorable Symbol	Definition	Beginning Definition for Students
Optimism		Feeling hopeful that risks are worth taking and that problems will work themselves out.	<i>When you do something new, you think, "I can try," and give it your best shot because that's how you grow.</i>
Persistence		Sticking with something even when it is challenging.	<i>Having persistence means you try and try again even when it feels hard.</i>
Flexibility		Seeing and trying many possible actions within a task.	<i>When one thing doesn't work, you try a different way.</i>
Resilience		Bouncing back and recovering from setbacks or failures.	<i>When you have trouble, you bounce back and try again.</i>
Empathy		Feeling how another person is feeling and imagining what it would be like to be in another's position.	<i>You have empathy when you feel someone's feelings in your own heart.</i>

class community will be energized as each stance is introduced. Before long, you will hear your students use these lenses throughout their day. You might hear “You were really optimistic when you tried that big slide on the playground even though

you'd never done it before" or "I was trying to be flexible when I tried another way to start my personal narrative."

The key to all of this work, however, rests in how the stances are introduced and to what degree students can take ownership of the concepts. To that end, we recommend a balance between guided inquiry and explicit concept instruction. Inquiry is at the heart of constructivism and, therefore, at the heart of our teaching. According to Jean Piaget, learning occurs as you build new knowledge either by transforming or replacing (constructing) existing knowledge. Vygotsky theorized that our learning is based on *social* construction through shared practices and interactions with others. Inquiry provides the perfect opportunity for the shared construction of new learning.

As you will see in the following example from a kindergarten classroom, Malini introduced the stance of empathy to her class by studying a text, in this case a book, and by explicitly teaching the children about the concept.

He Feels Like She Feels—Exploring Empathy: Window into Kindergarten

Welcome to Malini's kindergarten classroom. Amid the blocks and the tables, there are signs that this is not your average kindergarten room. On a wall toward the back of the classroom is a chart that says "Brains Can Grow" (see Figure 3.1). This class has learned that brains, like bodies, grow and that we can do things, like be persistent, to grow our brains. (See Chapter 1 to learn more about setting up a classroom designed to honor growth.)

It is 12:30 p.m. on a Tuesday in mid-September. Lunch has ended and recess has drained some of the wiggles from this group of four- and five-year-olds. The sun is slanting in through the windows on a rainbow-colored rug, the windows are cracked, and the sounds of the city are leaking in, along with a warm breeze. Twenty-four bodies are in various positions of rapt attention as their teacher, Malini, rereads (for the third time this year!) the last few pages of *Leonardo the Terrible Monster*, by Mo Willems (2005), already a class favorite.



- ▶ Deeper meaning can often be found on rereads, and children love hearing books again and again.
- ▶ Simple texts with powerful pictures can prompt meaningful, and universally accessible, conversations.
- ▶ Engagement is not obedience; focused attention is more important than still bodies.

Leonardo has just made a critical decision in the text: instead of pursuing his own dream of becoming a terrible monster, he has decided to become a friend. The pages that precede this moment show Leonardo attempting to scare a very sad boy named Sam, and Sam bursting into tears before launching into a litany of the ways his life is terrible. Malini has frozen here and pauses, leaning forward on her knees in her spot at the front of the rug. “You know, this confused me last time, and it *still* does,” she says, with exasperation creeping into her tone. “Why would Leonardo stop wanting to be a monster?!” Malini raises her hands to the ceiling in mock mystification as the voices start piling up.

- “Because monsters are bad!”
- “You have to be a friend!”
- “He is a friend!”
- “He’s funny!”
- “I have this book!”

This being September of kindergarten, Malini knows to let children say what they need to say for a few moments before gathering their attention again. She flips back to the page before, beautifully illustrated by Mo Willems, where Leonardo and Sam stare at each other with equally horrified expressions. “I want to go back here,” Malini says, “because this is what changed his mind. I want to look closer!”



FIGURE 3.1 “Brains Can Grow” Chart



- ▶ Sitting low to the ground, or even on the floor, helps establish that the teacher is one of the members of the community and can facilitate a tone of cooperation.
- ▶ Implicit in this read-aloud is powerful reading work: rereading a page, stopping when confused, thinking, and talking out confusion.
- ▶ For young children, look for picture books with illustrations that engage readers.

