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Gina Cherkowski  
Senior Editor  
[editor@wellnessedmag.com](mailto:editor@wellnessedmag.com)

Wayne Carley  
Publisher  
Wellness Education Magazine  
<http://www.wellnessedmag.com>

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# Connection-Based Learning: Fostering Relationships for Student Success

By Dr. Matthew J. Murphy

In an era where academic achievement and mental health are increasingly at the forefront of educational concerns, connection-based learning offers a powerful approach that addresses both.

This article highlights how this pedagogical framework can lead to more substantial academic outcomes, improved mental health, and a more positive school climate. Grounded in research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, connection-based learning teaches students fundamental relationship-building skills. Doing so not only enhances their academic performance but also prepares them for the complex social environments they will face in the future.

## What is Connection-Based Learning?

Connection-based learning focuses on explicitly teaching students how to build meaningful relationships, both inside and outside the classroom. While traditional learning methods

often involve collaborative activities such as group projects, debates, and study groups, these rarely teach the skills necessary for effective interaction. Activities like “think-pair-share” or “morning meetings” foster interaction but don't necessarily equip students with the interpersonal skills they need to navigate those interactions successfully.

These skills are crucial for effective classroom collaboration and long-term success in life and work. By teaching students how to connect, educators lay the foundation for academic growth, better mental health, and improved social dynamics in the classroom.



## **The Impact of Connection on Academic and Mental Health Outcomes**

The evidence supporting connection-based learning is compelling. According to research, students who feel connected to their school communities are more likely to attend school regularly, achieve higher grades, and graduate on time. These connections are also associated with reduced engagement in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse. The CDC's 2022 report confirms that school connections are critical to a student's academic success, while the U.S. Surgeon General's Office emphasizes that connectedness improves mental health outcomes.

The U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 advisory on social connection outlines a national strategy for schools to build connections within their curricula. This strategy includes developing strategic plans with benchmark tracking, creating supportive school environments, and implementing socially based learning opportunities. Schools that adopt these practices see improvements in student performance and contribute to the overall well-being of their students and staff.

### **Real-Life Examples of Connection-Based Learning in Action**

I encourage educators to reflect on the

practices they may already use that align with connection-based learning principles. Activities such as group projects and collaborative learning are common examples. However, the difference with connection-based learning lies in explicitly teaching the skills required to succeed in these interactions.

For instance, at Ramsey Public Schools, I introduced a tool from Robin, an edtech company, that helps assess how connected students feel to themselves and others. The assessment provides actionable data that informs curriculum recommendations, giving educators insight into their students' mental health and sense of belonging. This targeted, data-driven approach helps schools track progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure that students are learning academic content and thriving in their social environments.

### **Benefits of Connection-Based Learning**

The benefits of connection-based learning extend far beyond academic success, offering a multitude of advantages that impact students' overall well-being and development. When students feel a strong connection to their peers and teachers, their engagement in the learning process is significantly heightened. This sense of belong-



ing fuels their enthusiasm, leading to active participation and a deeper grasp of the material. In addition to academic engagement, students refine their listening and speaking abilities through structured communication practice. They become more effective communicators, capable of both absorbing and conveying knowledge with clarity.

Furthermore, as students learn to value and respect diverse perspectives, they develop a greater openness to new ideas, which fosters a collaborative and inclusive learning environment. This openness not only enriches classroom discussions but also cultivates a mindset conducive to lifelong learning. Research supports the positive impact of connection-based learning on academic outcomes, showing that students engaged in this approach tend to achieve higher test scores, better grades, and

improved attendance.

Beyond academics, connection-based learning plays a critical role in promoting safer, more supportive school communities. Schools that emphasize these connections report lower instances of risky behaviors, such as substance abuse, as students feel more supported and less isolated. By nurturing both academic and social-emotional growth, connection-based learning prepares students to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

### **Fostering a Positive School Climate**

Beyond individual benefits, connection-based learning strengthens the overall school community. When students practice empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution skills, they contribute to a more inclusive and supportive school climate. These practices cultivate an environment where everyone feels like a valued community member, setting the stage for improved academic and social outcomes.

