



Pathways

A Weekly Collection of Information, Thoughts, Reflections and Accolades for the Reading Public School Community

September 27, 2015

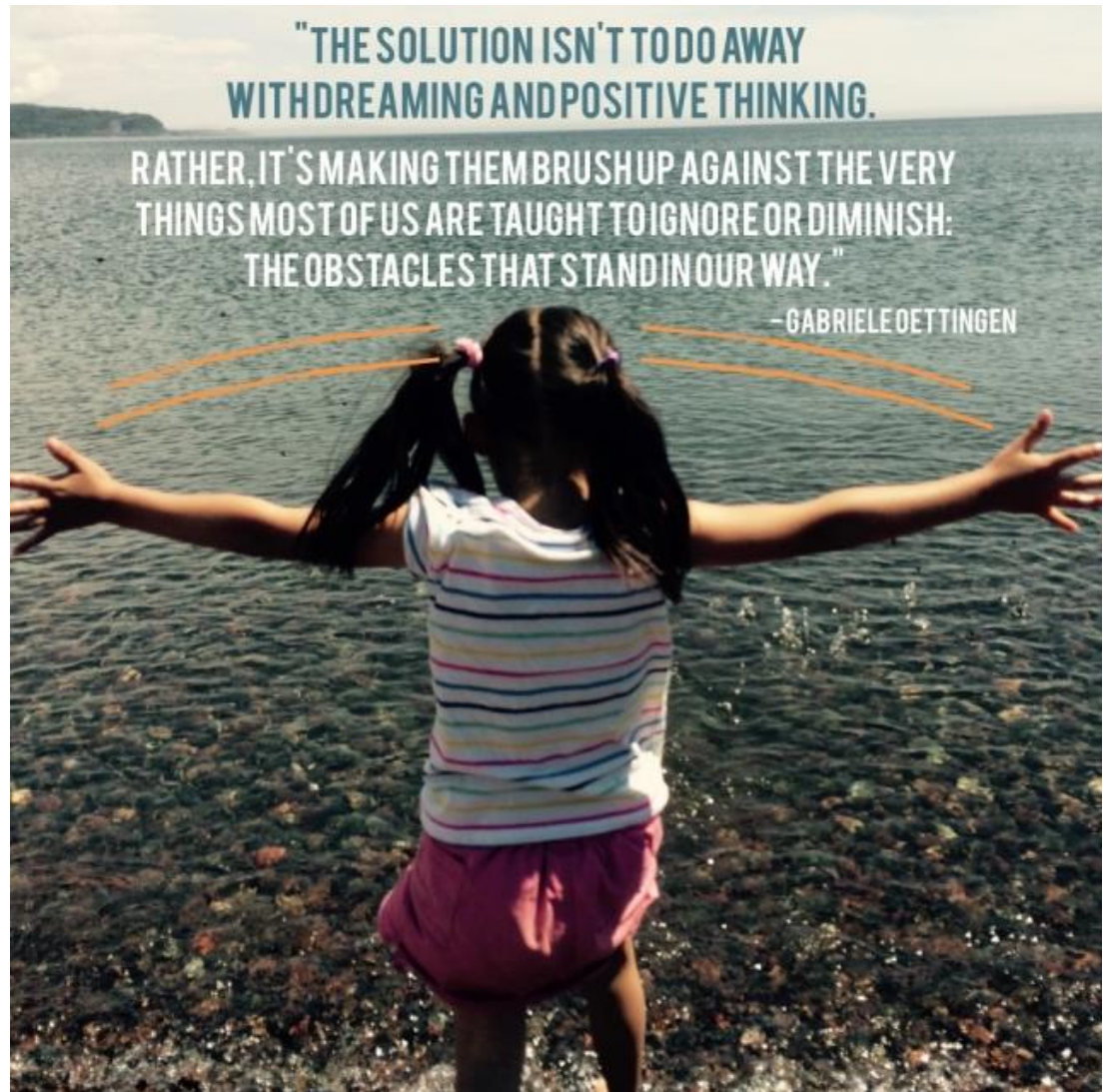
Volume 2, Number 4

Upcoming Dates

- September 28 – (2:40 p.m.) Middle School Jazz Band Auditions @ Coolidge;
- September 29 – (2:40 p.m.) Middle School Jazz Band Auditions @ Parker; (3:30 p.m.) RTA General Meeting in the Endslo PAC; (7:00 p.m.) Reading School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- September 30 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (1:15 p.m.) Elementary District PLC Meetings (1:30 p.m.) Middle and High School District PLC Meetings; (6:30 p.m.) RCASA Annual Meeting and Presentation of "If Only" at Jordan's Furniture
- October 1 – (8:30 p.m.) Coffee & Conversation – Elementary Level @ Joshua Eaton; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL in Rooms 321 & 320 @ RMHS
- October 3 – (8:00 a.m.) SAT Testing – RMHS is a test site
- October 5 – (8:00 p.m.) Coffee & Conversation – Secondary Level @ RMHS Distance

Why Grounding Dreams in Obstacles Helps Young People Manifest Them

Posted by Erin Walsh • July 16 on [Dr. Dave Mind Positive Parenting Blog](#)



I vividly remember a youth hockey coach once asked me to, "Imagine that there are no obstacles standing in your way. You are fast and powerful and nothing is between you and the net."

Even with my eyes closed in the locker room, I could practically hear my skates cutting the ice, feel the thrill of speed and the sweet taste of victory as I landed the puck in the net. It was exhilarating to even imagine this outcome – especially since I so rarely scored a goal in real life.

Learning Room;
(7:00 p.m.) School
Committee Meeting
@ Killam

- October 6 – Joshua Eaton Picture Day; (7:00 p.m.) Killam PTO Meeting in the Media Center
- October 7 – (8:30 a.m.) Joshua Eaton PTO Meeting & Principal's Coffee; Joshua Eaton Walk to School Day; (after school) Secondary Building Meetings
- October 8 – (after school) Elementary Building Meetings; (3:00 p.m.) Joshua Eaton Jaguar Jog; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL in Rooms 321 & 320 @ RMHS