Malini holds the book, angling her head one way and then another, asking, “What is going on on this page? Why did Leonardo make such a big change?”

The chorus of voices begins immediately, mostly naming the character actions, faces, and feelings because this is what the students talked about on previous reads. “He is crying! He is sad!” the voices say.

Malini uses these comments to help the children see a connection on the page. “Wait . . . wait. He feels sad? He is crying? Who is crying? Whose face is sad?” As she says this, Malini moves her finger between the two characters, who happen to both be crying and looking quite upset.

“Look! His face [*gesturing to Leonardo*] looks like his face [*gesturing to Sam*],” Jamila yells, launching herself out of her seated position to touch the book.

Malini looks shocked at this discovery and looks to the rest of the children. “Do you see this—do you see what Jamila sees? Do they look the same?” Everyone nods. A few small friends stand to also touch the book, and Malini nods for them to wait for a minute. “The last time we read this,” she says, “we thought Sam was sad because he had such a bad day, and now it seems like Leonardo feels sad, too, maybe because Sam is sad?” Heads nod and voices confirm this theory Malini has just offered.

Malini pauses and then says, “So it’s like he [*gesturing to Leonardo*] is feeling his feelings [*gesturing to Sam*]? He is feeling sad because Sam is sad?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Boroka shouts. She stands, eager to say what she has just realized. “Leonardo is sad because Sam is sad, like Leonardo’s heart is sad. They are sad together!” This last point is punctuated by a flick of the wrist and an open palm, facing upward, and the children around her nod.



- ▶ Tackle tricky topics on a reread so the general understanding is already out of the way.
- ▶ Gestures often direct the eye; the moment of realization in Malini’s classroom is orchestrated by the teacher’s nonverbal cueing as she points to the faces.
- ▶ Plan to use a book, and a page, that can spark the discussion you want to have, but let students lead you. (See Appendix E for book and video ideas.)

- ▶ Though we offer possible starting language for definitions, the best ones will be co-constructed with your students.
- ▶ When working with small children, don't underestimate how much repetition will lead to clarity. Though the children seem to be restating, they are actually realizing.

“Wait a minute, wait a minute—has that ever happened to you? Have you ever felt someone else’s feelings in your heart, like Boroka said? Like Leonardo here? Turn and tell your neighbor,” Malini asks the children. Turn-and-talk is not a flawlessly executed routine yet, so Malini spends a few seconds making sure everyone is actually turned to someone, and she catches only a snippet of what Finn is telling a neighbor (see Figure 3.2).

“One time, one time, I saw a girl’s ice cream fall on the ground and I felt so sad.”

Malini cuts in to repeat the definition they have just constructed. “So, Finn, it was like you felt her feelings in your heart? Like you weren’t sad, but you felt her sadness?” Finn nods and Malini offers a whispered, “Whoa.”



FIGURE 3.2 Students Turn and Talk



- ▶ Some of the stories the children tell will be fantasies, and it is still OK to treat them as truth; we can pretend ourselves into the people we wish to become. (See also Chapters 7 and 8, on storytelling.)
- ▶ Empathy is similar to, but not the same as, sympathy; however, the nuances do not need to be teased out at this moment.
- ▶ Move quickly; this is just the beginning of a long journey.

After gathering the attention of the children quickly, Malini recounts the story of Finn and the girl that dropped her ice cream. “Friends,” she says, “when you feel someone’s feelings in your own heart, there is a big grown-up word that goes with it: *empathy*.” Malini writes the word out, quickly, while saying it one more time (see Figure 3.3). Then she asks, “Can we try that word out in our mouths? Let’s say it! Empathy! Empathy is when you feel someone’s feelings in your own heart, like Finn felt for the girl with the ice cream, or Leonardo did for Sam.”

