

## TCM Chapter 16: The Transformative Mindset and Making Your Thinking an Ally By John Shindler

### In this Chapter:

- Connection Between Thought and Classroom Management Outcomes
- How to Have an Unsatisfying Day
- Exploring the Fundamental Factors in Our Thinking that Affect Our Experience
- Examining the Nature of Our Problems
- Sources of Negativity
- How Negativity in Thinking Manifests Itself into Classroom Management Dysfunction
- Changing Our Patterns of Thinking
- Adopting a “Yes” Mindset
- Beyond a Positive Attitude
- Promoting Energy Flow In Teaching
- Cultivating Our Sense of Purpose -- and as a Result a Transformative Mindset

**Reader Note:** This chapter is intended to challenge you to reflect more deeply on the relationship between your thinking and how it translates into your classroom management. Through this examination we find that the thinking that we do, how we feel throughout the day, our effectiveness with students, and the source of those things that we refer to as “problems” are all connected. I do not ask you to take any of this on faith or adopt any specific set of values. In fact, I encourage you to be skeptical and question every idea in this chapter. If the ideas are valid, you should experience their validity firsthand. None of the content in this chapter is intended to be philosophical or ideological. It is intended to be practical and to explore the technical aspects of how our thoughts impact our work as teachers. Some of the ideas in this chapter may seem unfamiliar at first, so it may be helpful to allow yourself time to reflect upon them. Changing patterns of thinking takes time and intentional practice.

*“Some days just seem to drag on forever.”*

*“Those students make me so mad sometimes and I bet they do it on purpose.”*

*“It is odd, I am around people all day, but a lot of the time I still feel so isolated and lonely.”*

*“I thought teaching was going to be more satisfying, but for so much of the day I just feel dissatisfied. I am beginning to understand how people get burned out.”*

*“I am doing my best to teach these students but they seem to always be letting me down. I feel disappointed in them so much, with the exception of a few that are my hard workers.”*

In Chapter One we characterized the *natural state* in the classroom as one in which we and our students work in harmony in a functional and satisfying environment. As you have explored the previous chapters, you have likely recognized that creating a functional classroom environment is no accident. However, with an intentional investment, a sound set of tools and enough time, we can bring function to nearly any context. Likewise our natural state of mind while teaching is one in which we are at ease, in the moment, engaged in our work, and feeling a sense of connection with our students. However, just as the natural classroom condition is uncommon, so is this natural state of mind. What is more *normal* is a state of mind that is on some level stressed or bored, feeling some degree of threat from students, parents, and administrators, wishing to do something else, looking forward to later in the day, and feeling isolated and alone. This “normal” but dysfunctional state of mind contributes to problems with our classroom management as well as personal happiness.

While we have many challenges and real problems to face while teaching, most of the experience of things being “problematic” during the day takes place in our minds (Tolle, 2001). Teaching is difficult work, but doing that work is not the reason that we feel distress. The majority of what gives us grief comes from how we think about things rather than the challenges that we deal with. In this chapter we will explore some areas of our thinking and examine how mental processes can make all the difference related to how we experience and interpret our jobs, our students, and what we find meaningful.

**Chapter Reflection 16-a:** You may be feeling skeptical about the ideas of focused thinking. The implication that the difficulties of your job are just “in your mind” can seem patronizing. The purpose of the chapter is not to condemn the way that we think, but to find ways to free us from those thoughts that keep us from enjoying our jobs.

**Chapter Reflection 16-b:** At this point, it might be useful to informally construct a map of your emotions throughout your last day of teaching (or working with others). What were the most common emotions; what were the repetitive thoughts? Keep these thoughts and emotions in mind as you continue with the chapter.

### **HOW TO HAVE A GENERALLY UNSATISFYING (THINKING) DAY**

Typically we judge a day of teaching as better or worse relative to how well the students behave. Granted, students do have better days and not so good days, but as Haim Ginott (1972) observed, the teacher “makes the weather in the classroom.” And we interpret the events and give mental labels to what goes on in our class. Our interpretation of the thousands of events that occur in a day will have a great deal to do with the lessons that we take away from those events as well as the way we feel about them.

Moreover, to a great degree our thinking will define our experience in how we subjectively feel about things, and objectively – the affect we project, how we perform, and the effect we have on others (Friedman, 2006; Friedman & Farber, 1992). It may not be immediately obvious but with certain kinds of thinking we insure that we have mostly unsatisfying and uneasy days; with other kinds of thinking we insure that we have a mostly enjoyable and contented experience in a class day. To examine this idea more

concretely, consider the two descriptions below (Table 16.1) and reflect on the powerful effects each type of thinking can have on the experience of teaching (or coaching or parenting).

**Table 16.1: Comparison of Thinking That Will Either Lead To a Largely Unsatisfying or Largely Enjoyable Experience From a Day of Teaching.**

| <b>Thinking that Will Lead to a Higher Degree of Unease and Dissatisfaction</b>   | <b>Thinking that Will Lead to a Higher Degree of Peace of Mind and Contentment</b>   |
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| Begin the day by thinking about how long and predictable it will be, how much you are looking forward to its being over, and how relieved you will be when you can go home.   | Begin the day grounded in the moment. Enjoy the processes and tasks in which you find yourself, and be present to and aware of your students.  |
| Picture other classes and/or other schools where you envision the students being much better. Compare your students to these past classes or other students and look for their faults.  | Accept your students for who they are. Do not judge them as better or worse, just accept where they are at this point in their learning and personal growth, and attend to what you can do to help them succeed in your class.   |
| Begin to wonder what your “problem” student(s) will do today to irritate you. Look for things that they do that confirm your expectations.  | Assume all of your students are going to do the best they can given their conditioning, what they are reacting to in their lives in and outside of school, and above all, the relationship that you have previously developed with them.   |
| Let your emotions be dictated by your reactions to external events. When a student does something that you do not like or when the students are not meeting your expectations, assign them bad intentions, and let yourself get angry and disappointed.   | Be aware of the connectedness of all events throughout the day. Keep in mind what you are projecting to the class. Try to project a positive expectation for all students. When things do not go well, assume responsibility for changing the cause or helping improve the situation. Take on a “Yes” mindset.   |
| Hold resentment for students who are making your life difficult “on purpose.” On the surface pretend that everything is fine but allow your inner dialogue to blame and judge the students who are causing you to be miserable. Resent that they are in your class and tell yourself how they are to blame for how you feel.  | Above all keep in mind that you choose your emotional reactions to events. What you feel manifests in your interpretation of events. Watch carefully for feelings of defensiveness and threat. Be aware of what you are defending. It is usually something petty. If you shed the need to defend your self-image, the students stop being the enemy.   |
| At lunch find another teacher or staff member to complain to. Tell them how the students are acting the same inappropriate, inattentive, and disrespectful way they did the day before. Paint a vivid picture of the parents as a useless and unsupportive lot who are ultimately the cause of all of your problems. Reflect on how if it was not for how they raised their kids, you would not have half the problems that you do. | At lunch, take the opportunity for at least a moment for yourself. Find the present moment and allow yourself to just be, eat, and enjoy the company (or the solitude if you so choose). Spend only a moment or two reflecting on what happened in the morning and what adjustments you want to make. As you think about the rest of the day, keep your awareness of the present and do not let your head get in the habit of being lost in thoughts of past events or future uncertainties. Plan in the moment, eat in the moment, and then when it is time to go back to class, maintain your awareness in the moment. |

