

Teaching and Learning in the Face of Adversity

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Strategies That Inspire

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INTRODUCTION

Adversity is all around us. It is central to the human experience to encounter challenges and barriers in our daily lives. Some of these challenges are relatively minor; others are significant, life-changing events. This book is not about changing the fact that educators, students, and families encounter adversity; rather, it is about our ability as educators to empower ourselves, our colleagues, and our students to elevate the way in which we respond to adversity.

Truth be told, we might wish these adversities away, and it would be great to have fewer challenges in our lives. But we are reminded of Maya Angelou's advice: "You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."

It seems that some amount of adversity is helpful and allows us to grow and develop. After all, as we may have heard, "adversity is one of life's great teachers." Be assured, we are not suggesting that educators or students simply accept the range of adversities in their lives and suffer. When taken too far,

resilience “may focus individuals on impossible goals and make them unnecessarily tolerant of unpleasant or counterproductive circumstances” (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lusk, 2017, para. 10).

Instead, this book is realistic and applicable. It addresses the ways in which we respond to the range of challenges—adversities—that arise as we do our work. There are healthy and not-so-healthy ways to respond to these events and situations. And there are skills we can develop and help our students to cultivate to elevate our ability to respond to adversity. We can reduce the negative impact of these adversities as well as enhance our learning and create opportunities from the challenges, obstacles, or even traumatic experiences we face.

In fact, there is a proficiency range when it comes to addressing adversity. Humans have a wide range of intelligences, and these develop with experience and learning. We are not talking about the multiple intelligences movement, which mistakenly suggested that learning experiences should align with one type of intelligence such as linguistic or musical. Rather, we are thinking about quotients that represent different clusters of behavior that can be learned. In a *Forbes* magazine article, Dennison (2022) notes that there are several different quotients that can be considered:

- ▶ **Intelligence Quotient (IQ):** The ability to recognize and solve problems
- ▶ **Emotional Quotient (EQ):** Measures emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional self-control
- ▶ **Adversity Quotient (AQ):** The ability to face and overcome adverse situations
- ▶ **Social Quotient (SQ):** Determines cultural fit and social awareness
- ▶ **Cognitive Quotient (CQ):** How one utilizes their intelligence

Importantly, these are demonstrated in the ways humans display behavior, their communication styles, the talents they cultivate, and how they approach projects and problems. The word choice *quotient* is important, as it means the degree or amount of some characteristic. In other words, at a given time an individual may have more or less of one of these characteristics. And these are influenced by culture, experiences, and opportunities.

Unfortunately, these models can be misused. For example, in history there was a mistaken belief that intelligence could be easily measured using a test and the scores used to label and sort people (e.g., Terman, 1916). In fact, some experts believed that the results of these tests could be used to predict the future success of the individual, and thus classes were organized for children based on their scores on these assessments.

Having said that, psychologists still recognize that humans have intelligence and have attempted to quantify it, now recognizing that scores on these types of assessments reflect the experiences that the learner has had rather than their future success. We also recognize that “thinking should be measured by an intelligence test and knowing by an achievement test” (Naglieri, 2020). Further, it’s important to separate the concept of intelligence from other areas of human development.

We introduce the idea of various quotients to underscore the fact that these are not fixed areas of performance, but rather continue to grow and develop across our lifetimes. In this book, our focus is on adversity and the ways in which we can elevate our own adversity quotient and that of our students. It concerns a collection of behaviors that allow us to respond when we encounter barriers, frustrations, setbacks, and unpleasant events in our lives.

As Stoltz (1997) proposed, the adversity quotient is a person’s ability to face situations, problems, and obstacles in life and

contains four components: control, ownership, reach, and endurance (see Figure i.1).

i.1 Components of the Adversity Quotient

AQ
ENHANCEMENT
SKILLS | **CORE**
QUESTIONS

When working through adversity, ask:

- C** **CONTROL**
What facets of this situation can I/we potentially influence?
- O** **OWNERSHIP**
Where and how can I/we step up to get the most immediate traction?
- R** **REACH**
What can I/we do to minimize the potential downside, and maximize the upside?
- E** **ENDURANCE**
How can I/we get past this as quickly as possible?

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- ▶ **Control** is our ability to take command of situations and our responses to those situations. We recognize what we can control in a situation rather than becoming overwhelmed by things that are beyond our control.
- ▶ **Ownership** is our ability to take responsibility for our responses and actions. It requires that we avoid blaming others or outside factors for the challenges. Instead, we focus on the steps we can take to improve the situations, resulting in greater self-efficacy and the recognition that our efforts and the outcomes are connected.
- ▶ **Reach** is our ability to respond to adverse situations and to seek help and support when needed. We build a network of supportive relationships and resources to reduce the feelings of isolation or we find support and guidance to help us overcome challenges.
- ▶ **Endurance** is our ability to persist through difficult times and face challenges. This helps us rebound from problems and maintain a positive attitude even when circumstances are trying. This strength helps us reach our goals.