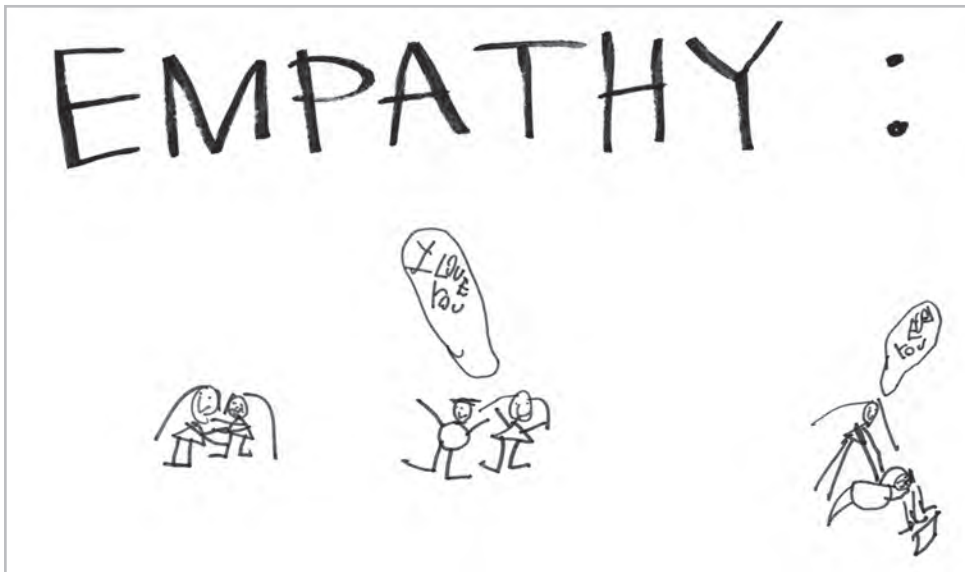


FIGURE 3.3 The Word *Empathy* and an Illustration



- ▶ Seeing, saying, and hearing the word activate different areas of the brain and make it more memorable.
- ▶ Use a visual, from the book or from a child's story, to illustrate the meaning of the word.
- ▶ Speed is more essential than quality, so consider this beginning chart temporary.

Malini notices the wiggles on the rug are increasing after the fifteen minutes this has taken, so she takes the children through a quick calming breath and wraps up. “Friends, we are going to keep our eyes open for when we see empathy or feel empathy in this classroom and in the whole world! We will have a special way and a special place to celebrate each time we grow our hearts and our brains!”

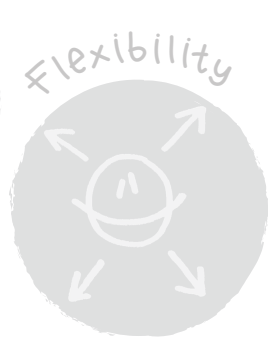


- ▶ For more information on the ways empathy is celebrated and kept alive, see the “Reflecting on and Maintaining Growth” section at the end of Chapter 4.

Moving from Idea to Action

By introducing the idea of empathy to her class, Malini has provided a new and highly valuable lens for her kindergartners. In the coming weeks, these four- and five-year-olds will see examples of empathy emerge in every part of their world:

their play, their stories, their homes, and their learning. They'll return to this idea of empathy again and again as a class, celebrating every small act of kindness. When the moment seems right and when her class is ready, Malini will add another stance to her class' tool kit. The following chapter offers a step-by-step guide to introducing the constellation of stances.



CHAPTER

4

Using Guided Inquiry to Teach the Stances

There is no set order for introducing the stances. Just as you choose just-right books or math tasks or instruction for your students, you can choose the just-right order of introduction for your class. Perhaps you teach third grade and after having seen your students try and give up almost immediately, you think your class would benefit by beginning with persistence. Maybe you teach fifth grade and you think the lens of empathy will set the perfect tone at the start of the year. Or, if you teach kindergarten, you might start by teaching optimism, tapping into the inherently playful nature of risk taking.

You will find that once you introduce one stance, it will lead naturally to another stance. Once students get in the habit of “trying and trying again,” they might be primed to learn to think flexibly when they come to a roadblock. Or perhaps after students learn to think optimistically, saying, “I can try!” they will need to be introduced to the concept of resilience and practice bouncing back when taking a risk doesn’t quite work out. As you introduce each new stance, your students will begin to see their own agency and the powerful role they play in their own learning.

In Your Own Classroom

In a traditional classroom cycle of inquiry, students and teachers launch an inquiry with a question, research that question, interpret their findings, and reflect. (For more on teachers as researchers, see Appendix A.) In *Action, Talk, Text: Learning and Teaching Through Inquiry*, Gordon Wells (2001) describes this cycle as a spiral of knowledge building. Experiences lead to new information, knowledge building, and understanding.