- October 9 – RMHS Choral department Karaoke Night in the RMHS Cafeteria

I remember loving this pre-game exercise. But how do we know if it helped me and my teammates perform on the ice?

According to the latest research it may have been better if a good defender had showed up in my imagination to try to take away the puck.

Like many athletes and students alike, I grew up in a culture saturated with messages about positive thinking. Posters with “Believe it! Achieve it!” or “Reach for the Stars” plastered the walls of my elementary school. It certainly seems reasonable that encouraging young people to dream would excite them, motivate them, and propel them towards a more positive future. This line of thinking didn’t come out of nowhere; decades of psychological research document the impact that **optimism** can have on outcomes.

But recently we’ve learned there are critical nuances to how we wield the power of positivity.

It turns out that conventional wisdom – that fantasizing about success makes us successful - is not born out by the research. It isn’t that dreaming is bad. Among other benefits, dreaming helps us mentally explore diverse futures, generate ideas and goals, and is an important tool for enduring hardship.

Dreams alone, however, don’t provide the motivation necessary to manifest them. The latest evidence demonstrates that blind optimism can rob us of the fuel we need to take steps towards that magnificent end goal. There are at least three reasons for this:

Pie in the sky thinking feels great in the short term. So great that we become **too relaxed** and less poised to take action. We actually need a bit of stress to get us going.

Pie in the sky thinking doesn’t feel so good over the long term. If we indulge in fantasies that aren’t grounded in reality we experience greater distress and dissatisfaction **over time** when we don't realize them. This further eats away at our motivation and leads to a “why bother?” attitude.

Our brains are living the dream. Fantasizing about the future can trick our brain into thinking that we have **already accomplished** our goals and thus we lose energy to actually do anything about it.