For example, teaching students how to de-escalate tense situations and manage social anxiety helps create a more harmonious school environment. As students grow in their ability to connect with others, they become more resilient and better equipped to handle the challenges they may face in school and their personal lives.

## Preparing Students for the Future

Connection-based learning benefits students in the present and prepares them for future success. As the workforce evolves, the ability to collaborate effectively, communicate clearly, and navigate social complexities will become increasingly valuable. These skills are critical for success in any career, and students who master them will be better equipped for the challenges of tomorrow's workforce.

## Conclusion

Incorporating connection-based learning into the classroom offers a holistic approach to education that goes beyond academics. Educators can help improve academic and mental health outcomes by teaching students how to build meaningful relationships while fostering a positive school climate. As research continues to show the importance of social connections, schools are responsible for equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in their studies and life. Connection-based learning is a proven, effective strategy for doing just that.

Through explicit teaching of interpersonal skills, connection-based learning enhances students' academic performance and prepares them for the social and emotional challenges they will face

in the future. Schools that adopt this approach are not just investing in better students; they are cultivating better citizens.



Dr. Murphy, professor at Ramapo College, is a recipient of the NJ Governor's Council Ambassador award on Mental Health. Dr. Murphy was regional Superintendent of the Year and served on the AASA Board.

# *Sea* of Suffering:

## How Emotional Restraint Has Negatively Affected Boys and Men

By Jake Stika

As a guy I remember a time, not long ago, where certain words or subjects would cause me to immediately disengage from the conversation. Terms like “trauma”, “intersectional”, or “patriarchy”, indicated that a conversation was coming down the pipe about something I knew nothing about.

Today, I find myself wondering how I could have connected with that version of me if I met him today. How could I come across as genuinely disarming rather than confrontational? For those that already agree, picking up an article like this and reading through it is easy. But how do we go beyond them and catch some of the people who might not yet be on board with the idea that we have a male mental health problem?

Of course, I can't fault anyone for feeling this way. We live in a time where social media algorithms capitalize on hot button issues and boost radical ideas to polarize us. Ideas like, “men are suffering because they've been robbed of their role as providers”, or “feminism is about women's superiority rather than gender equality” are proliferated. But how can men inoculate themselves against these one-sided talking points and internet opportunists? How do we create space to meaningfully discuss the issue together, rather than in isolated silos?

As some in the social justice space would say, we need to be hard on systems, and soft on people. By removing blame from the individual and placing it in systems, we frame patriarchy as something that affects all of us.



At that point, we can begin to have meaningful discussions about what we want our collective future to look like and how we can build it together. To put it another way, no one person is responsible for creating patriarchal systems, but everyone is responsible for dismantling them. So why hasn't this happened yet? What's holding us back?

## PROBLEMS

If men don't feel like they have space to talk about their feelings, the conversation inevitably gets driven underground. Eventually, it might find its way to anonymous online forums and "men's rights" groups where the polarization deepens. These communities become a breeding ground for the type of harmful and dangerous ideas we hear coming out of anti-feminist influencers like Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson; ideas about how a real man needs to behave to get the power and respect he thinks he craves. The reality is what men crave, is what everyone else craves: love, acceptance, and a secure place in our communities.

The harm that comes from these outdated notions of masculinity can be seen everywhere we look. It's in the disproportionate number of male substance-use victims, men who take painkillers to push through pain and maintain their role as breadwinner for their families, only to fall apart at the

seams because they wouldn't stop to take care of themselves. It can be seen in the number of houseless men out on our streets, who learned to never ask for help, or accept it, no matter how badly they may have needed it. Even in the statistics around suicide, we can see that, although women attempt suicide more often than men, men use more lethal means and are more successful. After all, what could be more emasculating than failing at taking your own life?