Inquiry can be woven into all areas of your curriculum: reading, writing, science, and social studies. Inquiry can be open-ended and student directed, or it can be guided by the teacher. As we saw in Malini’s kindergarten classroom, a guided inquiry provides an opportunity to balance social construction of new learning (in that case, about empathy) with clear, direct instruction about the concept. We recommend the following cycle to introduce each stance:

1. Study a text as a whole class.
2. Discover the concept.
3. Name the concept.
4. Reflect on and generalize the concept.

Study a Text

Your first step, as a class, is to carefully study a text and, through that study, discover one of the five stances of engaged and energized learners. There is a nearly inexhaustible list of texts that you could use to teach each stance. (We’ve listed some of our favorite resources in Appendix E.) In fact, we’ve found that many books could be used to teach multiple stances. The lovely picture book *Everyone Can Learn to Ride a Bicycle*, by Chris Rashcka (2013), could be used to teach optimism, persistence, or resilience. Your choices are not limited to books, either; you can use songs, video clips, advertisements, images, and even video games to teach the stances. Your students will quickly understand the concept of resilience if you try to learn one of their video games.

Since the options are so varied, we recommend looking for the following qualities when choosing a text to use in a guided inquiry:

- **Relevant:** The text must be relevant to your students. Use a picture book they adore, a song they can’t stop singing, or a video clip from the most recent blockbuster. Find something that fits with their lives.

- **Accessible:** The text must be something that all of your students can access. Don't choose overly complex texts or challenging, new materials. Go for a text that your students will be able to understand through both words and visuals.
- **Clear:** Make sure you are clear about what part of the text, specifically, is showing the stance you are introducing. It may be just a few pages or images, but you should have the exact components in mind ahead of time.

Malini's choice of *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* met all three of these guidelines. The book was well loved and had already been read and reread in the class; her kindergartners could make meaning from the images alone and support that meaning with the words; and the stance that Malini was introducing clearly matched that precise moment in the text.

Discover the Concept

Just as Malini did, as you lead your students through a guided inquiry, you will want to have them discover the concept on their own. You could explicitly tell students, "Today we're going to study empathy," but research has shown that students have a better understanding of a concept (and of a word that will be very new to most) when they discover it first for themselves.

Of course, you'll want to guide your students to the concept and not simply hope that they will discover empathy or persistence entirely on their own. Malini asked her students, "Why would Leonardo stop wanting to be a monster?!" and then went back to the specific page in question, saying, "I want to go back here. I want to look closely, because this is where he changed." By focusing students' attention on the stance in action, Malini guided them to discover the concept.

Older students—and for that matter, younger students—may have words that match the concept and, by all means, encourage your students to share them. After studying a clip of persistence, you might hear, "It's perseverance!" or "He's never giving up!" These words or ideas are only adding to the collective, social construction of the concept.

Name the Concept

Once your students have discovered and discussed the stance you are introducing, it's time to name it explicitly. John Hattie and Gregory Yates, in *Visible Learning*, write that teachers must balance inquiry with direct instruction: "If you are trying to learn a skill, you need social models coupled with descriptive language to enable you to understand and memorize what you observe" (2013, 78). In this case, by

introducing one, specific term and definition to represent the concept, you'll give your class a common understanding from which you can build.

Isabel Beck (2013) has stressed the importance of “student-friendly explanations” of new words. These explanations use only known language and indicate how the word is used. We offered suggestions for definitions to use with students in the previous chapter, but you should think carefully about your class and your students when you're creating your definitions—the known words of a kindergartner might be very different from those of a fifth grader. Before you give your own definition, you should also listen closely as students discuss the stance you are discovering. You can mine their conversations for phrases or words that would make the stance more easily understood and authentic to your class.

Here are some tips for naming the concept:

- Say the word and definition on their own and then again in the context in which they were discovered. “Persistence means you try, try again. Max was persistent when he . . .”
- Have students repeat the word and try it out on their own.
- Draw a quick sketch with a memorable symbol to provide a visual association.