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| <p>After lunch keep your locus of control as external as possible. Hope the students act better, and look forward to times in the day when you do not have them with you. Anticipate that things will go poorly and when they do, let yourself react with habitual anger, shaming, blaming, and lecturing your class. Be sure to project your passive aggressive disappointment and sense of superiority. Phrases such as “when will you ever learn” will make you feel less responsible and justified in caring less.</p>   | <p>As the students come into the room after lunch, take a moment to appreciate how unique and talented they are. As your attitude of respect and appreciation grows you can see it being reflected back to you. As you begin to feel more connected and closer to the students, you feel the sense of responsibility for their welfare. You can then shift your attention away from you and your ego as “the teacher” and back to the moment, the task, and being fully present to the students. You focus on doing one thing at a time, doing a good job of each task, and letting the outcomes take care of themselves.</p>  |
| <p>As students respond to your attitude of judgment and disapproval (that you thought you disguised) with aloofness and lack of respect, be sure to assign them the traits of lazy and disrespectful when you make assessments about their character. When you assign these qualities keep the locus of causality and responsibility on the students; don’t consider what part your attitude played in creating their response to you and the unsatisfying classroom climate. As feelings of loneliness and isolation creep in, long for situations in your life where you are loved, or classes that gave you the love you deserved.</p>  | <p>Focus your teaching on what is successful. Show respect for your students by projecting high expectations for their performance and their interactions with one another. Do not keep your positive recognitions (Chapter 8) or your appreciation to yourself. Use the power of the collective sense of ownership and responsibility to the community to guide your thinking in matters of behavior. Show your pride in the group and give them concrete examples of the progress that they are making. No matter how successful you are, avoid thoughts of comparison to other teachers. You recognize that once you begin to judge and compare, you poison the well.</p>   |
| <p>When you go home from after a long day of teaching, run over and over in your mind all that students have done to you -- the willful disrespect, the lazy unmotivated performance that reflects badly on you, the intentional misbehavior. Be sure to assign the students bad intentions for their actions. Give yourself reasons to justify your defensiveness, but unconsciously beat yourself up for being inadequate. Alternately recall bad episodes from the day, and long for the break or at least the weekend. Dread that you have to go back and teach tomorrow. Pretend that you “just leave it all behind” when you leave the classroom. Ignore the way that your negative feelings affect the way that you feel physically. Try not to notice how your unconscious mind does not want to give up the negative thoughts and the need to defend yourself. Just ignore the way your mind continuously tries to compensate for your sense of disconnection and inadequacy, and attempt to fill it with some diversion or addictive behavior. Tell yourself that everything is fine, and don’t pay any attention to how easily your body and mind react with anger when someone or something says or does something that triggers one of the many things that irritated you during the day. If you have grading or planning to do, let yourself</p> | <p>When you go home, practice being in the moment. If you have planning or grading to do, do it when you can. Don’t ruin the moment with worry about what you need to do. It leads to resentment of the task and the habit of worrying instead of doing. When you are not engaged in school work, be in the moment. It may be tempting to cycle your day through your mind, but as you notice what you are thinking about, you will find that it is pretty repetitive. It is much better to be present to whom you are with and what you are doing. It will make your time away from teaching much happier and your time as a teacher more effective.</p> <p>When you are grading papers, be in the moment. No matter how repetitive, enjoy each paper. Avoid trying to “get through them.” As you learn to enjoy the task, and be in the moment while grading, you will find that the time does not drag as before, you enjoy the task more, and you do not carry the resentment of grading back to the class the next day. And it is a great exercise to practice staying in the present moment.</p> |

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| wallow in the resentment you feel for doing it. Put it off, but complain up to that point about how you have to do it. |  |
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**Chapter Reflection 16-c:** As you examine each list, which one best characterizes how you typically think in a day? What was your emotional reaction as you read the lists?

As we compare the lists in Figure 16.1, keep in mind that both columns refer to a comparable day in a comparable school. There was nothing different in either context. The descriptions had nothing to do with location or who was taught. As you read the experiences described in each column you will note dramatic differences between them. If one were to take the approach of the orientation on the left, it is certain to produce a sense of unease, stress, and dissatisfaction. Interestingly, the experience characterized on the left most closely resembles the *normal* state of mind for many teachers. As a result, the longer one teaches under this laborious mindset, the less they want to (Farber, 1999). In contrast, the column on the right depicts what we might characterize as thinking that will lead to the *natural condition*. While this condition is unusual, it is realistically attainable by any of us. In this chapter we will examine the directional steps.

### **EXPLORING THE FUNDAMENTAL FACTORS IN OUR THINKING THAT AFFECT OUR EXPERIENCE**

To make sense of why each of us can have such a dramatically difference experience in a day of teaching, let's examine various potential thought process, patterns and reactions that take place. To begin, it will be useful to explore three factors that are fundamental to determining the quality of our thinking: our approaches to 1) time, 2) causation of events, and 3) awareness.

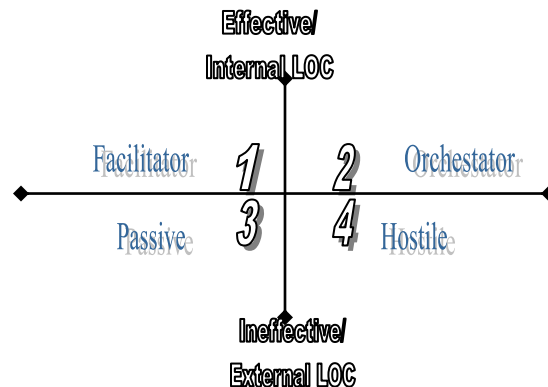
#### **1. Time -- Where is Our Thinking in Relation to the Present?**

Most of us rarely consider our thoughts relative to the moment. In fact, most of us assume that our attention is in the present. Try this: check in on yourself at various points during a typical day and observe where your thinking is in relation to time. If you are like most, your mind drifts between thinking about what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future. Most of us give very little real attention to the present. So what is the problem with that? Simply: everything. The only place that we can find peace, a clear sense of intention, and freedom from the mental noise that fills our head is in the moment. The past is where regret, blame, guilt, obsession, victimization and resentment live. Those feelings can only exist if we allow our minds to dwell in the past. Likewise we will not find peace of mind in the future. The concept of "future" holds anxiety, boredom, fear, dread, anticipation, and projection of problems, as well as the delusion that the future will somehow bring relief from problems. The future has not happened, yet we allow ourselves to experience negative emotions in manufacturing a future reality that is unpleasant. Just as mistakenly, we miss the moment because we anticipate something in the future that we misperceive as more important. We need to make the present moment our friend. Obliviousness to it is the cause of most of our perceived problems and suffering.

**Chapter Reflection 16-d:** If you are having a difficult time recognizing where your attention is at any moment, it may be useful to try an exercise. Simply sit in a chair for 15

minutes or longer and as best you can eliminate all distractions (e.g., computer, TV, others, radio, etc) and let your mind go where it wants. Simply observe your mind and notice where it goes. How long does it take before it wants to think about the future (i.e., what you need to be doing, what event is coming up, etc) or gets caught up thinking about a past event (i.e., what happened that morning, other times that you have tried to sit quietly, etc)? You might try to stay in the present and see how long you are able.

After doing this exercise, what did you find? Were you surprised at how little time your mind wanted to spend in the present?



## 2. Causation — Where to Place Responsibility and Ownership

As discussed in Chapter 2, the primary factor in the teaching style continuum--making up the vertical axis related to function and effectiveness--is the degree to which there is an internal or external locus of control (LOC). This is arguably the single most predictive characteristic of the success of a teacher (Shindler, Jones, Taylor & Cadenas, 2003). Effective teachers attribute the causes of their successes and failures to an internal LOC related to what they do. However, to be both effective and to enjoy peace of mind, we need to have an internal LOC related to how we *think*. It is important to take responsibility for our thinking and recognize the cause-and-effect relationship between it and literally everything else, including our success, the quality of our environment, and our level of peace of mind and job satisfaction. If we believe that the “real world” (Appendix I) is unsatisfying, that something external will always thwart our best efforts and that “those students” will always disappoint us, those beliefs will cause it to be so in our experience (Friedman, 2006). On the other hand, if we recognize that most problems are caused by our own minds and our self-limiting thinking and that in a very real way we create our own “real world” by our attitude, we find that things not only seem better, they work out better.

Our minds in survival mode tell us: *“If I take responsibility for what is, it will be too overwhelming. My students’ needs are endless. This job is endless. It is so big. I can never really succeed. If I accept that I am responsible, I will feel inadequate, guilty and/or overwhelmed. I cannot be held responsible for what happens to me students. It is not my fault, I cannot control everything.”* These thoughts torture us and make us feel guilt, inadequacy, and we ultimately find reasons to become less responsible. There is a temptation to externalize, blame, complain, become negative, tune out, and view the students as the problem (Farber, 1999). While this is understandable and normal, it is still dysfunctional.

To achieve peace of mind rather than externalize responsibility to cope with a sense of unease (a strategy that will not provide a sense of peace for long), it is more effective to change patterns of thinking (Larrivee, 2006; Tolle, 2003). The immediate and simple first step is to take responsibility for our own thoughts. You are the only one who can do this for yourself. You can develop skill at recognizing the messages that want to come in. Practice drawing your awareness to this very moment and “what’s important now” (WIN); tend away from the urge to fight “what is.” We do not have to take responsibility for everything that is happening in the situation, we just need to take responsibility for ourselves and remember that the present is all we can control (Tolle, 2003).

Second, when we access and focus on the immediate present, we notice that a clearer sense of intentions will follow. Moment by moment, there is nothing you cannot cope with. The future can seem overwhelming when we allow it to supersede our thinking, but it is not in this moment. Nor is it in the next. Habits of mind are difficult to change at first but become increasingly easier. What is right, necessary, and important will ultimately come to us as we free our thinking from the habit of creating thought problems and making this moment something that we need to run from (Tolle, 2001).

Third, while we need to trust our intentions, we must give up the desire to control. When we look clearly at the need for control, it is not so much a function of necessity as it is the ego trying to make the world consistent with its own picture. Deepak Chopra (1994) identifies the ability to shed “attachment to the outcome” as one of his *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. When we let go and stop clinging to outcomes we free ourselves from the torment of guilt. Our egoist thought patterns insist that we need to be attached to the outcome or things will not turn out well. It is useful to recognize this ego-based message for what it is: a mental fiction. In closer examination, we find our need to make things consistent with our idea of how things should be is fear-based. Letting ego attachment dictate how things should work out will not improve outcomes, but will go a long way toward making us miserable. It is a never-ending struggle with no peace.