It's important to note that the roots of these issues run much deeper than patriarchy. Capitalist systems and policy decisions have also played a role in how gender equality is shaped. For example, there's been a massive push to get more women into STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and, in turn, into higher earning roles and positions of leadership. This is objectively a good thing, but this change is driven by capital along with a demand for equality. If money wasn't a factor, we would see a complementary push for men in HEAL (health, education, arts, literacy).

Today, only a quarter of elementary school teachers in Canada are men. For children just starting out in school, there are less examples of men in teaching roles, perpetuating stereotypes about which genders can do which jobs. We've made the import-

ant step of addressing a lack of female representation in one area but stopped short of addressing a lack of male representation in others.

## SOLUTIONS

When I and two other friends founded Next Gen Men (NGM), a small but mighty Canadian nonprofit, our vision was to help build a future where boys and men experience less pain and cause less harm. That was back in 2014 and in the ten years since, there have been a lot of lessons on both the causes of the hurt and the remedy.

The most important lesson is probably that boys and men aren't fundamentally "broken" or "toxic." They're doing their best within a system that constantly tells them their best isn't enough. You can always be colder. You can always be harder. Like a form of emotional dysmorphia, there's always another pound of feeling to shed if we can just restrain ourselves enough.

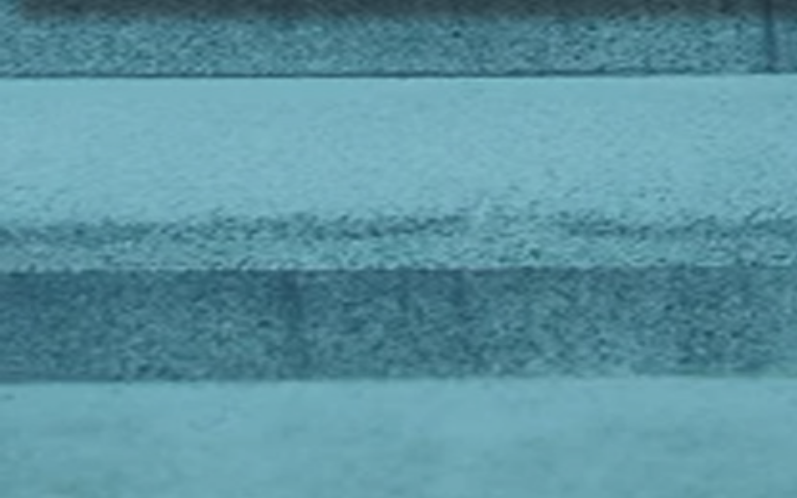
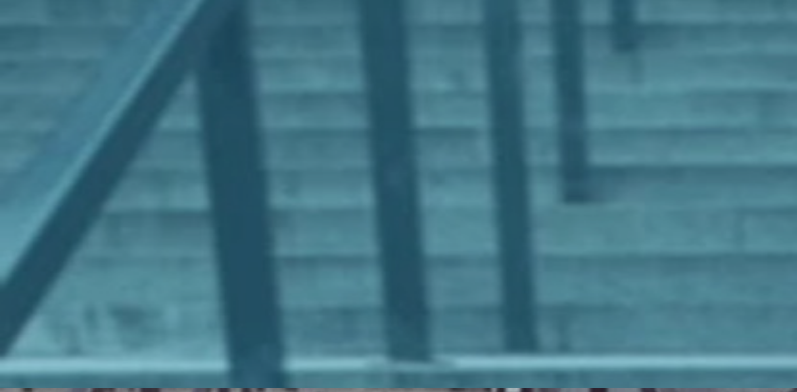
Jonathon Reed, our Director of Programs, works directly with our NGM youth in classrooms, outdoor retreats, and online on our private Discord server. He recently received a message from one of the boys who was feeling low. They said they were feeling depressed, and that they hated their past selves and their current self.

What stood out the most to Jonathon, though, was that they said they felt completely alone because no one could understand them, yet so many boys feel the exact same way. How is it that in a sea of suffering these boys can't see one another?

There's a famous bell hooks quote that comes to mind here. "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves."