Researcher and author Gabrielle Oettingen describes twenty years of research in her book **Rethinking Positive Thinking**. The big lesson? Focusing on our obstacles is just as important as indulging our dreams. She insists that she isn’t *against* dreaming, but *how* we dream matters.

Oettingen proposes trying **WOOP** instead:

Wish
Outcome
Obstacles

Kudos and Accolades

- Thank you to our building teachers and staff from RMHS & RISE for hosting the annual back to school nights and open houses for parents.
- Congratulations to the boys' soccer, golf, field hockey, and swimming with wins this week.
- Thank you to our modular kindergarten teachers at Joshua Eaton and our facilities, technology, and custodial staff for all of their efforts in transitioning into our new kindergarten modular classrooms.
- Congratulations to the RMHS Football Team who defeated Winchester on Saturday 34-14. The Rockets now have a 2-1 record.

Plan

This method combines something called “mental contrasting” with “implementation intention.” Mental contrasting consists of alternating between focusing on our dreams and visualizing obstacles that might get in the way of achieving them. Implementation intentions are “if-then” plans that identify when and how you will overcome those obstacles.

The author agrees that this exercise seems intuitive, but that very few people actually practice this kind of thinking. We tend to vacillate between indulging (how amazing and perfect will my life be when I graduate from high school!) and dwelling (everything about High School is awful and I am never going to graduate anyway).

WOOP harnesses both of these impulses and directs them towards a more productive present and future. In other words, it links our dreams to reality, making it far more likely that we actually realize them.

Putting dreams to work

So how do you help young people “do” WOOP? Find a distraction free quiet space. Give young people permission to free write or free think about the following things in the following order:

Wish: Start by focusing on something that you believe is achievable. This could be as big as, “I want to graduate from high school” to “I want to get to my first class on time.”

Outcome: What is the best thing that you associate with fulfilling your wish? How would it feel? Imagine enjoying this outcome as vividly as possible.

Obstacle: What is it in you that might hold you back from this? Find the most critical internal obstacle that prevents you from fulfilling your wish.

Plan: Name one thought or action you can take in response to the obstacle and hold it in your mind. Think about when and where the obstacle will next occur. Form an “if-then plan.” Repeat this in your mind.

For all of you parents and teachers reading this post, it may be a bit unrealistic to think that your teen will turn to you and enthusiastically say, “Yes! I look forward to starting my day with a quiet WOOP exercise that will help me succeed!”

Don’t let this stop you from sharing this strategy with young people. This promises to be a useful intervention for anyone working with kids. For example, a group of researchers recently wanted to know whether they could help low-income fifth graders ground euphoric messages in reality and in turn propel them towards greater academic success. After asking students to generate a school-related wish, **they found** that fifth grade students taught both mental contrasting and implementation intentions (WOOP) improved their GPA, attendance, and behavior relative to students randomly assigned to merely think positively about their academic dreams.

Quote of the Week....



"Take the attitude of a student, never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new."

– Og Mandino

Unjust obstacles and dismantling barriers to hope

Importantly, WOOP only works well when students pursue dreams that they value and that they believe are feasible. Forcing a student to do this exercise about something they care little about is futile. Similarly, asking a student to dream of success in an area where they have consistently met disappointment, prejudice, or failure is unfair. In contrast to the "pie in the sky" thinking that WOOP is designed to mediate, too many children have compromised expectations for themselves in response to a lifetime of obstacles. As scholar Melanie Walker writes, "We adapt our hopes to our probabilities."

This means we should match our focus on the internal capabilities of a child with greater commitment to dismantling external barriers to success (including poverty, systemic racism, and damaging stereotypes, among others). While mental contrasting hold great promise when it comes to impacting outcomes, we need to pay close attention to disparities within "feasible dreams."

If we are going to ask children to close their eyes and imagine a positive future, let's ensure that all youth have equal opportunity to get there.