The question we have asked often over the last several years is, “What does it take to elevate one’s adversity quotient?”—and by adversity quotient, we mean one’s ability to persevere in the face of significant adversity. Throughout our combined years in education, we’ve interacted with many educators, students, and families who have thrived in the midst of adversity, while others have been easily overcome by challenging situations, leading to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. In this case, those who fail or struggle to thrive would typically have a lower adversity quotient. Essentially, they lack hope, and thus are less inspired or able to confront or conquer potential trials or tribulations. It is our premise that tangible hope can kick-start one’s ability to persevere.

The term *tangible* is intentional. Like toxic positivity, hope without action is ineffective. Tangible hope, however, is concrete,

substantial, and subsequently transformative. Cornel West (Samuel, 2020) suggested, “Hope is not only a virtue; it is also a verb.” Hope can play a vital role in developing and cultivating one’s capacity to adapt and persist through adversity. Moreover, as a verb, “hope” transcends an expectation or desire for a specific action to occur and serves as a motivational impetus for attaining a goal, striving for growth, or finding purpose in life and in learning. In fact, according to a revealing study, *hope*, defined as a “multidimensional positive motivational state,” can impact academic functioning and student well-being. Within their study, Bryce et al. (2019) suggest that “cognitive hope, which encompasses motivation and approach to goal attainment, and behavioral hope, which includes regulation for goal attainment, both play critical roles in promoting youths’ academic functioning and life outcomes.”

This applicable concept of hope is also reflected in the title of an article in the *Journal of Research in Personality*: “Hope uniquely predicts objective academic achievement above intelligence, personality, and previous academic achievement” (Day et al., 2010). Furthermore, scientists have discovered that not only does hope reside in the medial orbital frontal cortex of the brain, but as a result, it can act to mediate anxiety by increasing endorphins (Ratner, 2019). We know that when students feel anxious or stressed, their ability to learn can be inhibited. As educators, we ignite hope in the lives of our students when we create the valuable pedagogical link that connects ongoing meaningful instruction and engaged learning to desired life outcomes. We understand that hope must be tangible and requires that we have goals and develop agency, self-efficacy, and resiliency. As such, hope is inexplicably connected to elevating one’s adversity quotient.

Stoltz has developed an Adversity Quotient assessment to help people understand how they respond to adversity and thus help people increase the ability to handle difficulties.

We will share ideas, anecdotes, and strategies that are within your realm of control, will nourish your well-being, engage your students, and foster positive and productive relationships.

Furthermore, know that we believe in the concept of *all teach, all learn*. Regardless of the role we serve within our school community—teacher, paraprofessional, school counselor, educational leader, bus driver, or any other role—we all have lessons to teach, and we all have something to learn, especially in the face of adversity. Consider, too, that our student learners can be our best teachers.

Finally, the contents of this book are timeless and meant to meet educators in the moment, especially in the midst of challenges or uncertainty. Global pandemics may occur once in a lifetime, challenging educational mandates may come and go, but adversity is a genuine and consistent experience—a certain companion in life. Former First Lady Michelle Obama (2011) shared this wisdom at a keynote address in South Africa: “You may not always have a comfortable life, and you will not always be able to solve all of the world’s problems at once, but don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own.”

As you embark on the journey that is this book, we invite you, as our readers and fellow educators, to participate—to read, learn, reflect, and share. In doing so, we are confident you will gain the awareness, knowledge, and skills to ignite hope, nourish well-being, and engage students in a quest to elevate your adversity quotient and that of your students!

1

BE INTENTIONAL

When you're intentional, you can add value to everything you do and to every person you meet.

—John C. Maxwell

In the Introduction, we suggested that adversity is ever-present and life's certain companion. What we didn't address is the reality, which we have all experienced, that some of the adversity we face in life is completely out of our control, while other challenges or obstacles are of our own making. So we begin our exploration of elevating one's ability to respond to adversity by focusing on the skill of being intentional. In fact, we ignite hope in the lives of others when we choose to be intentional. Additionally, a focus on intentionality can create responses from others that will cause us to feel more hopeful ourselves. More importantly, being intentional fosters behaviors that help us and others to encounter difficulties with courage, while nourishing one's well-being.

This lesson, like the three that follow, is organized into three sections. First, we present an opportunity to increase our awareness of the application of hope in the face of adversity.

For example, in Lesson One we explore the way in which *being intentional* can ignite hope by expanding our awareness as well as our ability to identify circumstances that are within our realm of control so that our response helps rather than hinders a situation.