The pressure men feel to restrain themselves and hide their emotions has rendered them blind to one another's experiences as well as their own. How can men have empathy for others when they have no empathy for themselves?

As they get older, this begins to look like an inability to connect on a deep, meaningful level. What they're left with is empty friendships where they're scared to express how happy they are to see one another or how much they missed each other. I can't think of anything that would have alienated me faster when I was growing up than daring to admit how much I valued my friends, to my friends. "I love you man...no homo" only emerged as a 'joke' while I was in university, but it



was the only way I could say it. Now, I say it, without the buffer, specifically to make way for other men to follow suit.

So, what can we do? How do we turn the ship around? Well, the good news is that you don't need any special qualifications to be engaged in this type of work. Whether it's your son, brother, nephew, or just kids on your street, if you have boys in your life, you have an opportunity to make an impact.

Simply paying attention and being curious about their lives is enough to make them feel heard. This alone puts them miles ahead of previous generations, many of whom learned the correct answer to "how was your day?" was an indifferent grunt and a shrug of their shoulders. One of the best ways to elicit a response is by vulnerably sharing your own experiences first. Give some to get some.

We also need to listen with an open mind and heart and embrace the idea of "calling in" rather than "calling out." Boys who are anticipating a raised eyebrow from parents or teachers are more likely to play it safe and keep their thoughts to themselves. The cost of saying something wrong can't outweigh the benefit of saying it right. Feelings of anger and rage aren't unnatural when you're scared and trying to figure out how to navigate the choppy waters of



adolescence. Everyone deserves psychological safety when they're trying on new identities and figuring it out. It wouldn't hurt to extend this posture to adults as they learn and unlearn too.

A noted boys' research psychologist Michael Reichert says, "Never underestimate the power of listening to boys, knowing them, and standing by while they navigate the rough waters of boyhood. Behind every boy who avoids being swept away in the current is someone who holds him—and believes in his ability to hold his own." In the end, it has become clear to me through my work in this field that there's no magic cure to this issue.

The solution needs to live with us, day

to day, as a lifestyle change. It's important for boys to see that there isn't a specific "type" of person that cares about being a responsible, considerate member of society. For example, you can be a young, athletic man with tattoos and piercings and a thriving social life, and still proactively value the well-being of others. If we, ourselves, are too afraid to speak out for fear of standing out, how can we expect boys in the school yard to do the same? Ken Kesey said, "You don't lead by pointing and telling people some place to go. You lead by going to that place and making a case."

As leaders in men's and boys' mental health, we must be the change we want to see in the next generation of boys.



As Next Gen Men's Co-founder & Executive Director, Jake is passionate about changing the way we see, act, and think about masculinity towards a future where boys & men experience less pain, and cause less harm. More information can be found at [nextgenmen.ca](http://nextgenmen.ca) and <https://youtu.be/X05p-buE1L14>

Jake is most proud of speaking at the United Nations, co-authoring A Kids Book About Masculinity, and becoming the new publisher of Voice Male magazine to continue a 40-year legacy chronicling the pro-feminist movement. He's currently completing his Master's in Social Business and Entrepreneurship through the London School of Economics.





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# The *Joy* of Laughter

By Dylan Dean



In a time where stress and anxiety are widespread, it's vital for parents and educators to find effective ways to support emotional well-being. One emerging method that is gaining traction is laughter yoga, which combines laughter exercises with yoga breathing techniques. What exactly is laughter yoga, and what benefits does it offer for families and educational environments? Let's explore the concept, its benefits, and how to incorporate it into daily life.

## **What is Laughter Yoga?**

Laughter yoga was developed in the mid-1990s by Dr. Madan Kataria, a physician from India, who recognized the therapeutic benefits of laughter. The practice is simple: participants engage in laughter exercises, often accompanied by playful activities and yoga breathing. The sessions typically begin with gentle warm-up exercises, followed by laughter exercises and yoga breathing techniques. It's a joyful and light-hearted way to improve emotional health and foster social connections.