**Chapter Reflection 16-e:** Reflect on the events of your day. When did you feel attached to things turning out a certain way? How did it make you feel: stressed, nervous, guilty, helpless, inadequate, upset at others? Did your feelings of attachment make things turn out any better?

### **3. Awareness -- Where Do We Place our Attention?**

Where is our awareness throughout the day? Is it on the many negative thoughts that recycle through our minds on a continuous basis? “That student is such a problem.” “How did they score so poorly on that test, I did a good job of teaching it to them.” “Why is it so hard to get them to listen?” “We would be so much better off without this principal?” “How am I supposed to teach effectively without \_\_\_\_.”

Count the number of times in five minutes that you have these negative thoughts or others. You will be surprised at the number! Furthermore, count the number of times in a day that the same handful of negative thoughts recycle themselves through your mind. Note that you do not even try to bring them into your awareness; they find a way of dominating your thinking unless you create change within.

**Chapter Reflection 16-f:** Reflect on the following questions:

1. How much time am I spending with my awareness being truly in the moment?
2. Am I letting compulsive and negative thinking pull me out of the moment, into a past defined by resentment, regret and irritation, or into a future that represents either dread or illusory relief from the current situation?
3. If my conscious mind is filled with this compulsive thinking on a continuous basis, what am I programming into my unconscious? And what will it look like when it surfaces in my behavior?

Reflect on how often you shift your awareness from what is important now (e.g., your students, investment in your teaching, appreciating what is good about the moment, etc.) to an “imaginary audience.” It is common when teaching for our minds to leave the present moment and allow the ego to become the audience. One of the manifestations of this is becoming self-conscious. Instead of being attentive to our students and the task at hand, we shift our attention to how we think we appear in the eyes of others. The practical result is actions that are stilted and tentative. Another manifestation is the “commiserating ego.” Our egos are a highly attentive and appreciating audience. The ego always commiserates with us when we have disparaging thoughts about students (e.g., “they are just not that smart,” or “they are not as good as other students” or “how are they not getting this?”). They are amused at the backhanded comments that we make to students who are not aware that they have just been put down. They are always there to listen to complaints about how our job is not as good as it should be, how things are unfair, and how since it is not our fault, we are justified in daydreaming and entertaining ourselves in whatever way will allow us to cope with this unsatisfying moment. When we find ourselves playing to our “imaginary audience” it is a clear sign that we are not in the moment and are acting unconsciously.

**Chapter Reflection 16-g:** Reflect on the last time that you played to your “imaginary audience.” What thought forms did it take?

It will help to keep our awareness in the moment, on what you are doing right now, as much as possible. You may be planning operationally for the future or analyzing the past for helpful ideas, but if done in the moment the ego is less likely to take charge of the process. When your awareness is in the moment, you will feel it in your body. Your breath will become deeper and slower and you will feel an ease and clarity.

**Chapter Reflection 16-h:** Take a moment and intentionally move your attention into the moment. Focus on being completely present to the task in front of you or the people who you are with. Notice how you feel when the mental noise slows down and your attention is “in the now.” What else do you find in this state? Keep it in mind for later.

## **SOURCES OF DYSFUNCTIONAL THINKING AND NEGATIVE EMOTION**

### **Exploring Dissatisfaction**



On one hand, feelings of dissatisfaction can be useful. They serve to help us recognize what could be better about our practice and in ourselves. Our job is to help students realize improvement; if we are satisfied with their remaining the same we are not doing our job. Dissatisfaction helps us set new goals and to clarify our sense of purpose. Moreover, there is a great deal of support for the idea that the best teachers are those who are least satisfied with the status quo (Fallona & Richardson, 2006; Fullan 1993; Glickman, 1998). Research suggests that good teachers want to make a difference.

On the other hand, a perpetual feeling of dissatisfaction contributes to our unease and speeds up the process of burnout (Friedman, 2006). If we feel that we are not doing our job well enough, or that our students are not learning fast enough, or that the job of teaching is a thankless profession, we will be unhappy and/or begin to deteriorate both physically and emotionally (Farber, 1999). Teachers who leave the profession typically do so because they cannot live with the perpetual sense of inadequacy (Friedman, 2006; Hargeaves, 1994).

How does one work with that voice inside that says “I want to make a difference” in a way that does not lead to downfall. First, resist the temptation toward being resigned. That is a lose-lose proposition. When we say, “I tried my best, but nothing is ever good enough--I will just give up,” we are unfulfilled and ineffective (Farber, 1999). Second, distinguish the types of change-oriented thinking that helps us move away from that which brings unhappiness. Goals themselves do not make us unhappy. They give a sense of direction and focus (Fallona & Richardson, 2006). Intention is a word that we have used throughout the book. Intention implies a clear sense of purpose, a deliberate movement toward a goal, with a firm grounding in the moment. If we act intentionally we move with confidence. The problem is becoming attached to an outcome. It is easy to assume that the two ideas go together: 1) setting an intention; and 2) wanting things to work out the way that we envisioned. But they are not related. Initially, the idea of letting go of the end result can appear ill-advised. It seems that things could fall apart without ensuring they turn out the right way. Explore your thinking though, and you will notice a distinction between the ego, which is the part of you that wants to control and “needs” things to turn out, and the actor, which is the part working toward a quality outcome. The reason the thought of an unsatisfying outcome creates stress and fear is that our ego insists we will be “less” if we fail. This is an unhelpful delusion.

**Chapter Reflection 16-i:** You might test out the idea that fear of a bad outcome is a mental fiction. Recall five things at different points in your life that you were very concerned about (including the most recent). 1. Did your anxiety make the outcome any better? 2. Did things work out eventually? If they did not, was the outcome survivable, if not acceptable? Was your attachment to things working out the way that you wanted useful, or just a source of needless stress?

As the voice of dissatisfaction comes in, it can actually be used purposefully. It can clarify intention and motivate us to work toward change (Fallona & Richardson, 2006). However, when the voice of the ego come in and tries to influence us to entwine our self-concept with the day's outcomes, it is important to recognize--but not enter--the trap of the ego dictating how to feel or what to do.

### **Examining the Nature of Our “Problems”**

Teaching is an engaging profession. There is always something to do, a challenge to meet, and an ever-present need to plan and prepare. Students bring a great deal of unpredictability and some dysfunction into their classes. As observed in Chapter Two these are not problems as much as challenges and simply part of the job. We can, of course, make them into problems as a result of interpretation and perception. It is possible to interpret our day as a series of problems, one after another. It is also possible to view the day as our work that is going to be done. When we make our challenges into problems and interpret the events of the day as problems we become our own enemy. Making teaching into a series of problems is a very effective way to have mostly miserable days. If we learn to notice the tendency in our minds to want to turn our work into problems, just the act of noticing reduces some sense of struggle. As a result we move through our days without the mental stress and strain caused by a mind filled with perpetual problems.

In most cases, the difference between a functional and healthy versus dysfunctional and unhealthy approach involves interpreting various events either as problems or as challenges that simply require action. The size of the event is insignificant but our interpretation of the event has great connotation. For example, during an activity we notice that our students are doing more talking than desirable. The problem-based interpretation causes negative upset and labeling the event as a problem. A more functional interpretation is simple recognition that something needs to change, then taking the action required to change it (Chapter 5 related to gaining attention). Even if the challenge is considerable, such as a student with substantial issues or being uncontrollable in class, viewing it as a problem will not help. Again, we simply need to take action (Chapter 14 related to dealing with difficult students). That action may require a long-term intention including a complex plan of action in addition to immediate intervention, but do not label it as “bad,” take it personally, or feel victimized. Action is required, and that is all.

In fact, if we mentally turn an event or student into something “bad” it will worsen our sense of peace as well as the quality of our classroom management (Fries & Cochran-Smith, 2006). Part of the problem is in labeling, conceptualizing, and personalizing the event, we shift toward an external causality, get out of the moment, and shift into fear-based thinking. The result is negativity and a sense of isolation and separateness.

**Chapter Reflection 16-j:** It is normal to look at all the problems in our work and personal lives as finite. We did not create them, they simply exist. Ask yourself the question, “If my problems were all magically solved and removed from my life, would it take long before I created a whole new set about the same size and the same type as those I have now?” Try to answer honestly, since this is a useful exercise to break patterned thinking.

### **What is the Problem with Negativity?**

Most of us spend a great deal of our time engaged in some form of negativity. We have become acculturated to it, so it seems normal. At times it is subtle and at others, debilitating. Negativity can take many forms--complaining, passive aggressiveness, perpetual disappointment, blame, a sense of unfavorable comparison, cynicism and

fatalism. Time spent in schools can actually contribute to negative states of mind. Many of us work within toxic climates that draw us into a sphere of negative energy. Spending prolonged time in the faculty lounge can “acclimatize” us to insidious forms of negativity until they seem normal and inevitable. It is usual to become accustomed to negativity, but we must awaken to the point that it has little value (aside from bonding us to others who are also trapped in these patterns). Nevertheless, it is an entirely mental habit that is destructive to our peace of mind and our effectiveness.