Next, we provide a section focused on choices that nourish one's well-being. Within this section, we ask you to identify adverse experiences that are out of your sphere of influence and provide strategies for cultivating courage to evidence impact through changing that which is within your control. Our intention is to propose ideas and strategies that nurture one's well-being through thoughts, words, and behaviors that are inherent to our daily routines and vital to education.

Finally, the third section is designed with purpose to promote opportunities to foster student agency, self-efficacy, and engagement in the midst of adversity.



PROMPTS TO PONDER

- What is one word that comes to mind when you consider what it means to be intentional?
- How might being intentional impact your well-being or that of your students when challenging situations, personal hardships, or professional frustrations occur?
- How might focusing on intentionality improve your instructional practice?
- How might student engagement and achievement be affected by educators being more intentional in their thoughts, words, and actions?

IGNITE!

To be intentional means to think before we act, making choices with consideration of the impact on ourselves and others. Nearly 50 percent of people live their lives on autopilot, going

through the motions while our minds wander. Not surprisingly, doing so makes us unhappy (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Conversely, choosing to be intentional can infuse significance and value into our every thought, word, action, or behavior. For example, being intentional about “why” we do what we do can bring meaning and purpose into our work, grounding us in our passion and helping us to remain motivated and committed when we encounter adversity. In fact, when we become disconnected from why we originally chose our vocation, we inadvertently allow frustration and disillusionment to seep into our daily routine and disrupt our ability to persevere.

We encourage you to intentionally identify your *why* and keep it in your hearts and at the forefront of all you do every day. In fact, take a moment to consider your why. Was there a person, experience, value, or passion in your life that influenced your decision to choose your vocation? Some of us can bring our reason immediately to mind. Others of us may need time to marinate or think intentionally about why we chose a human-oriented profession. Which one are you? If you are one who can identify your why easily, take time to share in the following space. If, on the other hand, you need more time to reflect, please come back in the next day or two and share your thoughts.

There are two primary reasons for identifying and reflecting on our why. First, so often in the typical world of education we can get lost in the essential yet potentially overwhelming responsibility of accelerating student learning, implementing initiatives, measuring outcomes, using data to drive instruction, and creating school culture. Add the reality of the protocols, procedures, requirements, and trainings that must be in place for us to even consider best instructional practices, and it is understandable that over the last few years we may have lost sight of our why. However, we cannot let our known responsibilities or inconceivable unforeseen challenges distract us from that which is right in front of us: the human beings whom we teach and lead and those with whom we serve. When we stay connected to our why, people remain our focus, and we realize that so many little things really do matter! A smile in the hallway or the use of one's name during a class session ignites hope for a positive day, a word of encouragement or an opportunity provided for students to work together to seek solutions ignites hope for learning, and setting a high expectation ignites hope that personal and academic success is attainable.

The second reason we encourage you to be intentional in identifying your why is that when we know why we do what we do, we are able to set relevant and meaningful goals as we tackle adversity. In fact, establishing short- and long-term goals helps people operationalize their why. These goals serve as mile markers in our quests to live our why. We're not talking about to-do lists, but rather goals that allow you to work toward your vision. Goals should be specific and difficult. Locke and

Latham (1991) note there are five goal-setting principles that can help improve your chances of success:

1. *Clarity.* Setting goals that are clear and specific allows people to track progress and reduces the confusion that can arise when goals are not clear.
2. *Challenging.* Accomplishing difficult goals builds our efficacy and the belief that we can do hard things. As we experience success, we create a winning mindset that builds our adversity quotient.
3. *Commitment.* Clear and challenging goals require that we commit to take action to accomplish the goal.
4. *Feedback.* Seeking feedback and acting on that feedback allows us to adjust our expectations and our plan of action going forward.
5. *Task complexity.* The goal should allow for clear steps or actions, and these should be sufficiently complex to ensure that the goal is met.

Later in this chapter, we will focus on goal setting. The goals you set to build your adversity quotient should align with your why. Consider each of these questions about the goals that you set and identify an accountability partner who can provide you feedback.

- ▶ What is a school-related or personal goal you have for yourself?
- ▶ How does this connect with your why?
- ▶ What has your past performance been like? What has been your personal best so far?
- ▶ How will achieving this goal benefit you?
- ▶ How will you know you have been successful?
- ▶ What might get in the way of you meeting this goal?
- ▶ What resources do you need to achieve this goal?