## The Science Behind Laughter Yoga

Research supports the numerous benefits of laughter on mental and physical health. Here are some key findings that highlight the advantages of laughter yoga:

- 1. Stress Reduction:** A study published in the *International Journal of Yoga* found that laughter yoga significantly reduced stress levels and anxiety in participants. The endorphins released during laughter can elevate mood and create a sense of well-being.
- 2. Enhanced Social Connections:** Laughter yoga is often practiced in groups, promoting social interaction and connection. Laughter can strengthen relationships and improve social networks, which are crucial for both children and adults.
- 3. Improved Physical Health:** Engaging in laughter can provide various physical health benefits, such as improved cardiovascular health. Laughter exercises can enhance blood flow and function, leading to a healthier heart.
- 4. Boosted Immune System:** Laughter increases the production of antibodies and activates immune cells, improving the body's immunity.

## Benefits of Laughter Yoga

Incorporating laughter yoga into family or educational settings can yield numerous benefits:

- A. Emotional Resilience:** Laughter yoga can help children and adults develop emotional resilience by providing tools to cope with stress. Learning to laugh at challenges fosters a positive outlook and encourages problem-solving.
- B. Increased Engagement:** In educational settings, laughter yoga can enhance student engagement. Incorporating short laughter breaks can refresh attention and promote a positive classroom environment.
- C. Community and Connection:** Laughter yoga fosters a sense of community. For families, participating together can strengthen relationships, while educators can create a safe and supportive classroom atmosphere that encourages collaboration and connection.
- D. Mindfulness and Presence:** Combining laughter with yoga breathing promotes mindfulness. Participants are encouraged to focus on the present moment, which can enhance emotional regulation and self-awareness—skills that are invaluable for both children and adults.

## How to Get Started

Getting started with laughter yoga is simple and can be done in various settings. Here's how parents and educators can incorporate this practice into their lives:

- **Find a Class:** Look for local laughter yoga classes or workshops. Online resources and videos can also guide you through laughter yoga practices.
- **Try Not to Laugh Challenge:** Whether in the classroom, or at home, try to get others to laugh through jokes, videos, or just being goofy. First one to crack loses the challenge but leads the laughter every time.
- **Integrate Laughter Breaks in the Classroom:** Educators can introduce laughter breaks during lessons. A quick five-minute laughter session can re-energize students, reduce stress, and improve focus.
- **Practice Mindful Breathing:** Combine laughter with breathing exercises. Encourage deep breathing followed by laughter to help students and family members center themselves and enjoy the moment.
- **Encourage a Positive Atmosphere:** Foster an environment where laughter is welcomed. Share funny stories, jokes,

or engage in light-hearted activities that promote joy and connection.

Laughter yoga is a powerful tool for enhancing emotional well-being and building connections among families and educators. With its proven benefits for stress reduction, social bonding, and physical health, laughter yoga offers a delightful way to cultivate joy and resilience in our daily lives.

The challenges of modern life can be reduced by incorporating laughter yoga into routines by providing much-needed relief and promote a positive environment. I encourage you to step out of your comfort zones, get silly, and laugh together.



# The Empowerment Journey

## Unpacking the Power of Micro-Skills

By Nicki Straza

“For crying out loud Nicolette will you please pay attention!” The teacher was clearly exasperated, and I knew trouble wasn’t far behind. All I wanted to do was please my teacher; I did everything I could to do what the other children were doing, but I couldn’t. Finally with tears in my eyes, I simply responded, “I don’t know how.”

Cartesian theories of the mind cannot be the reference for educationalists any longer. Does mindset matter? Of course it does, but it is only one domain that must be engaged for learning to truly take place.

As I have aged, I have learned that our pedagogy of learning, not only in

***“I don’t know how!”***

This situation played out so many times in so many ways in my childhood, that I just came to accept that I was an annoyance and a burden, which only fueled my people-pleasing ways. I compensated by helping, cleaning or volunteering to run things to the office in order to curate favor with my teachers.