**Chapter Reflection 16-k:** Consider the last thing that you complained about. Recall how it felt to complain. As you examine it more closely, can you identify what it was that your ego was feeling the need to protect? Was it your sense of self? Did you need to excuse yourself for a lack of action (that you could have taken earlier) to alleviate some guilt? At the root of all negativity is an effort to run from taking responsibility. Can you identify what it was in this case?

Most forms of negativity have two primary causes. First, they can result from a lack of acceptance and the desire to avoid “what is.” Instead of taking responsibility for the moment and saying “yes” to our reality, we promote negativity when we rationalize the need to say “no” to the present in the form of denial, defensiveness, unease, displeasure, etc. Second, negativity results from a lack of courage to take positive action (the ego disguises this as superiority). Instead of taking the opportunity for constructive action, we choose to be passive. As a result of that choice we feel dissonance; to cope we use some form of negativity to avoid feelings of guilt or failure. As discussed in Chapter 5, this manifests itself in the classroom when we choose negativity over action. There are many times in a day that an inadequate state of affairs could be improved. For each, we can proceed in either one of two directions. One is to initiate action, change the situation, and in recognizing that change, enter a new emotional state where negativity is unnecessary (Sequence A). In contrast, when we see the need for action we rationalize inaction, and when the problem persists, we employ negativity to cope with the sense of guilt and the need to defend self image (Sequence B).

**Figure 16.2 — Roots of Negativity: Sequence of Events Related to Feelings of Negativity or Resolution**

**Sequence A**

Problem – Action Taken – Change – Ability for Positive Reflection on Behavior

**Sequence B**

Problem – Inaction – Problem Remains - Distress – Negativity

**Chapter Reflection 16-l:** Recall the last time that you felt negative: defensive, complaining, disappointed in the students, touchy about your performance as a teacher, etc. Reflect on what you were defending. It is likely that there was a point in time that you could have acted, but did not. Is it possible that your negativity was a form of beating yourself up or displacing that anger onto your students?

When we allow our negativity to take over, we spiral into a pain cycle that is capable of doing major damage to not only to ourselves but also to everyone around us. First, we

must begin by accepting that there is no value in being negative. We must accept that we are not perfect and will slip toward negative moods, but keep in mind that the thinking in those moods is unhealthy. Our ego-attached mind may tell us to be angry or assign bad intentions to someone, complain, blame, feel sorry for ourselves, or take revenge on a student or the class. The better we get at identifying these messages, the less likely we stay enslaved to our unconscious conditioning. We will use a more intentional inner voice to guide our actions.

### **What do we do when we recognize the voice of negativity emerging?**

1. **Do not fight it.** Accept these emotions. You do not need to blame yourself or others for negative feelings. Just become aware of the thoughts. When you are in the act of noticing the negative message, you see them for what they are--simply thought forms and nothing that you “need” to listen to. In your noticing the feeling, it will lose power and control. This is in no way denying what you feel. Denial is counterproductive in transitioning your mindset.
2. **Listen to what negativity is telling you.** When you feel negative thoughts coming in, treat it as information. Ask yourself, “What button just got pushed?” “What am I defending?” “Is there some inadequacy I feel the need to project?” “Is there some hurt or vulnerability at the root of the emotions?” Let the emotions tell you what is at the root of your negative reactions. Emotions are the most accurate window into the mind. Refrain from labeling emotions “good” or “bad” -- just accept that they are there for now. They are real, yes, but emotions are not your identity. What can you learn from them?
3. **Choose positive action.** In any situation we have only three functional/healthy choices (in contrast to many of dysfunctional/unhealthy choices; e.g., going negative, becoming reactive and unconscious, etc.):
  - Accept the situation. Stop fighting the idea that things need to be different. Say yes to what is.
  - Take action. Tap into your intentional vision and do something that improves the situation. Taking conscious, deliberate action will feel positive and lead to solutions.
  - Remove yourself from the situation. Take a time out. Find another place to be. Wait until you have renewed inner peace and the negativity is not doing the talking.

### **Stress, Anger, and the Need to Be Right — Dysfunction Disguised as Normal Patterns of Thinking**

Most of us accept a regular amount of stress, anger, and the need to be right as normal and inevitable. While they define much of our daily experience, they do not need to define our efforts throughout the day. While they will always creep in, by using an intentional approach and raised level of consciousness we can spend much less time in those states than we do at present.

#### **Exploring the Nature of Stress**

For some of us, stress is a constant companion. For others it is episodic. It is felt in the body as a sense of unease and tension. Breathing becomes shallower and the level of cortisol in the blood is elevated. Stress, at its essence, comes from wanting things to be different. This includes wanting life to work out a certain way in the future but fearing that it will not. Like other forms of negativity, stress has no useful purpose. It is counter-

productive. When we are stressed, it impacts others. Our stress is inevitably projected onto our students and makes them uneasy. When we are stressed our minds are more fractured and less grounded in the moment. When the climate of a class has a chaotic quality, it is often the result of the teacher's stress level.

If we find ourselves in a stressed state quite often, we might want to practice a mindset in which we ground ourselves in the moment and focus on doing *one thing at a time*. In reality we can only do one thing at a time, so we are not missing out on anything. It is impossible this moment to be doing something in the future. The stressed mind will do its best to tell us how important it is to become obsessed with problems that the future may bring.

Instead of allowing our minds to fixate on the imagined future, it is more effective to stay in the moment and do what we can right now to prepare. Have we done the planning and preparation that is necessary? If we have, then try to stay in the moment and let go of attachment to things turning out a certain way. If the stress is related to completing a large project or from not being fully prepared for a future event, guard against the inclination to conceive of the task as vast, expansive, and overwhelming. Take one piece at a time; do one thing right now. The larger we mentally make the job, the more likely we are to experience stress and translate that stress into procrastination. Doing one thing at a time grounds us in the moment and helps us take practical steps toward reaching the goal or improving the chances for a good outcome.

When our stress takes the form of worry, it can be paralyzing. Brian Tracy (1988) suggests that to counteract worry, we should go through a series of mental steps. First, imagine the worst case scenario. Second, decide whether we could live with that if it were to happen; if so, accept that fact. Third, take action to help bring about the best possible outcome.

**Chapter Reflection 16-m:** Reflect on the last time you felt stress. What was it about? Did the stress improve your outcome? As you look at it, do you recognize the appearance of a voice telling you that you need the future to be a certain way? What was that voice saying?

### **Exploring the Nature of Anger and Resentment**

Most of us experience some subtle forms of anger throughout the day. These may feel like defensiveness, disappointment, resentment, or regret. While normal, this will take a toll. There is a misperception that we need to "just let it out." This theory is called *catharsis*. However, research has consistently shown that catharsis is not effective at reducing angry feelings and actually escalates anger tendencies. In one study, Bushman (2002) found that venting anger by hitting a punching bag actually increased the subjects' long term levels of anger. Moreover, the study found that when subjects ruminated over anger, their level of anger increased. We can conclude therefore that "holding it in" is as unhealthy as "letting it out."

It is useful to recognize that the physical feeling of anger is simply the body's response to thoughts. In changing the thoughts we reduce the anger. Much of our motivation for staying angry comes from the misperception that it is useful. Many of us view anger as a

motivator. It energizes us to take action, to be assertive, to get “pumped up.” However, we can be assertive or energized without the anger. In fact, anger simply makes us less conscious in whatever we are doing.

**But What if They Deserve It?**

There is an old saying: “Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.” When we externalize our anger the effect is introducing more pain into the equation of the class. Using the hot coal analogy, what we have done is burned ourselves first when we let our thinking become angry. Then, in throwing that hot coal into the class, we burn our students. Rest assured that at some point, in some form, that coal will come back at us. When we externalize anger in the form of giving pain (e.g., lectures, guilt, shame, put downs, threats, punishments, etc.), we get burned at least twice. When our students make us mad, our minds want to get back at them because “they deserve it.” However, it becomes clear that this reasoning is dysfunctional. If students have done something that calls for a consequence, they deserve a logical and related consequence (not pain). Any disciplinary action done in anger (and using a pain-based logic) will create less function in the room and drag us down the continuum toward 4-Style management.

When we experience anger it seems determined by the situation and inevitable. Actually, we have a great deal more control over it than we assume. Moreover, we see that the mechanism in our minds that prompts anger is predictable. The external context itself does not make us angry; it is our thinking regarding it. Events are just events; we can decide how we feel about them, we determine their value.