Another intentional choice that won't add to our busy schedules is simply changing the way in which we look at things. Some may call this a mindset shift; the research world calls it cognitive reframing (Pipas & Pepper, 2021). We can choose to see people and situations through the lens of deficits, or we can choose to reframe our thinking or words in order to see or express what might be possible in any given situation. For example, a teacher who has a student in class who is consistently disruptive can choose to see that student as disrespectful and unruly or as a student who embodies perseverance. If the teacher chooses the latter perspective, then an opportunity exists to encourage the student to use this character trait to engage in class in a more positive way. Of course, the disruptive behavior needs to stop, but how we frame the situation impacts our well-being.

We have discussed being intentional in our mindset, as well as some of our specific choices in the context of words or actions. The choice to *believe* intentionally—in our students, our colleagues, and ourselves—fosters our ability to ignite hope and is worthy of a deeper dive. Collective teacher efficacy has a positive influence on student learning (Goddard et al., 2004). Collective teacher (or educator, to be more inclusive) efficacy can be defined as the *belief* that we, as a group of educators, have in our students' ability to achieve *and* the belief that we have in our own ability, as a group, to make an impact on their learning. In essence, we must believe together and take note of our impact. As Bandura, the originator of the concept of collective efficacy, notes,

Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more central or pervasive than belief of personal efficacy. Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief

that one has the power to effect changes by one's actions. (Bandura & Locke, 2003, p. 87)

Take a moment to consider the adults who make up the faculty and staff within your school community. Regardless of whether we are collaborating to serve our students from a physical school building or working together to meet our students' needs through distance education, if student engagement, learning, and growth is our ultimate goal, then together we must believe, our students must believe, and we must turn that belief into attitude with action.

And the “we” is crucial. Let us be clear: One person, believing on their own, can and will make a difference in the life of a child. A reminder of this is found in a saying commonly attributed to Dr. Seuss, suggesting, “To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world.” However, the power and purpose that come from all staff members collaborating, encouraging, and challenging each other, quintessentially being together in attitude and spirit, can make an impact on the entire school community, producing results beyond our wildest expectations. This is where turning attitude into action becomes a reality.

For example, we are certain that each of us has experienced a situation in our lives in which we were part of an effort to work together for the common good of others. Think back to a community service project in which you participated, a church activity, or a family outreach effort in which you took part. How did it feel to be working with others to make a positive difference? How do you suppose the person or group receiving the service felt? What positive outcomes may have resulted from your collective efforts? Please use the following space to write your reflections:

Now consider this question: Were there any individuals who were part of that group effort who are typically less engaged, less confident, or less assertive than they were during the joint effort to serve others? In many cases, we see people stand taller, speak louder, and smile more when they feel they are part of a productive team or working with others to achieve a positive outcome. This is true of our students as well. We turn our believing attitude into action by recognizing students' strengths and creating opportunities (learning opportunities can be as powerful as service opportunities) for those strengths to be leveraged. Consider the following response from Alex Gallegos, 17, in 2022 in an interview with Michelle:

My teachers have ignited hope within me by affirming my ability to succeed after high school—which, in my case, includes achieving my dream of attending college, despite being a first-generation college student, a child of a split household, and a student receiving (proudly!) education in a majority

low-income community. Or perhaps because of those things, rather than despite them.

Alex says his teachers ignite hope by affirming his ability. They didn't question that he would be successful. They encouraged what he already knew about himself. Many of our students, however, need us to believe in them because often, they do not believe in themselves. In contrast to Alex, some of our students live with significant adversity and feel defeated or incapable. Michelle remembers a student sharing with her that he felt he had been "swimming against the current" since he was born. Another student told Michelle that she would never be able to succeed. She said, "You don't get it. I'm a failure. I've always failed. Nothin' I do will change that, so why should I even try?" Michelle also recalls a student who shouted, asking her to tell him he was "nothing." His reasoning was that it was "so obvious, I just want to hear you say it!" He was shocked when Michelle wouldn't comply, and he crumpled into tears at her encouragement that he was a valuable human being. We have all likely experienced a sense of helplessness or sadness as we interact with our students, listening and trying to learn from their heartaches and hardships. It is in this empathic response that we realize that our students may need us to recognize strengths for them to see them for themselves. For example, saying to a student, "You are so diligent in your work ethic! I hope you know that this trait will help you to be successful even when tasks are difficult," might buoy the student when frustrated or discouraged.

Intentionality ignites hope. Knowing our why, choosing to reframe the way we think and speak, and believing intentionally in ourselves and in our students are just a few ways that being intentional ignites hope in the midst of challenging situations. Likewise, elevating our adversity quotient requires that we cultivate courage.



IGNITE INTENTION

Please consider one way in which you will choose to ignite hope in the realm of *being intentional* for one student.

Student's first name or initial: _____

I will be more intentional with this student by (thinking, saying, being, or doing . . .):

NOURISH!