Reflect on and Generalize the Concept

Beck's (2013) research into word acquisition and vocabulary reminds us that very few children will leave your guided inquiry understanding or remembering a new term if they are exposed to it only once or twice, no matter how clear your definition may be. To develop a deep understanding of a word and its associated meaning, students need to think and talk about the word in different contexts. The text you studied as a class provided one context, an introduction, but our goal is for students to use these stances across their days and across their lives. We want them to be able to generalize them into everything that they do.

Over the coming year you'll work to reinforce your students' understanding of each stance (see the section “Reflecting on and Maintaining Growth” later in this chapter for more tips on this), but that work will begin even before you send your children away from the rug. Malini had students turn and talk about a time when they might have “felt someone else's feelings in their hearts.” By sharing these experiences, children were shifting from the static nature of a stance in a text to the more dynamic nature of the stance in life. Yes, Leonardo was empathetic to Sam, but *we* can also be empathetic. The benefit of making this shift from the text to real life is twofold: it offers another chance to understand this

new term and it gives children the opportunity to see their world through that new, powerful lens.

In the following example, fourth graders discover the stance of resiliency. Without question, they each have had moments in their lives when they have been resilient (standing back up as toddlers, moving to a new school, or even correcting a misspelled word), but when Ms. Allen introduces this new lens, they suddenly have a word to match this stance and the agency to recognize their own resiliency and to use it to their advantage.

Olympians Get Back Up: Window into Fourth Grade

It's late September and Ms. Allen calls the class over to the rug.

"All right, fourth graders," Ms. Allen begins as the class settles in to the meeting area. "We've been spending the last few weeks exploring what it means to be optimistic and what it means to be flexible. We've seen just how quickly taking on these two tools can really change our learning. The energy in this classroom for learning is incredible! And it's not even October yet!"

Ms. Allen gestures up to the two charts on the whiteboard. The charts are labeled "Optimism" and "Flexibility" and are covered with sticky notes detailing times that students have tried or witnessed other students using these stances (see Figure 4.1). A third chart hangs next to them, entirely blank.



- ▶ Providing opportunities (like charts with sticky notes) for children to record and celebrate times they have used a stance will integrate them into the classroom culture.
- ▶ Be sure to link each new stance with the ones that have already been introduced. That way, students will see how the stances weave and work together.

"This time of year, I start to gear up for winter and get excited to start skiing. I was thinking back to last winter and remembering how great it was to watch the Olympics. Did you guys watch, too?"

Ms. Allen looks around the circle and the students nod.

"Yeah!" Addison calls out. "Some of that skiing was so intense!"

"Well, I started thinking about what it takes to be an Olympian. What does it take to grow to be one of the very top athletes in a sport? I'm sure you have to have optimism—you have to think, 'I can try this!' And we know you have to take risks. You probably also have to be flexible. If one type of training or technique doesn't work out for you, you have to try another. But what else? I pulled up this