Handling Confrontations with Particularly Challenging Students

In this *AMLE Magazine* article, consultant Grace Dearborn list some qualities exhibited by teachers who still love their work after 15-20 years in the classroom:

- They use effective tools for handling student misbehavior.
- They empathize with negative experiences students may be having outside the classroom that cause disruptive school behaviors.
- They aren't discouraged by occasional bad days or bad moments.
- They don't see themselves as failures when a student doesn't succeed or change.

"Still," says Dearborn, "managing difficult student behaviors eventually sucks the energy from most teachers, no matter how talented or experienced... So how can we help our most challenging students without completely depleting ourselves?"

Students with serious behavior problems have learned the hard way that adults are not trustworthy – in fact, will eventually abandon or abuse them, physically or psychologically. Deep inside, these kids hope to find an exception – a genuinely trustworthy grown-up – so they act out, putting teachers through multiple tests to see if they might be the one. "We are only human," says Dearborn, "and in the face of such a protracted onslaught of negative behaviors that gets worse over time no matter how safe, structured, and consistent we are, no matter what consequences we use, we eventually give up. Eventually we get exhausted... And now we are just another statistic in their growing body of evidence against adults."

When teachers are on the verge of giving up, Dearborn suggests an unusual strategy: "Imagine that all your students have an invisible subtitle running along in front of them that is communicating to the adults in their lives what they really need. Everything else – the nonsense that comes out of their mouths and bodies during difficult interactions – is just noise, interference meant to get in the way of our reading and responding to their subtitle." For example, what the student says is, "This is stupid! Why we gotta do this?" The subtitle reads, *This is hard for me. Help me to succeed and let me save face, too.* Responding to the subtitle, a teacher might

Disney Tweet of the Week



"A laugh can be a very powerful thing. Sometimes in life, it's the only weapon we've got."

—Roger (Who Framed Roger Rabbit)

say, "Yes. I know this is hard and sometimes hard things feel unnecessary and we want to avoid them. But I'm here to help. Let's work it out."

Dearborn admits that students' outbursts and resistance often tax our patience. "When that happens," she says, "it's harder for me to stay calm enough to remember to look for the subtitle, especially if I feel personally attacked." At such times, she conjures up several default subtitles:

- *Please help me!*
- *Don't give up on me!*
- *What can I do right now to behave better?*

"Any one of these helps me stay calm and respond productively to their misbehavior instead of unintentionally escalating the confrontation," she says. "Remember, my baseline assumption is that student outbursts are tests to pass, not a show of disrespect. Consequently, it's not personal; it's a cry for help."

Dearborn recommends a six-step process when a student irrationally resists a request to do something (or stop doing something):

- *Assume the best.* "I can pass the test by being safe, structured, and consistent," she says. "The student wants me to pass the test."
- *Soft eyes, soft voice.* Be calm, Dearborn advises. "I need that calm to be expressed in both my verbal and body language. If I concentrate on keeping the muscles around my eyes soft, or neutral, my voice will naturally follow."
- *Offer a choice.* Kids need to know that they can comply or continue to resist, and whatever they choose, there will be a consequence.
- *Respect the choice made.* This is not personal, says Dearborn. "I am not being attacked or disrespected. It is just a test."
- *Give the consequence.* This can be positive or negative, depending on the choice the student makes.
- *Escalate the choice.* If the student chooses not to comply, another more uncomfortable consequence is calmly proffered. This continues until the student complies – or is temporarily removed from the interaction or class.

"Struggling teachers sometimes hold the belief that respect is something that should automatically be afforded them because they are the adult authority figure in the room," says Dearborn, "rather than something they must earn through a series of interactions over time. Or, from the student's perspective, a series of tests being passed over time... [J]ust because students don't change on the outside (behavior), that doesn't mean they aren't changing on the inside (belief). Some kids are battling a lifetime of not being able to trust adults. Some kids need to experience more than one year of consistent, loving accountability in order to internalize trust."

"Compassionate Discipline: Dealing with Difficult Students" by Grace Dearborn in *AMLE Magazine*, September 2015 (Vol. 3, #2, p. 8-11), www.amle.org; Dearborn can be reached at grace@consciousteaching.com. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 604.