There are three parts to the anger mechanism, and understanding them can raise our awareness. First, to involve ourselves in anger we take an event out of the larger world context and narrow our focus to that event only. Second, we suppose or assign intentions to the object of our anger. As we examine anger (as well as all other forms of negativity), we recognize a strong relationship between the intentions we assign to others and the degree of harmful thinking that we experience. Third, we need to assume that the “anger just is,” rather than see it as the result of something -- one of a thousand thoughts we could have attended to and only one of the many feelings that we could be feeling right then. Figure 16-3 outlines how perceptions relating these three variables translate into dramatically different results in situations that offer the opportunity to get angry.

**Figure 16.3: Comparison of Healthy vs. Unhealthy Responses**  
**-- Scenario of Anger toward a Student**

|                            | <b>Dysfunctional/Unhealthy</b>   | <b>Healthy/Functional</b>   |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Setting the Context</b> | Examine the event within a narrow context. Look at the event and the student in isolation. Let your ego do the talking (or more likely ordering), and let it bring your attention into a narrow, personalized event. | Acknowledge that the student is acting in a larger context. They may be reacting to something we or someone else has done. Open up your awareness and see that this is only one of the hundreds of events and choices going on right now. |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Assigning Intentions</b>   | Assign the student bad intentions. Tell yourself that the student did what they did for a malicious reason. What they did or said was an attack on you.   | Assign the student the appropriate level of unconsciousness. Keep in mind that our job is to be the conscious one in the equation. Assume that the student is doing the best that they can with the level of awareness that they have at this point in their lives. Somewhere in the back of your mind, recall your own level of consciousness at that age, and some of the things that you thought and/or said.   |
| <b>Choosing an Emotional State</b>  | Be unconscious and allow your ego's response to the threat take you over. Feel angry. Feel justified in being angry. Run the event over in your mind a few times and work yourself up, until you feel the emotion through your whole body.  | Recognize the anger arising in you. Make a choice not to let it "become you." Choose to shift your awareness to something else. Recognize that you choose your emotions by what you choose to attend to. Forgive the student for being a little unconscious today, and move on emotionally.  |
| <b>Practical Considerations</b>   | Hold on to the feeling. Allow it to come out in the form of passive aggressiveness or hostility. Feel justified in getting the student back in the form of a put down, or teasing. Wish ill for the student, and put less effort into teaching him/her.   | If the student has done something that has violated a class rule or expectation, give him/her a consequence. If not, make an effort to connect with the student when you feel less hurt. If you have something to say to the student, say it assertively using "I" statements and then let it go.  |
| <b>Example Scenario: You have created a lesson that you feel is highly valuable for your students. Early in the lesson, most students are responding well. They are on task and enjoying the lesson. However, one student seems to be disinterested and uncomfortable. You turn to the student and ask them a question and they say, "I'm sorry but I just think this is boring."</b> |   |  |
| <b>Application to "Boring Comment" Scenario</b>   | Immediately narrow your focus and make your whole reality about this one event. Lose track of all the other students or the fact that the student may have a lot of reasons for being disagreeable today. Take the comment personally. Allow your disappointment to take over that the student expressed dislike for something you hold dear. Make it about you and them. Assume that they said this just to offend you and make you angry. Allow your feeling of anger to overwhelm you. Let the | Keep in mind that most students are enjoying the lesson, and it is going fine. Accept that not everyone is going to share your love of this topic. Give the student a break. It is okay that they get bored. Notice your temptation to get angry. Allow it to pass. Shift your focus to "what is important NOW (WIN). Stay positive, or at least internally find the "yes" mindset inside you. Comment to the student publically or privately that it is okay to be bored, but |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | <p>anger do the talking. Project onto the whole class your feeling that “they do not deserve your best effort, because you do not deserve to be treated this way.” Find ways to get back at the students later in the day (e.g., brainstorm ways to lower their grade). Put less effort into your teaching.</p> | <p>comments like that are not good for the class. You welcome constructive criticism, but that sounded like complaining and was not an effective way to express his/her feelings. Internally, forgive the student for being young and unconscious. Shift your energy back to doing the best job of teaching that you can.</p> |
|--|---|---|

**Examining the Need to Be Right**

Much of stress and/or problem-making comes from the need to be right. You could counter, “I am the teacher; don’t I need to be right?” Yes, certainly, we should know what we are talking about, and be accurate and well informed. We need to be subject experts and a source of good information. In one sense then, we should try to be correct most of the time. We can separate “being right” into two different categories: 1) having good information and helping students arrive at sound, well-informed conclusions; and 2) the ego’s need to mentally defend itself from a perceived threat.

A good way to recognize the difference will be in the body. How do we feel as we discuss or defend our position? Are our minds clear and light, our breathing easy and our bodies relaxed? Or do we feel our heart rate increase and the level of adrenalin rise? Do we feel awareness narrow as desire to win the point surges? Think back on situations in which you have articulated views different from others; what were you feeling?

First, consider a scenario in which you are engaged in casual chat with some students and one suggests that the school would be better if it were not so purple. You are confused because the school is clearly beige. You are pretty confident that your senses tell you that the school is not in the least bit purple. Imagine yourself in this situation. How would you feel and react? The student is clearly wrong and you are confident in your knowledge. But it is likely that you would feel little or no defensiveness as you tried to help the student recognize that the school is really beige rather than purple, or as you simply walked away feeling concerned for the student’s ability to perceive color accurately. In this case, it is likely that your physiology would remain unchanged, and your awareness would shift quickly to something else.

Then recall a recent situation in which you felt personally challenged, For example, a student or colleague may have disagreed with your opinion or someone took exception with the way that you were doing something (maybe a classroom management strategy). How did you feel? It is likely that you felt adrenalin rise and a great desire to defend your ideas in the strongest terms. Hours later, you were probably still feeling offended, and running your argument over and over in your mind, long after the students had gone home.

In both scenarios, our view of reality was challenged directly. What another said was in direct conflict with our views. In the first scenario there was little if any ego reaction. However, in the second scenario, the ego was likely very involved. As a result, our mental reaction to the comment became personal. Our ego insisted in effect that our very self was under attack; what it hears is, “If I am proven wrong, I will cease to exist.”



Our ego also tells us that we will feel better when we win the argument (either mentally or actually). While the ego feels very motivated to engage the argument, and tells us that it is a good thing to do, our body is telling us that it is not. The body is the true indicator of the emotional state, and our body is telling us that the need to be right is making us miserable.

If when presented with conflicting information we engage in a rational process of inquiry, we are using our minds. If, on the other hand, we find that hours later we are still fighting the mental argument or defending ourselves, it is evident that our ego is locked in a struggle for survival and we are being taken along for the ride. We are unconscious passengers and our ego has the keys. As Eckhart Tolle (2001) suggests, “Most of the time we are not using our mind at all, it is using us.”

To remedy this normal but highly destructive pattern, we need to be intentional about bringing a change to our thinking. First, we will need to become skilled at noticing the feeling of defensiveness. At first this may seem impossible, but over time it gets easier. Second, we want to introduce a healthier set of thoughts when we feel the urge to defend. It may be effective to keep perspective on how small the argument is and how there are so many other matters that could warrant our attention. If our argument is with a student, we might want to bring to mind how much our views have changed since we were their age, and how even experts might disagree on this point. Third, we will want to try to stay in the moment and conscious. As we do, we will be aware of the reaction going on in our body, the tendency for our focus to narrow, and the transparency of the message that our ego is giving us to dig in and win. Finally, get used to not taking yourself or your thoughts so seriously.

**Chapter Reflection 16-n:** When you are in an especially peaceful state of mind, reflect on the last time that you felt the need to argue or cycle a defensive thought through your mind continuously. Resist the temptation to revisit the argument; instead, just reflect on what you were feeling at the time. What were you defending? What did you fear would happen if you could not convince yourself or the other person that you were right? Why did you NEED to be right?

The ego-driven aspect of any disagreement is often much easier to see in others. The next time you see someone arguing what you believe to be a very small point with great energy (and then having trouble letting go of it later) reflect on the degree to which their need to be right was ego-driven.

### **HOW NEGATIVITY IN THINKING MANIFESTS ITSELF INTO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT DYSFUNCTION**

Creating a mind that is more in the moment not only leads to less stress and strain throughout the day, it also leads to better classroom management outcomes (Friedman, 2006). The effects of our own thoughts on our classes can range from the subtle to the profound. On one level, negativity of any kind creates a shift in our attention from what is important now and projects to our students. We are usually a lot less successful at hiding our negative thinking than we think. As we discussed in Chapter Three, a good amount of what we teach is “who we are.” We set the tone in the class, so when we allow disappointment, anger, resentment, defensiveness, comparison, complaining, stress, or depression to define our energy, our class will take on that quality. Conversely,

when we project a present-moment awareness and positive energy, our students respond in kind. On another level, negative thinking can manifest itself very directly into classroom management dysfunction. Prime examples include ways in which our sense of disappointment and defensiveness influence interaction with our students.