At a time when educators often experience the feeling of being overwhelmed, we can further ignite hope in our own lives and the lives of others by nourishing our well-being. Reflecting upon Niebuhr's serenity prayer, we realize that when we are confronted with challenges in our lives, it is necessary to identify and accept with serenity the parts that we cannot change, the pieces that are out of our control. Serenity requires us to take a pause, to be still, to reflect, and to breathe. This is very challenging for some of us and requires intentional thought and action. Nancy makes this a daily habit to consider her day and note the wins. In fact, she makes a small note on her digital device before dinner each day about the wins—the things that went really, really well for the day. In doing so, she is continually reminded of the positive things in her life, and this fortifies her to accept and address the challenges she experiences.

We feel compelled to acknowledge that some of us and our students have experienced tragic events for which “accepting with serenity” does not come easily or immediately, if it comes at all. There are situations that people experience that are neglectful, abusive, traumatic, or even criminal. This type of harm can cause undue shame, a sense of helplessness, or genuine fear. In such situations, nurturing one’s well-being may look like acknowledging that the situation truly is out of your control, it is not your fault, and that you cannot face it alone any longer. Cultivating courage in such a situation may mean choosing to trust someone from whom to seek support or help. This choice may feel impossible, yet it is within one’s control and may be the first step toward finding serenity.

Regardless of how we pursue serenity, it takes vulnerability to identify situations that are predominantly out of our control and sincerely release them. We say this because it is difficult for some of us to admit that we do not have control over every piece of our lives—that, in fact, there are some situations, no matter what we say or do, that remain unchangeable. Researcher Brené Brown suggests, “Vulnerability is not weakness, it is our most accurate measure of courage” (Jensen, 2019). As such, when we lean into vulnerability, it compels us to ask ourselves if we are spending undue emotion and energy on that which is out of our control or negatively impacting our own well-being or the quality of our relationships. Likewise, it takes courageous vulnerability to ask ourselves if the way in which we responded to a situation, even one primarily out of our control, made matters worse. As we cultivate courage through vulnerability, we can focus with intention on the thoughts, words, behaviors, and situations over which we *do* have influence. For example, as school administrators, Nancy, Doug, and Michelle have all experienced moments in which they made decisions for staff or students in the moment, without taking time to consider the impact on all parties or seeking

voice from those impacted by the decision. It is less complicated and expedient, at times, for an educational leader to make a decision on their own, yet that does not mean it is best for all involved. In fact, this type of decision can create frustration and divisiveness, limiting the potential investment of all and inhibiting a positive result. It is a vulnerable choice to admit when we are wrong in how we handled a situation, to seek sincere forgiveness, and request an opportunity to restart. At the same time, it is a courageous choice and one that will garner respect, restore harm, and open the door to a more effective and productive outcome.

The late great John Wooden advises, “Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can.” Be intentional by asking yourself in a frustrating moment, What *can* I do? What is within my sphere of influence? Certainly, your attitude is something over which you have control. Could you practice gratitude more actively? Or might you take a few moments each morning to focus on reflections, affirmations, or prayer? Taking a moment to take an intentional breath when frustrated is also within your control. These intentional choices may seem insignificant, yet when put into practice with consistency, they will undoubtedly enhance your well-being and contribute to your ability to support the social and emotional needs of your students.

Consequently, we can make a choice to foster the well-being of our students simply by creating opportunities to learn two new things about each of them throughout the year. We can do this through individual conversations, or we can provide space for our students to write to us with prompts that include questions such as these:

- ▶ What is your favorite thing to do outside of school?
- ▶ What is a talent that you possess?

Now take a moment to consider one concept—be it a thought, attitude, or action—that was *within* your control within that same situation. Is it possible that the situation might have changed for the better if you had focused on what was within your control? If so, what might it have looked like or how might it have impacted your feelings and why? Use this space to reflect.

Consequently, we must be intentional in giving ourselves grace when experiencing feelings of overwhelmingness or inadequacy or in situations for which we made a regretful choice. For many of us, it is natural to offer grace or forgiveness to others, yet when it comes to offering it to ourselves, we can be resistant. We may not think we are worthy, or we may put unrealistic expectations on ourselves. We can nourish our well-being by leaning into the courage it may take to admit that we are human and that we get things wrong sometimes,

to forgive ourselves so that we can move forward and contribute to a collaborative solution or foster an opportunity of growth for all involved. Most of us have experienced challenges that have left us feeling professionally overwhelmed, underprepared, and ineffective. As a result, we might have doubted our capabilities. If you have experienced such feelings or doubts, please know that this is natural, and you are not alone; but let us also remind you: You know your craft. As educators, we all do. We all have strengths. We are creative, intuitive, organized (some of us more than others!), and flexible. We have to be because we interact with children (and each other) every day.

