

Appendix X: Book- *Transformative Educator's Guide to Mindful Practice: Daily reflections and exercises for Peace of Mind, Excellence and Teaching from the Heart*----
By John Shindler

Negativity and Where It Comes From

If we spend enough time in a school we get accustomed to the idea that negativity is not only normal but necessary and too often a constant companion. So let's look at negativity and make sense of what it is and where it comes from. First, it is rooted in a lack of acceptance. If we did not call something negative it would not be negative. So recognizing that it is 100% invented in our minds is a good place to start. Second, we can get fooled into thinking that negativity in our minds or projected outward will get us something that we want. When we look closer, we see that it does not. It may think we will feel better when we complain about things to others or tell students how inadequate they are, but it does not really make us feel better to complain, and it does not lead to better performance from our students when we are negative with them. Sharing our concerns and speaking the truth to those who are in a position to make change, and telling students to stop it or following through with a consequence is not negative, it is active.

We will deal with negativity a few more times on other days, but let's focus on the most practical aspects of it here in September. The negativity sequence is explained in more detail in Transformative Classroom Management, but in essence, it goes like this. 1) We recognize a situation that we think is not ok, 2) We do nothing (hoping it will go away, or fix itself, or do not want to put the energy into it, or lack the courage to act), 3) the problem persists, 4) we feel negative emotions, 5) we act on those negative emotions, or go into denial about it. Almost all situations that create negativity follow that pattern. So as you examine that sequence, what do we learn. Yes, now that you see it, you see that experiences of negativity is not just eventualities within the job. They are born in almost all cases from inactivity. When something happens that we feel is not in our positive picture of what is best for the group, we have two good choices a) let it go, and just accept it, or b) take action. Taking action is empowering and energizing. Summoning the courage to act, builds more courage in the future.

Exercise:

Recall the last 3 times that you felt the feeling of negativity. Was the cause something that you could have solved but just accepting it, or changing your perception? Or was it something that you would say – for the good of the class, something needed to be done. Looking back, what was the action that you could have taken earlier that you passed on (it is ok to admit here, that you lacked the energy, courage, will, or solution at the time). Forgive yourself for whatever the reason was that you failed to act. Now think ahead. Get excited about your next window of opportunity. Do you need to help your class be more clear about an expectation? Because you are going to quite your complaining and warning, and wishing and hoping, and you are going to show then a leader who acts, and puts explicit expectations in place so none of your action are capricious, reactive or out of the blue.