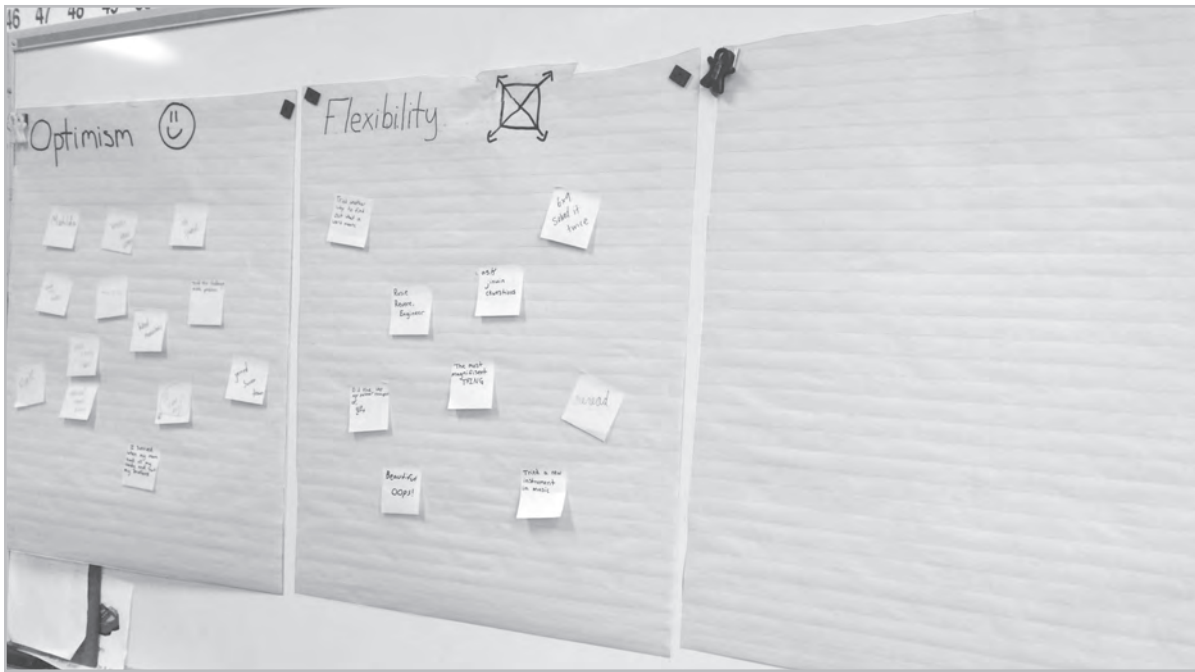


FIGURE 4.1 Charts on Optimism and Flexibility with Sticky Notes

video—it’s an advertisement, really—and I think it will give us a clue about what else Olympians need to have to really be successful.”



- ▶ Make the resources that you use authentic and accessible to your students. Books—especially picture books—are useful for all ages, but you might want to try using clips, video games, articles, or songs that are especially relevant to your students *and* the stance you are teaching. (For more resources, see Appendix E.)
- ▶ When introducing the new inquiry, link the day’s work back to the work that has come before it and the ultimate goal: creating energized and engaged learners.

Ms. Allen switches off the lights and pulls up a video clip: an advertisement that played over and over again the previous year.

“Pull out your inquiry notebooks and open to a blank page. Let’s watch it with this question in mind: ‘What does it take to be an Olympian?’ We’ll watch the whole thing through twice and then talk about what we’ve discovered.”

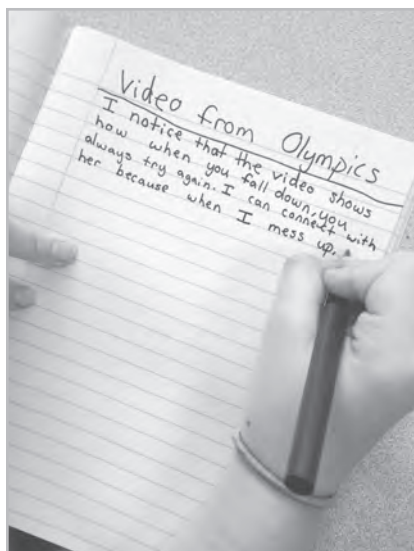


FIGURE 4.2 Inquiry Notebooks:
Discovering Resilience

Ms. Allen starts the video. The clip depicts babies, then toddlers, then school-age children, and then young adults falling repeatedly while learning to walk, while just starting their sports, and as professional athletes. The clip concludes with several of the athletes winning races and thanking their moms for “teaching [them] that falling only makes [them] stronger.”

Ms. Allen shows the video twice, pausing in between each viewing to restate the inquiry question. The students jot down sketches and notes in their inquiry notebooks (see Figure 4.2).

After the second viewing, Ms. Allen switches the lights back on.

“So,” she asks, “what does it take to be an Olympian? Turn and talk to your inquiry partner. What did you notice?”

The children turn to their partners and an energized buzz fills the room. Ms. Allen circulates among the children, listening in and jotting notes.



- ▶ Your goal as you circulate is not to hear the word for the concept you are exploring (in this case, *resilience*), but rather to hear students talking about the concept. In this case, you’d want to hear: Olympians get back up and try again.
- ▶ Inquiry partners (or small groups) and notebooks are structures that are easily put in place that can help foster deep thinking and reflection.

“All right, fourth graders, let’s come back together. Let’s get into our circle and start a conversation: What does it take to be an Olympian?”

Ms. Allen uncaps a marker and sits next to the blank piece of chart paper. She looks around the classroom.