Growing up, the notion of ADHD was relatively unheard of. I was just that hyperactive kid who annoyed everyone. Now, with the advancement of Neuroscience and Cognitive Psychology, we are learning that mind and body are intertwined with each other, and

math and reading, but also in Social Emotional Development must include laughably small skills practiced through all the domains of being. I have come to call these Micro-skills.

To start, we need to consider the anatomy of empowerment. The Oxford dictionary defines empowerment as “the authority or power given to someone to do something” and “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights.”

This is an individual journey we must

all take to own, and ultimately shape, the life and influence we want to have. Yet, empowerment comes with a trade-off: when we create the conditions for others to be empowered, we relinquish control.

Human nature tends to crave control, but true empowerment leads to a more collaborative, creative, and effective environment—whether in the classroom, at home, or in the workplace. There are some key principles in empowerment that are important to understand if we want to create the conditions of empowerment in our homes, classrooms and workplaces. These principles, when paired together, create a potency that unlocks empowerment and learning.

### **Paired Principles for Empowerment**

- 1) Awareness with Agency
- 2) Attention with Discernment
- 3) Intention with Urgency
- 4) Action with Self-Compassion
- 5) Vision with Hope

Let's unpack this.

**Awareness with Agency:** Many of us are acutely aware of our failures, a tendency known as negativity bias. Our brains are hardwired to focus on mistakes and potential threats as a survival mechanism. While this was essential

when humans faced predators, today it often leads to undue anxiety over minor issues, like making mistakes in front of others.

However, awareness without agency—the ability to take responsibility and control over our responses—can lead to shame, depression, and hopelessness. When we pair awareness with personal agency, we empower ourselves to learn from our experiences rather than be paralyzed by them. Adopting a growth mindset, where effort is valued over outcomes, leads to greater resilience and success.

### **We create conditions for awareness and agency to grow by:**

- Modeling and nurturing psychological safety and a growth mindset.
- Focusing on effort not just outcomes.
- Creating time and space for awareness to take place and support for handling emotions in real time and safe ways.
- Using coaching methodology, not just instruction.
- Allowing the adversity of natural consequences without punishment or abandonment.

- Curating curiosity and mitigating shame in our verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Leveraging all the domains of being in our awareness and agency.

**Attention with Discernment:** As James Redfield famously said, “Where attention goes, energy flows.” Attention and energy are finite resources, much like currency, so if we focus our attention on things that align with our goals and values, we are more likely to succeed. Conversely, if we waste attention on unchangeable circumstances or irrational fears, we deplete our emotional and cognitive energy.

Being mindful of how we spend our attention is crucial to our overall well-being. We can nurture attention with discernment by practicing mindfulness, encouraging “noticing” moments, and integrating multi-sensory learning experiences.

**We create conditions for attention with discernment to grow by:**

- Holding space for awareness, and highlighting circumstances where our attention may be manipulated or used against us.
- Mindfulness - the art of putting our focus and attention somewhere on purpose.

- Rewarding “noticing” and nurturing choice, in light of what was noticed.
- Integration of many styles of learning that include sight, sounds, taste, sensory input, and movement.

**Intention with Urgency:** We’ve all experienced the gap between intention and action. We may decide to start a new workout routine or build a new habit, only to procrastinate or give up after a few tries. According to James Clear, author of Atomic Habits, small daily improvements lead to transformative long-term change. By focusing on improving just 1% each day, we can achieve significant growth over time.

The key to making progress is urgency. Even the smallest steps, taken with urgency, move us forward. If we start today and remain consistent, our efforts will accumulate and yield powerful results. Setting a timer for five minutes and committing to a task can kickstart momentum.

Micro-skills are about breaking big skills down into smaller practices that can be layered on top of each other to form strong, break-resistant skills.



## **We create conditions for intention with urgency to grow by:**

- Setting a time for 5 minutes and doing all that we can on a project or task until the timer goes off and repeating this at the same time each day. (Even if you want to keep working, stop. This helps to develop more urgency for the next opportunity.) Clarifying this will be important for those neuro-diverse children who require explanation and maybe additional time to adjust or acclimate to the changes. This is less about the hard fast rule as it is about the idea of doing something now!

