



Hurdling Resilience through Habits of Mind

It is a time of year that elicits a mix of emotions. Everything from anticipation, anxiety, stress, and for many students, a burning desire for a promising outcome. Ideally, this event should evoke one to ask themselves questions, such as, “What could I have done?” and “What could I do next time to improve?” Yes, it is report card time!

As teachers it is our responsibility to hold students accountable for their learning. Often this is done by assigning a letter grade. Not only is this letter grade meant to reflect measurable learning, it can potentially serve as a misconstrued symbol for student’s belief, attitude, and confidence within themselves as learners. Furthermore, it could represent how they internalize their capabilities, and what direction they take when they fail or confront challenges. Obviously this is not the purpose of a report card yet reality is that many children perceive themselves as a reflection of their grades.

This article is not about report cards or grades, it is about resiliency. By resiliency in the context of learning, I mean how students “bounce back” when they experience failure, and “hurdles” they encounter and overcome in order to reach success. Additionally, I feel it is safe to say that Habits of Mind plays a significant role in building resilience. Habits such as, *striving for accuracy, metacognition, taking responsible, thinking interdependently, and thinking and communicating with clarity and precision*, to name a few.

So, how can we develop resiliency and Habits of Mind when setbacks occur with students?

This piece will discuss two instructional strategies on how to build resiliency through Habits of Mind along with some example statements to utilize within the classroom. Remember, what we say and how we use common language in the classroom goes a long way. In addition, I will offer some “impromptu” strategies for de-escalating frustration while building resiliency with a Habit of Mind.

Instructional Strategy Hurdle #1

Activity: Striving for Accuracy Resiliency Opener

The Plan:

Every class should begin with an opening activity that grabs attention, focus, and interest. It can be anything connected to prior knowledge, learning outcome for the day, or a simple and exciting activity to stimulate thinking. Although, the big question with any opener should be, “How could the opening activity build resilience through *striving for accuracy*?” Here are a few examples:

- Brainteaser: A challenging brain teaser offers students opportunity to fail and then recover in a safe environment. Phrase the question in such a way as, “*Strive for accuracy in solving this brain teaser with a resilient mindset. If you fail, bounce back and recognize what you did wrong, and try again next class. Keep focused and do your best.*”
- Story Time!: This activity is best for the start of a new week. It should focus on telling a story about someone who presented resilience. It can be an individual from history, currently in news, sports star, character from a novel, family member, or even yourself. Phrase the question in such a way as, “*Tell a brief story about someone who exemplified and modeled resilience in their life? How did they strive for accuracy in order to be resilient?*”
- Reflect and Apply: This activity allows students to reflect on the prior class and apply that information into some new insight. Phrase the question in such a way as, “*Strive for accuracy by checking your notes or talking with a partner about the top three points we focused on last class. In addition, if there any ideas you do not fully understand don't hesitate to be resilient - jump that hurdle to gain understanding?*”

The Connection:

Striving for accuracy plays a significant role in building resilience. When an unsuccessful outcome occurs, it is critical that one re-evaluates the situation to find ways to improve while displaying precision in their steps going forward. A “friendly-safe” zone and “friendly common language” offers comfort in practicing resilience.

Instructional Strategy Hurdle #2

Activity: The Metacognitive Resilience Scale

The Plan:

Before any assignment, project, or activity that could pose uncertainty and/or confusion, take some time to gauge students' confidence. When students receive a test score, project, or pre-assessment, get a feel for their capacity to recover. By recognizing how students “feel” via an indicator is critical within in any learning situation. This is students' practicing *Metacognition* - being aware of their thoughts, feelings, actions, and strategies. Start by placing a scale at the top of assignment sheets or having an enlarged scale visible in the classroom for students to indicate their level of resilience. Provided below is an example scale and a description of situations where this scale could be utilized within the classroom setting

No Resilience			Some Resilience				High Resilience			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Resilience Predictor: After reviewing an upcoming 10-day detailed project with multiple steps to a class, it is crucial to make sure to stop and ask for clarification. This offers opportunity for students to ask questions, identify particular sections of struggle, brainstorm ideas, and develop a game plan for how they will approach this monstrous project. To track students' resilience along with *Metacognition*, each day students will reflect on the following:
 1. Using the resilience scale, where do you rate yourself now? Why?
 2. How are you using *Metacognition* through this process?

A way to phrase this could sound like, *“Before we begin our projects, it is important to rate your feeling of resilience. Think about your rating number, why that number represents your resilience, and how practicing Metacognition could support your progress in building your resilience?”*

- Metacognitive Resilience Barometer: To gauge doubt, frustration, or uncertainty in connection to any assessment, it is imperative to gain student insight. By displaying a Resilience Scale (like the one above) in a visible area of the classroom, offers students a reference point for self-assessing. Here is a great example. Students receive their test grade back along with a blank note card. On the note card students rate their resilience with a number. Next to the number they write a metacognitive note on their feelings and how they can recover next time around. This note card gets turned into the teacher for insight.

A way to phrase this could sound like, *“After receiving back your test, refer to the Resiliency Scale in the front of the room and select where you feel you currently are at. Below your resiliency number, comment on a what you can do to recover and improve next time.”*

The Connection:

Metacognition and resiliency go hand-and-hand. When one *thinks about their thinking* according to overcoming a setback, the more resilient they become.

Hurdling “Impromptu” Resilience and Habit of Mind Recovery

It is a common experience that occurs across all grade levels and classrooms - frustration. Teachers can often recognize the signs - a defeated sigh, sheepish gaze to floor, or a demeaning comment to self. Sometimes it can be more blunt with comments like, “I’ll never be

able to do this.”, “Forget it, I am done.”, and “I’m not smart enough.” - all statements that should signal a call for action. As teachers we need to embrace opportunities where we can turn these signs and statements into building resilient impromptu moments. Below are three ways to develop resiliency when recognizing a frustrating situation for students.

1. **The Risk Taker:** Always compliment a student when *taking a responsible risk* in class. Whether it be answering a question wrong, stumbling on words while reading out loud, or even volunteering to go first for a class presentation. These are opportunities to build confidence, optimism, and risk taking...while in a safe space.
2. **Blending Minds:** The saying goes, “Two minds are better than one.” When you present a challenging activity or problem, and you recognize frustration building in some students, offer a 3-minute *thinking interdependently* session. This gives students an opportunity to pair up with a peer and collaborate. It is not about finding the answer instead the focus should be on sharing thought processes.
3. **A Moment of Clarity:** A classroom topic discussion can bring forth valuable viewpoints and perspectives. Although, for students who present slow processing, they could elicit resistance and refusal to contribute. Many times this is due to expressing uncertainty, forcing responses that lack clarity, and feeling defeated from past discussion experiences that were unsuccessful in their minds. To remedy this situation - add a 10-second pause between questions. This encourages students to practice the habit of *thinking and communicating with clarity and precision* while giving opportunity to bounce back and build confidence to contribute. If you notice more pause time is needed then extend the time.

The Final Yet Never Ending Hurdle

No matter what hurdles will never end. Children will always come across situations in school and in life where the track has no end and challenges always exist. As teachers it is our job to promote, encourage, and provide opportunities to learn from failures and build an inner resilience to compete in the race of life.