“You have to fall and get back up. A lot,” Nathaniel begins. “Falling down makes you stronger and you learn from your mistakes.”

Ms. Allen takes notes on the chart paper as the children continue the discussion.

“I agree,” Amanda says. “No matter how many times you fall, no matter how many times you get hurt, you just keep trying.”

“You have to get back up if you want to get better at something. You can’t just lie there,” Addison said.

Ms. Allen draws a line under the notes on the chart paper. “Let’s pause for a second here,” she says. “There’s a name for this concept that you’ve discovered. It’s called resilience. Thumbs up if you’ve heard that word before.”

A few thumbs go up, but not many.

“Resilience means bouncing back when something goes wrong and trying to learn from your mistakes. We saw those Olympians do it again and again. They fell down, they got back up, and they learned from their mistakes. Let’s think about our own learning and growth. What can we learn from Olympians? When have we been resilient? When can we bounce back and learn from our mistakes? Take a moment to turn and talk with your partner about a few times that you’ve been resilient—in sports, at school, or maybe when learning something new. Go ahead.”



- ▶ Be sure to give a clear, developmentally appropriate definition for the stance you are introducing. The same definition might not necessarily be the best for kindergartners and middle schoolers, but the concept will be.
- ▶ By giving children an opportunity to talk about the concept right away with a partner, you are helping them reinforce both the new idea and the vocabulary word that you will be using all year.

“So what do you think?” Ms. Allen asks, pulling the class back together. “When could we be resilient?”

“I was resilient the first time I tried to do tricks on skis,” Cody says.

“When I was five, and I was learning to ride a two-wheeler, I crashed all of the time. But I kept getting back on my bike,” Amanda shares.

Ms. Allen jots the two examples on sticky notes and sets them aside.

“Do you think being resilient could help us in school? How so?” Ms. Allen asks.

“Maybe,” James suggests, “if you’re trying to solve a super hard math problem, you keep trying even if you get it wrong. You could try a different strategy. Then you would be resilient.”

“Or,” Addison adds, “if you’re reading and you keep messing up on a word, you don’t just skip it, you figure it out.”

“That’s resilience?” Ms. Allen asks.

“Yep. That’s resilience.”



- ▶ When you’re collecting examples of the new stance, accept both those from school and those from life outside of school. All will be helpful as children make sense of the concept.
- ▶ The more students can use the word (hear it, read it, use it themselves), the faster it will become a part of their working vocabulary.

“This video showed moms helping their children up over and over again. And it’s true that sometimes it’s helpful to have someone help you bounce back. Do you think it has to be your mom?”

“No,” Nathaniel says, “it could be a dad, or a friend, or a teacher, or *you!*”

“Yeah,” Amanda adds. “It can’t always be someone else. It has to be you, too, because you decide if you want to do it again. You have to decide if you want to solve your problems or to keep trying, trying and not give up. It has to be you.”



- ▶ Take every opportunity you can to have students see themselves as agents of their own learning. (See more about this in Chapter 1.)
- ▶ If, during this guided inquiry, the conversation veers off course or students are misunderstanding the concept or the word, quickly steer it back on course. You could say, “That’s an interesting idea, but remember that resilience is all about making mistakes, bouncing back, and learning from your mistakes.” You may choose to reframe the student’s idea with this lens if you can do so quickly and in the moment.

“Fourth graders,” Ms. Allen says, “it’s time for us to officially add a third tool to our tool kits: resilience.” She writes the word and draws the key symbol on the blank chart paper that hangs next to the charts for optimism and flexibility.

“Every time you find yourself or you notice someone else being resilient—bouncing back from a mistake and learning from it—let’s add it to our chart. I’ll start by adding the examples we came up with today. Make sure to be on the lookout for more!”

Reflecting on and Maintaining Growth

For us, as teachers, the summer months are filled with possibility. We keep notes in journals, bookmark blog posts that inspire us, and envision the classrooms we will inhabit in the upcoming school year. These daydreams are great and powerful; research even tells us that daydreams are healthy and helpful in that they happen when we are in our best creative problem-solving mode (Fries 2010). Yet as every September fades into October, at least one of these aspirations has faded away. So how do we build a successful habit? According to Scott H. Young, author of the essay “Reprogramming Your Daily Habits” (2013), the answer lies in understanding the limits of willpower.