When we allow disappointment to seize us, we allow ego to run our behavior. Instead of putting our attention on actions that help students learn and function, we allow ourselves to be passive, projecting the message, “If you do what I want, I will be happy but if you don’t, I will withdraw my affirmation.” This is often a subtle action and message, but the effect promotes a shift in your students’ orientation toward an external locus of control (you). It may not be on the level of conscious attention, but disappointment has the effect of decreasing the level of motivation in the class and disempowering students (Kohn, 1996).

When we feel threatened or defensive, we become drawn out of the present time. Our tendency will be to fight back, or withdraw into the role of the victim. When we fight back, we have engaged in a power struggle and “pain exchange” with our students. When we act as victim, students experience a loss of faith in our leadership and the integrity of the social contract. Our management approach shifts toward the 3-Style each time we take the role of the victim.

When we allow negativity to define our thinking we tend to be more personal and less consistent. We are more prone to making our students into a “they” and us into a “we,” which gives us a false feeling of separateness (Farber, 1999). Negativity leads us to become more passive aggressive and less proactive. It narrows our perception and limits our ability to clearly recognize the dynamics in our class (Tolle, 2001). We are less conscious of the implicit-level factors that are operating within the class and as a result, more determined by their effects.

**Chapter Reflection 16-o:** Reflect on classes that you have observed recently. Did you see evidence of a relationship between the negative thoughts of the teacher and any classroom management or motivation problem in the class? Save your observations here for Group Activity #2 at the end of the chapter.

### **EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF OUR MENTAL SCRIPTS**

We all have a series of mental scripts swimming around in our unconscious minds (Nelson, 1999). Most of them are subtle, while others can define our entire outlook. Most of these scripts are formed very early in life, but are often solidified in adolescent years. It has been said that we often select teaching as a career to re-write the scripts of the years we would like to change or relive. Whether this is true for you, examining the underlying scripts in your unconscious can be enlightening and hold the key to our ongoing struggles.

These scripts can be healthy, unhealthy or neutral (Nelson, 1999). For example, we may be carrying around a generally positive script that says, “If I work hard good things will happen to me.” Or when we were young, someone might have inspired us to believe we are capable; as a result we developed a script around that concept. Whether healthy or unhealthy, true or false, once these scripts are accepted truths in our unconscious

minds, they are burned into our self-images and require a strong counterprogramming to alter.

Very commonly in the course of our teaching we discover that less-than-healthy scripts tend to define our thinking. One of the realities of teaching is that it is difficult to disguise who we are and that includes the contents of our unconscious. In most cases, teaching will bring it out even if we would prefer not.

Some of the more common problematic mental scripts include:

*"I don't deserve respect."*

*"I will never get what I want."*

*"I am no good."*

*"You can't trust people -- they are selfish and dishonest and will always let you down."*

*"If I act impossible to please, it will shift the attention away from me and my sense of inadequacy."*

*"If I am not likeable, nice, and agreeable, I will lose others love."*

*"Popular kids will hurt me."*

And probably the most common script that teachers (and many others of us) have is, *"I am a fraud and I will be found out at some point."*

Simply becoming aware of these scripts is the most important element. Awareness alone will go a long way toward the ability to shed scripts limiting our growth and performance. In addition, it will be useful to self-program our minds with more healthy and accurate messages. For example, if we recognize our tendency to doubt our own legitimacy and/or lovability we may want reprogram our thinking with a message such as "I deserve love and respect." Simply repeating the message silently can have a powerful effect on unconscious beliefs over time. Becoming aware of the concrete evidence that contradicts these unhealthy scripts will be helpful too (Nelson, 1999). For example, if we believe that we must be likeable or others will abandon us, we might be intentional about recognizing the evidence related to those students, friends, and family who like us no matter what, and for a lot of reasons other than our efforts to be nice.

**Chapter Reflection 16-p:** Examine the scripts in your own unconscious. What messages are they telling you? What effect do you see it has on your teaching? What are the counter-messages with which you want to reprogram your thoughts to be happier and more effective?

### **CHANGING OUR PATTERNS OF THINKING**

To cultivate more functional and harmonious forms of thinking, it is not necessary to acquire special skills or help from others. To begin, it is beneficial to acknowledge the fact that dysfunctional thinking is not unique to us. Each teacher has some level of mental negativity that is holding them back, as has anyone else. One must resist the temptation to deny that negative thoughts and tendencies exist at all. This is counterproductive. Denial fuels the unconscious; while it may alleviate pain in the short-term, it compounds it in the long run. It is not useful to fight our feelings or to be hard on ourselves for having certain feelings. As we discussed earlier, feelings are simply information. They edify a great deal, including what we need to work on. Moreover, we do not need to dissect the past to bring about change. The idea is simple: keep focusing

on being in the moment. It is more effective to practice being more and more conscious and to place attention on forming new patterns rather than revisiting the past for answers.

Two things simultaneously start to occur when we become more in the moment and increase our level of awareness of how our thinking is affecting us and our classes. First, we notice how much that thinking has caused the suffering we have experienced and in the act of noticing we see how the patterns that have brought us grief can be changed. Second, we notice that the students become less frustrating to work with, less threatening, and more enjoyable to be around (Tolle, 2001). As we begin to change, our situation changes along with us. In other words, both our real and imagined problems begin to lessen.

In the next sections we will examine avenues toward promoting habits of mind that will bring us peace and make us more effective with our students. These avenues include cultivating an attitude of “yes,” encouraging a positive energy flow, finding our inner voice of intention, and developing a sense of purpose.

**Taking on a “Yes” Mindset**

One of the most effective ways of making the shift away from whatever negative thought or state of mind that we are experiencing, into a place that is going to be more functional and enjoyable, is to take on a “yes” frame of mind. A “yes” frame of mind is one in which we say “yes” to “what is.” We say “yes” to the moment. Eckhart Tolle (2003) refers to this inner “yes” as one of the portals to accessing the present moment. It is a state of acceptance. We say “yes” to the life that surrounds us rather than wanting things to be different, or wanting to be in the future. A “yes” frame of mind says that we are going to rise to the occasion and take action as opposed to putting it off or being passive. We are saying “yes” to quality and acting with intention.

The artist needs to say “yes” to the moment to be able to access the creative energy within himself or what is created will be uninspired. The athlete needs to say “yes” to the moment and commit to what they are doing or perform poorly, make mistakes, or even increase the chance for injury. The “yes” does not need to take any extra effort. It is not about trying harder. It is about being in the moment and tapping into the life-force in that moment. In effect, we are saying “yes” to life itself.

Without being consciously aware of it, we approach most things with a subtle or not-so-subtle “no” mindset and a rejection of life. While we tend to view our mental activity as neutral, upon closer examination we see that almost every thought is defined by either a “yes” or a “no” attitude. Most of the time the effect is subtle but each of these small thoughts adds up to larger and more significant outcomes such as a mental outlook and/or a physical manifestation in our bodies, and is ultimately projected onto the classes that we teach. In Figure 16.4 we examine some of the ways that a “yes” mindset contrasts with a “no” mindset.

**Figure 16.4: Contrasting Characteristic Thoughts of a “Yes” versus “No” Mindset**

| Thoughts that Characterize the “Yes” Mindset | Thoughts that Characterize “No” Mindset           |
|--|---|
| “I am in the moment. The moment is good.”    | “I want something else, or to be somewhere else.” |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| “There is endless wonder in the world around me, if I only notice it.”   | “I already know how things are going to go. I have been there and done that.”  |
| “When I say yes, I feel an ease and clarity in my thinking. As a result, I find my intention more evident. I feel a clearer sense of direction.”                               | “I want a diversion. I am bored. My work feels tedious.”   |
| “I see the human possibility in my students and others with whom I interact. I see learning all around me.”  | “I see all the limitations that keep my students from doing what I want them to do. Why do I have to work with such a flawed group of people? After a while, each group just seems like the last. I already know how they are going to act. And I am usually right.” |
| “When I look out at my situation, I feel a thankful attitude. I get to do a meaningful job, and make a difference. The list of blessings is endless when I really look at it.” | “I never get what I want. I feel like others are always letting me down. Maybe the worst part is that I am sure they all do know what I want, but no one cares enough to do it.”   |

Taking a “yes” orientation is by no means being passive or necessarily agreeable. When we say “yes” to life, we have to say “no” to a lot of other things. It means saying yes to action, which means that we will need to walk away from some unhealthy situations or take an assertive position against something that we believe is wrong. When we say “yes” to life, we say “yes” to the fulfillment of potential and that means we are saying no to hanging on to mediocrity and irresponsibility.

Is working from a mindset defined by “yes” the same as being optimistic? Not really. Being sunny and optimistic is probably preferable to being sour and pessimistic. Neither optimism nor pessimism is rooted in a “yes” attitude. A pessimistic perspective says, “I know things will turn out badly. I just expect it to be that way and I am rarely disappointed.” Whereas an optimistic perspective says, “I hope things turn out well. I like it when they do, so I have faith that a good outcome will occur and I will get what I want.” Do you hear “yes” in either of those statements? A “yes” mindset has little to do with believing that we will or will not get what we want. It is not about the outcome, but the process. Both optimism and pessimism are basically ego-based mindsets. Neither will lead to a long-term growth or fulfillment.