Despite the uncertainty of a situation or type of adversity we encounter, we must remember that we have always known how to set and achieve goals. Our performance evaluations rely upon this fact. However, we now have a specific goal-setting process to practice and follow. When we feel overwhelmed or when we doubt ourselves, we can be intentional in setting a specific goal to practice self-compassion, for example, and reminding ourselves that one of our strengths as educators is to scaffold complexities in order for tangible objectives to be met. Our well-being and that of those with whom we interact will be nourished when we treat ourselves with the kindness, thoughtfulness, and the same grace we give to others.

NOURISH NOW

Please consider the content and reflections from the Nourish! section. Use the template on the following page to create a goal for yourself, specific to one new behavior in the realm of being intentional that will nourish your own well-being or that of your students.

Goal Statement:

SMART Goal Checklist: Specific Measurable Attainable
 Relevant Time-Bound

Why is this goal important?

How does this goal connect with my why?

What is my past experience or performance with this goal?

What are the benefits of my goal? What are the potential challenges or barriers?

How will I, or what skills/resources do I need, to measure, review, refine, and achieve my goal?

Action Steps:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Start Date:

Review and Refine Date/s:

Completion Date:

ENGAGE!

Being intentional in the way we interact with our students can elevate their adversity quotient by impacting their sense of worth, providing opportunities to foster self-efficacy and agency, and engaging them in their own learning. Simply put, our intentional actions impact our students. For example, choosing to embrace clarity makes an impact on student engagement (Jensen, 2009). It is just one way to be intentional without complicating our workload or adding to the chaos or confusion that may already exist in our students' lives. An example of this is choosing to be clear and concise in the words we elect to use. Often, the number of words it takes for us to explain something is directly correlated to understanding. Fewer words result in less confusion. Be intentional in reminding yourself that, in many situations, less can be more. Shifting our mindset in the way we view a situation or being more intentional in our words and actions takes practice, and the effort is worth it, as it can be the difference between frustration or patience, judgment or acceptance, and hopelessness or hopefulness!

Moreover, as educators, we can be intentional in the way we design learning plans to provide opportunities for our students' strengths to shine. We realize this may take creativity, but as educators, this is one of *our* strengths. We can ask questions, facilitate discussions, and engage students in activities that highlight their strengths. We can reference specific examples that reinforce our belief in them. More specifically, leveraging students' strengths can foster student agency. Consequently, when we understand the importance of student agency, we can engage in intentional practices to foster our students' ability to manage and invest in their own learning.

EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF STUDENT AGENCY

Agency is central to a positive relationship to learning. Student agency is the management of own's own learning. Students with low levels of agency believe that learning is something that happens *to* them, and if they don't learn something, it is because of the teacher's inadequacies or their own traits. They don't see their own role in their learning.

Student agency is multidimensional and fostered by approaches to instruction, task design, motivation, assessment, and the development of study habits. These are also key for transfer of learning, which is the ability to apply knowledge and strategies under new conditions (National Research Council, 2012). Research on student agency in schools identified eight dimensions: self-efficacy, pursuit of interest, perseverance of effort, locus of control, mastery orientation, metacognition, self-regulation, and future orientation (Zeiser et al., 2018).

Self-efficacy. The belief that one can achieve goals is fundamental to student agency, as it is with adults. The four sources of self-efficacy are having mastery experiences, seeing models, benefiting from social persuasion and encouragement, and knowing how to manage the physiological responses (Bandura, 1982). A student who possesses a higher level of self-efficacy believes that they can reach goals.

Pursuit of interest. Think of this as a consistency of passion for a topic. We've seen the determination of students to learn everything there is to know about something that has seized their interest: coding, the *Titanic* disaster, geocaching, soccer. Students pursue their interests by reading books, talking with others about it, practice, and searching for new challenges that will build their skills. An important aspect of this is that they stick with some interests for a period of time and don't lose interest quickly (Peña & Duckworth, 2018).

Perseverance of effort. Hand-in-hand with interest is the willingness to continue on when something becomes more difficult. A student with a higher degree of persistence understands that setbacks can happen but is willing to see a project or task through to the end. Importantly, perseverance of effort can't be fostered when the tasks are not challenging. Unfortunately, this happens too often with some advanced students who skate through their years of schooling, only to discover that when they reach college they don't have the wherewithal or the resiliency to confront challenge.

Locus of control. The key word is “control”—to what extent does a learner believe that they are an influencer in the successful completion of the task? The location, or locus, of control speaks to where they attribute success and failure. A person with a strong internal locus of control places a higher value on their own skills and effort, while those with an external locus of control focus on the difficulty of the project or what other people's skill levels are. In truth, locus of control is on a continuum rather than an internal/external binary. An internal locus of control is associated with higher levels of achievement (Shepherd et al., 2006).