Strategies for Reaching Apathetic Students

By **Alex Shevrin**, Teacher/leader & techie at independent, alternative, therapeutic high school for **Edutopia Blog**

"I don't care." Those three words can cause the most experienced of teachers to grow frustrated: how do we reach students who give off the vibe that nothing matters? Use these questions to better understand and reach apathetic students.

Is it really apathy?

If your student has his head down, is nonresponsive, or won't complete schoolwork, apathy is only one of many possibilities.

Is the student having a hard time at home? Struggling with mental or physical health? Do they have an undiagnosed learning disability, making it feel impossible to complete any task at hand? Have they recently experienced a trauma, or might be experiencing impacts of a past trauma?

Often, what looks like a lack of motivation can be a way to hide the underlying story. It's easier to say "I don't care," than "I need help." Spend time getting to know your student, reaching out to his/her family and guidance counselor, and assessing whether a lack of motivation is truly the issue at hand.

Is the behavior localized to your class or across the board?

Touch base with the student's other teachers. Is the seeming apathy something that's just happening in your class, or is this the student's presentation across all of their classes? Be sure to check in with extracurricular instructors as well: does your apathetic student come alive during basketball practice or chess club? Once you get a fuller picture of your student, you can then begin to refine your interventions.

What's the big picture, and can the student connect it to the daily details?

It's difficult to stay motivated when we can't see the connection between what's in front of us and what we want out of life. What does your student want for themselves in the long term? Is it a high school diploma? A college education? A career? A family?

When we know what students are working toward, we can help contextualize the daily work for them. If I know my student wants to become a chef, I can help them see how working on grammar skills will help them with menu-writing, or how chemistry will lay the foundations for expert baking. If my student wants a high school diploma, I can help them understand how each block of time in class or each completed project adds up toward their graduation requirements. When the little stuff clearly adds up to the big stuff, the little stuff becomes more important.

Where can you build bridges?

If an apathetic student is excited or passionate about even one thing, you have somewhere to start.

Challenge yourself to build bridges between a student's interests and the skills or content you wish to teach. Can a passion for video games turn into an exploration of the scientific method? Can a talent for BMX biking lead to a skillfully written narrative?

Use problem-based learning, inquiry-driven methods, and real-world context to help your students create bridges, rather than feeling like they're jumping off a cliff every time you ask them to do an impossible task in class.

Does your student know you care?

At the end of the day, you ultimately aren't in control of whether your student succeeds or not. You can't make them do work, you can't make them learn, and you definitely can't make them start to care. You can, however, influence all of those things through a caring relationship with your students.

Let your students know you care about them, and then give them the safe space to take risks rather than shutting down.

Finally, sometimes when a student says, “nothing matters,” what they really mean is “I don’t matter.” Be sure that your student knows they matter, no matter what.

Reading Public School Happenings

Barrows Modular Classroom Grand Opening

On Monday, Barrows kindergarten students began classes for the first time in their new modular classrooms. The photo below shows the inside of one of the modular classrooms.

The Joshua Eaton modular classrooms will be opening tomorrow (Monday). Special thanks goes out to everyone who helped make this transition to the modular classrooms possible.





Camp Bournedale

On Monday and Tuesday of this week, Grade 5 students from Barrows and Joshua Eaton attended Camp Bournedale in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Below are some of the activities from the trip. Special thanks goes out to all of the teachers, administrators, and parents who chaperoned the trip.



Contact Us

The Journey newsletter is published weekly for the Reading Public School Community. If you have anything that you would like to share, please email your information to John Doherty at

john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us



The Barrows Gym is Back!

An ecstatic Barrows Wellness Teacher, Sarah Atwood shows that the gymnasium is back and ready for Physical Education classes after three weeks as a temporary classroom for kindergarten students. A special thanks goes out to the Barrows, Joshua Eaton, and Killam Wellness Teachers for their flexibility and support over the last month as we transitioned our kindergarten students from the temporary classrooms in the gymnasiums to the modular classrooms.