### **Exploring the Idea of Being “Positive”**

What about being positive, does that come from a “yes” attitude? Certainly, having a generally positive attitude can potentially be rooted in a “yes” mindset. When it comes to the job of teaching, sending out positive energy has many benefits. For one, it produces repeated deposits into the “emotional bank” account of relationships we have with others (Covey, 1989; see Chapter 3). The positive energy that we radiate will come back in some form. The result is a positive effect on our lives, our teaching, and our relationships within the school. Offering positive energy to others tends to be worth it. We find evidence for this when we observe others who project a positive energy. What we usually notice is that they seem to be surrounded by positive energy from others.

**Chapter Reflection 16.p:** Bring to mind someone you know who has a very positive attitude. How would you describe the way that others respond to them? What are the implications for teachers and coaches?

While there is an undeniable value to projecting a sincere positive attitude, we need to take a close look at where it comes from. It may sound contradictory, but positive attitude is often the flip side of negativity from the same dysfunctional coin. In the earlier discussion on negativity we found that the mental act of being negative is rooted in a “no” of some kind and a denial of “what is.” In the same way a positive attitude can be a mask for a deeper sense of non-acceptance. One can be acting in a positive and socially acceptable manner while struggling inside with authentic thoughts and feelings. A way to test this is: after spending a class period trying to be positive, do you feel joy, ease and as though good energy has moved through you? Or do you feel that it took a lot of effort to “act” positive? The reality is that on some days it may be necessary to act, but if done on a consistent basis it is indication that deeper insight is required. Acting is exhausting and difficult to maintain; no matter how much we deny it our students can sense when we are acting. When we get home from a day of “acting positive,” we feel drained. Moreover, whatever we were disguising through the day is there to greet us at home.

Why do we feel the need to act? The answer is complex and subjective, but typically relates to the wish for acceptance. Ask yourself, “Though I pretend to like the students, do I really?” “What is keeping me from letting myself really care about them?” “I act committed to the classroom social contract, am I?” “Am I afraid to be real with the students?” “What is the unease provoked by being myself?” The answers to these questions can bring some difficult emotions; in refusing to acknowledge them our inner conflict will take its toll on us, our energy level, and our effectiveness with others.

Making the transition to more authentic engagement involves an intention to be in the moment and present to our students. It is strange paradox -- ego tells us that if we did not put on an act, a negative, depressed, boring, dispassionate, or inappropriate person would be revealed. When we say “yes” to the present, we do not have to *act* like we are engaged. It happens naturally. When we are in the moment, we are not focused on our own problems but on the action that we are taking and therefore there is no room for boredom. When we are aware and tuned into the reality of what we are able to do in a moment of teaching, we will discover an inherent joy. Any job that is done with an attitude of “yes” can be joyful, but teaching is especially rewarding because of the profound experience of promoting the growth of young people.

### **My Experience**

Our attitudes go a long way in defining our situation. Remember, we make the weather in the room. We can confirm this idea by examining any classroom. What we find is that over time the students and the climate of the class will mirror the attitudes and dispositions of the teacher.

I experienced this phenomenon firsthand a few years ago. After teaching many sections of classroom management pretty successfully, I began the next quarter with the attitude that I could just show up and the students would somehow receive the quality of instruction that the previous students had. At the same time, I have to admit that my attitude had deteriorated as I had spent a great deal of time in the schools and had become frustrated with the classroom management practices that I had seen as well as with what I interpreted as the faulty assumptions that were at the root of those practices. On the first day of class, as I interacted with the students, I heard many of those flawed assumptions coming out of their mouths. And without being aware of it, I began to treat this class with less respect and put less effort into it. I found myself complaining about

them to others (breaking the rule that I swear by, never to talk about students negatively), and developing negative expectations. Predictably, they responded in kind. They took few risks when responding and did not laugh at my few efforts at humor. In the end, the quality of their work was sub-par, and uninspired.

As I read the course evaluations, I was shocked. I thought that I did my usual excellent job teaching and that I was a likable and positive person. Above all, I thought that I was able to hide my unconscious lack of respect for them. I clearly had not. I learned a painful but powerful lesson that quarter. When we give respect, we get it back. When we don't give it, we should not be surprised when we don't receive it.

The following quarter I knew I needed to change my attitude. I started right off by validating each new group of students. I did not rest on my previous performance, but made an effort to make the content of the class meaningful and fresh. I projected a positive expectation and a respect for their ideas. As I changed my attitude, my situation changed along with my mindset. The students put more energy into the class. They listened better and stayed more focused on the task. They volunteered more and took more risks with their ideas. They reflected my respect. As a result I was able to respond to the positive energy that I received with an increased positive energy of my own. I enjoyed the quarter a great deal, and by all indications so did the students. And the class's written comments read as though these students had had an entirely different instructor than the students from the previous term. In many ways, they had.

### **Thinking that Leads to an Energy Flow**

We have all been in a situation in which we felt "in the flow." In teaching, it is often the experience of everything clicking. In this state, we lose track of time, and we become immersed in our task as our energy flows out. We feel it and lead students effortlessly; the creative energy in the room is palpable. At the end of the experience, we feel energized and alive. On the other hand, we have experienced episodes in which there was no such flow of energy. In this state, time drags and we have to really work to get positive results of any kind. At the end of these days, we feel fatigued or that our energies are stuck, perhaps frustrated and unsatisfied.

What is the difference? Why do some days boost our energy and others drain it? Most of the difference is caused by our mental state. Granted, there are external factors such as weather, the energy level of our students, or curriculum and testing requirements. However, in events in which there was a flow of energy, there are common ingredients and most of them are controllable by our approach. Here is a list of some of elements that contribute to our energy flow:

1. **Saying "Yes" to the Moment.** Recall how you felt in those situations in which you were in a "groove," and that things were "going somewhere." Time became irrelevant and you became completely immersed in the present. Contrast that to times you felt that the day was dragging. You were likely aware of how slowly the clock was moving, not nearly fast enough. When we say "yes" to the moment, we tap into a source that is not bound by time -- the place where creativity and insight are born.
2. **A Focus on Giving.** When we find ourselves in the flow within collective settings, we are likely putting great attention on the needs of others. Our awareness then goes out to the group and we forget ourselves. When this

happens in the classroom we do not feel as though we are the origin of our teaching as much as a conduit of knowledge from a larger creative source. These moments of flow contrast sharply to times when we feel that we are pulling teeth to get students to learn. It will be useful to check in on our thinking periodically and ask ourselves, “Am I teaching for them, or for me (i.e., ego)?”

3. ***A Clear Intention and Acting with Purpose.*** Confidence is not bravado but the absence of fear. As soon as we allow fearful thoughts, our focus shifts from the moment and the emergent sense of intention within us and creates a defense response against the object of our fear. We spend a lot of time thinking about all the things that might go wrong (in the form of fear of failure, negative expectancy, the general fear that we are not quite sure how things are going to turn out with our lesson, or even paranoia that the students are thinking ill of us), and fearing arising problems. This fear kills our confidence and our flow. When we tap into the moment and act with a clear intention, fear tends to dissolve.

**Chapter Reflection 16-q:** This constant voice of fear may not seem obvious, but take any two-minute stretch of time and listen to the messages that run through your head. How many are related to fear or anxiety, especially fear of a potential problem? If we want less fear, denying or fighting it will be ineffective. We need to simply allow the thoughts of fear to arrive, acknowledge that they are there, and maintain focus on what you are doing and staying with your clear sense of intention.

4. ***Allowing One’s Humanity to be Expressed Fully.*** Reflect on those times in and out of the classroom in which you felt a flow of energy. It is likely that you felt a sense of integrity and as if your entire being was involved in what you were doing. Can you recall a feeling of flow in cases in which you allowed only parts of yourself to come out, while suppressing your personality, emotion and passion? We have all heard the old teacher’s adage -- “Don’t smile until Christmas.” The assumption is that in allowing our humanity to come out, students will see who we really are and find a way to attack us. However, if we spend the whole day defending against being human, the cost to our sense of well-being is great (not to mention that it is ineffective, as discussed in Chapter 7). If we give ourselves permission to be human and express ourselves authentically, we will feel more flow in the moment. At the end of the day we will feel that our energy has moved through us. We do not need to already have teaching experience to act authentically. We can be authentic from day one. It will be much easier to trust this is possible if we become expert at the technical aspects of teaching, especially in technical classroom management (Chapter 12).
5. ***Cultivating a Reciprocal Energy Flow.*** Time flies when we are having fun. Fun is a basic human need along with power, freedom, love, self-efficacy (see Chapter 7 for discussion of these). When our own basic needs and those of our students are met, we feel a sense of reciprocal energy flow. It is difficult to feel a sense of flow when we look out at a group of young people who are frustrated and/or tuned out. The energy has to go both ways in the classroom. We can feel a sense of flow alone when engaged in a favorite pastime or creative endeavor. Finding a sense of flow when we are doing the independent tasks in our jobs can



make a substantive difference to how we feel each day. For example, if our planning feels creative it will feel less burdensome. If we take the moment to enjoy what students write rather than view the task as entirely menial, we can savor the process of grading. When in the classroom, flow will require everyone's contribution. We will be more successful if what we do involves a shared sense of growth. When the activity is promoting a "psychology of success" (Chapter 8) and the group is engaged in the moment, time flies and we feel psychological movement.