Mastery orientation. Goals drive all of us, but there is also the motivation for those goals. The beliefs we have about our goals orient us onto a path. The goals of students can fall broadly into two paths: a mastery orientation or a performance orientation (Pintrich, 2003). Students with a mastery orientation understand that what they are learning benefits them. They understand that learning a topic in one class will benefit them in another. As well, they judge their own performance in terms of what they have learned, not in comparison to others. A student with a mastery orientation says, “I want to learn Spanish so I can speak to my grandparents.” Students with a performance orientation have goals, too, but they may be tied more closely to the amount of effort required and

their standing with others. A student with a performance orientation may say, “I want to pass Spanish class,” or “I want to get an A in this class so I can move up in the class ranking.”

Metacognition. Often described as “thinking about thinking,” metacognition develops in the first years of schooling and continues across a lifetime. You’ll notice this happening with the five-year-old that checks the picture on a puzzle box lid to complete it. Metacognitive strategies are embedded in instruction. We teach early readers to monitor their understanding so that when they lose meaning in a text they go back to re-read. We teach older students to take notes and use them as part of their studying. A student with a higher degree of metacognition will notice what is confusing, ask questions, and mentally summarize what they are learning.

Self-regulation. Closely related to metacognition is the self-regulation needed to learn. A student with a higher degree of self-regulation can reset their attention during math when they notice they’re thinking instead about a video game. Self-regulation plays an important role in practice and studying. For instance, being organized, keeping track of assignments, and setting aside time for study are all essential skills.

Future orientation. Perceptions of what constitutes the future are definitely going to vary with age. Young children may consider the future to be lunchtime. But a goal of schooling is to help students see that the learning they do today is grounded not only in their current context but also in their investment in their own future aspirations. Early-grades social studies curriculum includes study of different occupations and community roles, and lots of schools host Career Days so that children can ask questions about how the firefighter decided on that professional field. Middle and high school efforts include helping students develop résumés and introducing academic and extracurricular efforts that will burnish

their postsecondary applications. Students with a future orientation are able to equate their school efforts and experiences as a foundation for adult aspirations.

TEACHER PRACTICES TO BUILD STUDENT AGENCY

Teachers play an important role in the relative amount of agency a student possesses. The amount of autonomy experienced by students has a direct link to their sense of agency (Filippello et al., 2019). Teaching styles that are highly controlling place a premium on compliance, convey approval that is dependent on achievement, and ignore students who do not achieve, resulting in a “chilly” classroom climate. These teaching behaviors foster an external locus of control that is authority-based, and students in these classrooms grow more insecure about their learning and their ability to take action. The result can often be learned helplessness.

In contrast, teaching styles that increase students’ autonomy foster those who have a higher sense of agency (Filippello et al., 2019). These autonomy-supportive classrooms are led by teachers who encourage discussion, listen for students’ points of view, make feedback informative, and take the time to link student actions to their success. Choice and relevance are crucial curricular features. Importantly, in doing so they help students develop an internal locus of control. For a student who has had a compromised relationship to learning, autonomy-supportive classrooms can be transformative.

The intentional use of teacher practices specifically aimed at building student agency have shown promising results over time, as short as within a single school year (Zeiser et al., 2018). Given that the building of student agency can fuel student learning, this is an investment that can deliver measurable results. In this lesson and those that follow, we will

discuss application through a menu of actions and practices that educators can use. The following menu is specific to the intentional teacher practice of building student agency and is clustered into three categories: student opportunities, student-teacher collaboration, and teacher-led approaches. To what degree are these practices part of your daily instruction?

Menu of Practices That Build Student Agency			
Use the checklist to reflect on your current practices as they relate to teaching about and creating opportunities for agency.			
Use the following reflection scale:			
<p>1: <i>I consistently create opportunities for this to occur in my instructional setting.</i></p> <p>2: <i>I sometimes create opportunities for this to occur in my instructional setting.</i></p> <p>3: <i>I rarely or never create opportunities for this to occur in my instructional setting.</i></p>			
Student Opportunities	1	2	3
<i>Choice.</i> Students make choices about content and process of their work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Group work.</i> Students have opportunities to work in groups to learn and practice agency necessary for group success.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Harnessing outside opportunities.</i> Students have opportunities to demonstrate agency outside the classroom and make connections to its application in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Revision.</i> Students are able to revise assignments or tests after they receive feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Student self-reflection.</i> Students self-reflect using journals, logs, or other structured templates or tools.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Student Opportunities	1	2	3
<i>Student-led instruction.</i> Students demonstrate agency by leading instruction on a particular skill or concept.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student-Teacher Collaboration			
<i>Developing relationships.</i> Teachers develop personal relationships with students to better understand their agency strengths, needs, and motivators.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Feedback.</i> Teachers provide students with feedback and scaffold the process of students seeking feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Goal-setting.</i> Teachers help students set goals to complete coursework while improving agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Individual conferences.</i> Teachers hold one-on-one meetings with students to discuss elements of student agency and its relationship to academic work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Student voice.</i> Teachers provide students with opportunities to contribute to and provide feedback on key decisions in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher-Led Approaches			
<i>Assessment.</i> Teachers design to evaluate student agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Direct instruction.</i> Teachers provide explicit instruction to develop skills related to student agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Modeling.</i> Teachers model agency to demonstrate it to students in a meaningful context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Positive reinforcement.</i> Teachers provide positive reinforcement for demonstration of agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Continued)