Stepping Stones...

- **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit www.schoolspring.com to view the job details.

Part-time Regular Education Paraeducator, Wood End Elementary School	JOB ID #2047614
Long-Term Substitute: Middle School Earth Science Teacher, Coolidge Middle School	JOB ID# 2035204
Regular Education Paraeducator (32.5 hours biweekly), Joshua Eaton Elementary School	JOB ID#2049074
Middle School Adjustment Counselor: Long-Term Substitute, Coolidge Middle School	JOB ID #2051394

- **COFFEE & CONVERSATION - Facilitated by the District Leader of Social Emotional Learning**-Over the past few years, parents in the community have been asking for a forum where they can meet and share with and hear from other parents how they are navigating various issues with their students. Topics such as how to responsibly use technology, navigate social media, talk about substance use and anxiety, gender identity, grief, and so many other issues. This year, we are excited to be offering COFFEE & CONVERSATION! Once a month at the elementary level and once a month at the secondary level, we will host a morning parent coffee where families can drop in and engage in facilitated conversation with other parents. We will have a topic of focus each month but will welcome conversation on any relevant issues that families bring to the table. Flyers with information (one for elementary, one for secondary) can be found by clicking the link below:

Elementary Link

Secondary Link

- **Families for Depression Awareness is presenting a free, 1-hour Teen Depression webinar (with additional 15 minute Q&A) on Wednesday, September 30 at 7:00 PM ET / 4:00 PM PT.** Designed for parents, teachers, school counselors and staff, youth workers, and other caring adults, the webinar covers
 - How to distinguish between depression and teen angst
 - What you should know about self-injury, bullying, and other concerns
 - How to talk to teens about depression
 - How to get help for a struggling teen
 - What to do when a teen refuses help

The expert presenter is Dr. Michael Tsappis, the psychiatrist for the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Boston Children's Hospital and a member of the faculty of Harvard Medical School in the Department of Psychiatry. His post-graduate specialty training is in general psychiatry as well as child and adolescent psychiatry. Dr. Tsappis is particularly interested in understanding psychiatric illness in the context of human development and a changing social environment.

Watch the webinar live to submit questions to Dr. Tsappis! Complete the online evaluation form after the webinar to receive a free set of Parent and Teen Depression and Bipolar Disorder Wellness Guides in English or Spanish.

Can't attend the live webcast? Register today and watch the recorded webinar later at your convenience.

Register at www.familyaware.org/trainings.

Blazing Trails....

"Massachusetts District Focuses on Safe, Responsible Use of Social Media." Students in the Burlington, Massachusetts, district are learning how to connect online in safe and responsible ways. Jennifer Scheffer, the district's mobile learning coach and instructional technology specialist, is working with school leaders to incorporate digital citizenship lessons across subject areas. [Read More](#)

"The Species That Asks." The September issue of ASCD's Educational Leadership is all about questioning for learning -- how to ask questions of students, how to encourage students to ask their own questions, and how to ask better questions and find better answers. In her Perspectives column, Marge Scherer describes why getting questions right is well worth the effort to ensure that students tackle important, intriguing, and revealing questions -- the kind that will help humankind survive and thrive. [Read More](#)

"Number of Homeless Students in U.S. has Doubled Since Before the Recession." Schools are serving a growing population of homeless students. Federal data show the number of homeless children served in public schools during the 2013-14 school year reached a record of 1.36 million, or 3% of all US public-school students. [Read More](#)

"How to Make Your Questions Essential." The well-known aphorism that "writing is revision" applies particularly well to crafting essential questions. They rarely arise in a first draft, but can be honed to foster the kinds of inquiries, discussions, and reflections that help students find meaning in their learning and achieve deeper thought and better quality in their work. This Educational Leadership article by Denise Wilbur and the late Grant Wiggins shares seven ways to hone your questions. [Read More](#)

Have a Great Week!