We can tell we are in a flow when we feel that we lose track of time, feel energized and alive, and feel a sense of love or happiness emanating from within. When we spend more of our day in that state, our bodies will feel a difference, and we will find that many of the trials and problems we deal with on a regular basis decrease.

**Chapter Reflection 16-r:** It may be useful to reflect on times in your life that you have felt in flow. What was going on? Describe the experience.

**Chapter Reflection 16-s:** Reflect on why any of us feels the need to repress our students. What do we accomplish by doing so? What are the mental messages telling us this is a good idea? Is it that "I will lose control," or "If I show my humanity they will see I am weak?" Most of these mental messages are subtle. Can you detect them in your thinking?

### **CULTIVATING OUR SENSE OF PURPOSE — RESULTING IN A TRANSFORMATIVE MINDSET**

What do we use to guide our actions instead of all the mental noise and the reactive voice of the ego in our head? We need to listen to a deeper source. When we clear away all the noise, the fear and the distractions, what emerges is a lucid sense of *intention*. When we say "yes" to the moment, we have access to this inner source of motivation -- our inner life force. We could call it many things, but here we will simply refer to it as the force inside us that provides us with intention. It exists between fearing and wanting, future and past. It is at the heart of our innermost self. When our mind is clear and we ask ourselves "what is important now?" (WIN), our intention is waiting with an answer. When we access our true intention, we access our true state -- our natural state.

Each time we access this present-moment intention, we get a clearer sense of our larger sense of purpose. In that sense, intention and purpose work together. We could say that our intention answers the moment-to-moment questions, whereas our sense of purpose answers the larger questions. When our actions are guided by this clear intention, even challenging or menial activities do not feel pointless, insignificant, or mercenary. We get something out of everything we do. When the voice of our inner intention is audible, we get a glimpse of a larger sense of the meaning of what we are doing. Our intention illuminates our gifts and uniqueness. It clarifies how we can best make a contribution. Our true sense of purpose is simply a reflection of that illumination.

Just as our work will feel boring and unsatisfying when our ego is fighting the present moment, when our purpose is rooted in ego we will struggle to achieve job satisfaction. If

the motivation for teaching includes such things as enjoying control of others, needing to feel important, or because the schedule was preferable, we may be motivated but never satisfied. When our sense of purpose is ego-driven it leads to feeling separate, alone, unsatisfied, and the perception that our work is meaningless. Many teachers feel dissatisfied and search externally for a sense of purpose. They believe that when they attain a more powerful position, transfer to a better school, or get a raise, they will be become satisfied and complete. What they usually find is that the sense of meaninglessness follows them to their new situation.

We can only find our sense of purpose by listening to our intention. The more we listen to our intention, the more we learn about what we truly care about and value. Moreover, we discover our gifts, and the ways that we can make a difference. Fullan (1993) found that the most successful teachers were those who reported feeling a sense of “moral purpose” in their teaching. Moreover, Wolk (2002) wrote, “There is no separation between the content we teach and issues of character and morality. They are just as intertwined (p. 2).” It is true that we may get the same salary without approaching our work with a sense of moral purpose, but will our work be as fulfilling and meaningful?

When our action is guided by a clear sense of purpose that grows from present moment intention, our work will be *transformative*. Whether we are alone, working with a single student, or a room full of students, we will raise the level of awareness around us. We become a light to others. Our inner “yes” affects all that we do. Mahatma Gandhi said it best with the words, “Be the change that you want to see in the world.” When we act with present moment intention, we change the world one action at a time. It is much less important to invent a grand image of our ideal future than it is to simply “be the change” in this moment. When we do what we love, and love what we are doing, meaning and purpose emerge naturally.

## CONCLUSION

The job of teacher is itself great instruction. It provides us with an avenue for growth that few other professions can. Our teaching mirrors us to ourselves and so opens up doors for growth that are invaluable. Much of the time we would have never volunteered to learn the lessons that we do. However, when we take advantage of the opportunities to grow and avoid the temptation to resign ourselves to perpetual coping, we find that these opportunities for growth, though often temporarily painful, are in fact true gifts. We come out the other side more compassionate, mature and conscious. When we become more conscious it is reflected in our teaching. When we say “yes” to our jobs, and we find that they say “yes” back to us.

In the next chapter we examine the 4-Style teaching approach and discuss how one can move from this style of management up the continuum to a style that is more effective and functional. This chapter will be most relevant to those who would characterize their approach as 4-Style, or those who find that they are tempted to include 4-Style features into how they manage.

### Journal Reflections

1. Take this opportunity to reflect on how you see your purpose as a teacher, and how it has evolved over time. What are the areas in which you would like to grow and improve? What do you see as the current internal and external road blocks to your goals?

2. What forms of negativity do you recognize arising in yourself on a regular basis? Have they become part of your identity (e.g., victim, complainer, critic, angry person, dissatisfied person)? In other words, do they thread through the story line of your life?

### **Chapter Activity (Group)**

1. As a group discuss your observations related to Chapter Reflection 16-o, in which you were asked to reflect on a classes that you have observed recently. *Did you see evidence of a relationship between the negative thoughts of the teacher and classroom management or motivation problem in the class?*

### **Chapter Activity (Partner or Individual)**

1. When your parents were upset, stressed, overburdened, or angry — how did they behave? How did your parents view human nature? Do you share their view (consciously or unconsciously)? Did the parent with whom you most identify have trouble setting boundaries or being consistent? Imagine that parent as a teacher. What advice would you give them so that their tendencies did not sink them?
2. Reflect on some of the parent tapes that run through your mind (e.g., you are not smart, you are the special one, you are in the way, if you do what I want I will love you, if you mess up I will shame you, etc.). These tapes turn into buttons that students can push to trigger our insecurities or pain reactions. What are the parent tapes that you need to be most aware of?
3. Examine common states of mind you may have in a day. Pay special attention to the states of mind you take on when you are tired, stressed, or under pressure. Share with your partner some of those that you consider to be beneficial as a teacher and those that you judge to be less beneficial (e.g., victim, overly critical, disappointed, blaming others, acting superior, acting helpless, etc). What might you do as a teacher to keep from letting these kinds of unconscious tendencies undermine your effectiveness and/or sense of satisfaction?

### **Chapter Activities (Individual)**

1. Steven Covey in the book *Habits of Highly Effective People* describes a useful exercise for clarifying one's sense of purpose. The goal of exercise is to boil one's life purpose down into as few words as possible. See whether you can state your purpose in 30 words or less.
2. One of the most effective exercises for counteracting negativity is to reflect on those things for which we are thankful. We can do this at anytime. Some possible situations include:
  - When you feel exasperated with your job or your students
  - Before you go to bed at night
  - Right now. See how many you can list in five minutes.
3. It is difficult for some of us to recognize the degree that the noise machine in our heads controls our thinking, and how difficult it is to stop our compulsive thoughts. It may all seem normal. A useful indicator of how much our minds are in control is when we try to stop thinking. There are very few people who are able to go 10 seconds without an involuntary thought entering their mind. Test this for yourself.

Simply try to stop thinking for 10 breaths. Every time a thought enters your mind start over. If you are like most people, you will get the point of the exercise long before you ever reach 10 breaths without thinking.

4. Try the following exercise for bringing some serenity to your thoughts and perceive your environment more clearly -- as non-threatening and in harmony. First take a few seconds to bring your awareness into your body. It will be useful to focus on your breath, stay in the moment, and tune in to your inner body (it may be useful to visualize one part of your body becoming luminous and warm). As you breathe, bring your awareness inward and notice the sense of peace that you feel. Locate that peace inside in a single point (e.g., your heart or one of your hands). Take as long as you need to achieve a quiet mind, and be able to focus your awareness on that one spot. Next, slowly shift the focus of your awareness outward, move the location of your focus to a spot outside of you and then eventually to a global sense of everything that you see in your environment. Project your sense of peace and perfection onto whatever you observe. Just appreciate what you see without any judgment. Notice the perfection life around you (even if it seems to be less than perfect to the mind). Maintain your focus there for a while. Next, bring that spot/point and your awareness back in to your body. Feel the perfection coming back to you. Stay there for a while. Breathe. Be in the moment. Next, notice how the sense of separateness between you and your environment begins to dissolve. In the remaining time that you have, allow your awareness to move back and forth as it will without letting your mind take over. When you are done, attempt to bring that peace of mind and sense of connectedness back to what you do afterward.

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