Young refers to research conducted by Roy Baumeister that demonstrates that every person has a finite amount of willpower. When you use it up, it is as though you have drained your gas tank, and it can replenish only over time. Ever have an exhausting day at work? This phenomenon explains why it was then probably harder

to complete a normal workout, for example, on that day. You, as the colloquialism goes, ran out of steam. Young goes on to say that you should not combine new complex things at once if you really want to stick to your new habits. If you want to build a new hard habit, take on one at a time. So what does this mean in the classroom?

To help children build these stances, you may first want to ask them to apply them in areas of the day that are somewhat familiar to and “easy” for children in order to avoid draining their “willpower tank” too quickly. In the primary grades, this means play. It will be easier to build a habit of optimism in the art center, which will then transfer to work in reading, writing, and math, than vice versa (see Figure 4.3). In upper-elementary grades, you can choose one core academic area (writing, math, or reading) and then have your students discover how each stance fits in with that specific part of the day. Many will have aha moments or will begin to change their engagement in that academic area. Once you have introduced the stances in writing, for example, you can introduce them in math and reading. Don’t shy away from pulling in examples from older students’ lives outside of school—their sports, games, music, and weekend adventures are perfect fodder for deepening their understanding of the stances. Just remember: it can be a bit like trying to juggle and ride a bike at the same time when you attempt to launch everything at once. Be patient, keep in tune with your class, and incorporate one thing at a time.

Additionally, we need to commit to and be consistent with our new habit, Young states. Following you will find some simple ways to integrate awareness and reflection on these new stances to promote a high level of consistency.

Check in Regularly with Each Stance

- **Chart:** Make a chart for each stance with a symbol, a visual, and a definition. Leave space at the bottom to add stickies with descriptions, sketches, or photographs of children “living” the stance. (See Figure 4.4.)



FIGURE 4.3 A Cube Structure in a Classroom Chart Inspires Us to Be Persistent in More Ways



FIGURE 4.4 A Classroom Chart Shows the Variety of Stances

- **Use props or icons:** Visuals will help the class reflect on and remember a stance and what it means to use it. In some primary grades, teachers gave a crown with a visual of the symbol to a child who had demonstrated a stance (see Figure 4.5), and in many grades, children coded work with the symbols of the stances when they used them successfully (see Figure 4.6).

Check in Regularly with the Ecosystem of the Classroom

At the heart of this work is not just individual growth but a community of growth and kindness. We are not advocating “rat race junior,” where children persist to outperform peers; rather, we are looking to build a community of common language and living so that we, and the people in our community, can grow and thrive. To that end, it is worth revisiting and reflecting on the community and how we can use these stances to support others.

- **Role-Play:** Use the different stances in role-playing so children can experience what each means. You might role-play different stance approaches to the same problem to see which is most effective or to illustrate differences. For example, if the block tower fell down, what would it mean to be persistent (rebuild it the same way), flexible (build something different), or empathetic (help the person whose blocks fell down because you know how it feels)?
- **Share:** At the end of work time, children can tell about how others used specific stances to help themselves be the best version of themselves.
- **Coach:** Give opportunities for partners to help each other use the stances. You can whisper to a partner that he can help his friend by reminding him to “be flexible” or “be optimistic.”



FIGURE 4.5 A Child with an Empathy Crown



FIGURE 4.6 A Piece of Writing Marked with a Symbol for Flexibility

The commitment of a small amount of time each day brings the consistency needed to move an awareness of the stances to a habit of the mind. The following chapters will help you build, refine, and expand the ways you and your students use these stances and understand what it means to be an energized and engaged learner.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

- Invite parents to read the research! Many parents have told us the books we suggested (see Appendix A) have helped them in their own lives, as well as in their parenting.
- Ask parents to talk through times they have (or have not) used these stances in everyday occurrences. Talking through their own adult processes can provide a model for children to follow when they face their own small challenges.
- Invite parents to use these thinking tools (and the language) to celebrate when their children have overcome challenges! Zipping a coat, tying a shoe, and sticking with a hard piano piece are all worthy of remembrance.