(Continued)

Teacher-Led Approaches	1	2	3
<i>Scaffolding.</i> Teachers provide students with tools, strategies, and resources to help scaffold students toward mastery of agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Verbal cues.</i> Teachers provide brief spoken prompts in real time to highlight or remind students of behaviors that demonstrate agency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Adapted from: Zeiser, K., Scholz, C., & Cirks, V. (2018). *Maximizing student agency: Implementing and measuring student-centered learning practices.* American Institutes of Research (p. 30). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED592084.pdf>.

ENGAGE EXTENSION

Please consider your responses to the Menu of Practices That Build Student Agency and respond to the following prompts:

My current practices reflect strengths in the following areas:

I notice that I rarely, if ever, create opportunities for (choose one for which you checked “3”):

I will begin providing opportunities to practice what I noticed above by (specifically doing what?):

Thank you. Before we move on, take a moment to take an intentional breath. Do this by setting this book aside, closing your eyes, breathing in through your nose, holding it for two to three seconds, and breathing out through your mouth. Ready, go . . .

Welcome back! Taking an intentional breath at any time, but especially when we feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or confused, helps us to center, relax, and focus, not only positively impacting our state of mind and body but also that of those with whom we are interacting.

LESSON REFLECTION

This lesson introduced various strategies for igniting hope, nourishing well-being, and engaging students in the face of adversity. To culminate the lesson, please consider the following table indicating specific actions that foster intentionality in the face of adversity, preparing us to be at our best as human beings and instructional leaders. At the same time, consider

the divergent actions that can derail our journey to persevere when we experience hardships, challenges, or trauma, compromising our ability to teach, lead, and support others. Then, use the blank spaces to identify acts or behaviors specific to your way of being that foster intentionality, as well as those that interfere in your capacity to act with intention.

Actions That Foster Intentionality	Actions That Derail Intentionality

In your final reflection of this lesson, consider one intentional mindset and/or behavior you would like to *stop*, *start*, and *continue*. Choose one to *stop* because, upon reflection, you realize it may lead to frustration, judgment, or hopelessness. Choose one mindset or behavior you would like to *start* practicing in an effort to be more mindful or intentional, and one mindset or behavior you realize you do well and want to *continue*. For example: I tend to focus on Jerrod's negative behaviors. I'm going to **stop** calling him out for being disruptive in front of his peers. I'm going to **start** looking for a positive character trait to attribute to Jerrod and verbally acknowledge that trait during class to reinforce positive behavior. I will **continue** to care about Jerrod's performance in my class. Or: I will **stop** looking at my phone while walking in the hallway. I will **start**

acknowledging people by name while passing. I will **continue** to use my students' names when I greet them each day.

Please personalize your answers below:

STOP:

START:

CONTINUE:

In the long run, choosing to be intentional in focusing on that which is within our control promotes our well-being and helps us to believe in ourselves and our ability to make an impact on our students' lives and learning. We encourage you to share these ideas with your colleagues so they, too, will feel empowered. Ultimately, when we all step forward together, choosing to be intentional in our thoughts, words, and actions, believing in our students and ourselves, we will galvanize ourselves and each other, and we *will* ignite hope, nourish well-being, and elevate the adversity quotient!



CORE CONNECTION

Control is our ability to take command of situations and our responses to those situations. We recognize what we can control in a situation rather than becoming overwhelmed by things that are beyond our control (Stoltz, 1997).

Being intentional in our thoughts, words, and behaviors can elevate our ability to respond to adverse situations in a way that helps rather than hinders. Practicing collective efficacy while modeling and teaching self-efficacy and agency leverages the control dimension of the adversity quotient. Likewise, cultivating courage by pursuing serenity, identifying opportunities for change, and then taking action through intentionality fosters our ability to confront adversity with calm, perseverance, and fortitude. Finally, being intentional about *why* we do what we do allows us to connect with the purpose and meaning of our vocations, nurturing our well-being and our vocational resilience and helping us to be more joyful, motivated, effective, and productive.