- If you learn something new, teach what you know to someone else within 30 minutes of the new learning.

- If you are building a new habit, start today, not tomorrow.

- If you miss a day, be compassionate, and jump right back in and keep going versus trying to create a perfect streak or trying to start over. This undermines the shame/perfection cycle.

**Action with Self-Compassion:** Most of us want to take action – but sometimes we get stuck. We feel stuck because we have an uneasy feeling that we are not doing things perfectly. As a result, we might criticize and berate

ourselves when we make mistakes, which can lead to feelings of shame.

Oftentimes we are aware of our need to act but approach it from a place of shame and self-condemnation, rather than self-compassion, which is a more productive and healthy way of approaching the problem. Susan David says “Self-compassion is the antidote to shame” and it is from this place we take our courageous steps forward.



The challenge for us as parents, educators, and leaders is that SHAME works faster. Sometimes in our desire to get a task done, we resort to shame-inducing tactics rather than compassion-inducing ones. If we want to nurture an environment where action and self-compassion live together, we must take a ‘people-before-task’ approach to all that we do.

## **We create conditions for Action with Self-Compassion to grow by:**

- Celebrating learning and effort even if the outcome isn't what was hoped for.
- Noticing progress, no matter how small, both in how a situation was navigated and the outcomes achieved, and affirming this progress.
- Focus on what can be learned from this experience rather than focusing on something being wrong.
- Hold space for disappointment and sadness, labeling these emotions as valid and normal.
- Encourage cognitive reframing to see how a setback may in fact be a steppingstone.
- Highlight that the brain needs to make mistakes to learn and celebrate this forward momentum.
- Be aware of when our actions and words increase shame vs compassion.

**Vision with Hope:** Depending on your past experiences, hope may feel impossible or far off, but as we begin to peel off the shackles that have held our power captive, hope begins to spring to life with a vision for our future selves

that is both empowering and hope filled.

Gratitude and a growth mindset will help us experience this sooner than we think. The secret about hope is that it is LESS about visualizing a specific outcome and MORE about having a vision that demonstrates your power to change, adapt and overcome along the journey to a better outcome. Even something as simple as visualizing yourself being successful in facing the next challenge or temptation is exercising the practice of vision with hope. Any progress we make in these moments should be celebrated as such rather than marked as failure.

## **We create conditions for Vision with Hope to grow by:**

- Reflecting on our learnings and visualizing ourselves putting those learnings into actions.
- Verbalize, dramatize or create drawings showing what you can do differently next time.
- Reduce linear thinking by exploring 3-5 ways to overcome versus only one way.
- Invite curiosity by making the next steps about experimentation to see what works and what doesn't versus having only one right way.

- Affirm effort and character development (persistence, perseverance, tenacity, patience, etc.) versus outcomes.
- Practice gratitude.

These skills, when layered together, create the conditions of empowerment. I look forward to having you join me in part two of this topic in the next issue, where I will outline how layering these domains contribute to learning.

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### About the author -

Nicki's passion and energy are contagious as she brings over 25 years of leadership and organizational experience to the table. She believes that flourishing leaders build flourishing cultures. She is a Certified Flourishing Coach & Trainer who specializes in workplace culture and building bridges across generational gaps.

She is the owner of Straza Solutions and is an author, speaker and curator of developmental experiences and workshops. She has two adult children and lives with her husband in Brantford, Ontario. Connect on Social Media:

Instagram/Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn  
[@nickistraza](#)

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# Talk Moves from a Researcher's Perspective: Interview with Dr. Theresa Pham

By Demetra Mylonas

**B**uilding an environment that supports student mental health requires that students build a set of helpful skills, some of which include being able to engage in conversation, which includes both being able to articulate thoughts and ideas, as well as to listen to others and assimilate different perspectives. These are teachable skills that can be learned under the guidance of a supportive learning environment.

With this thought in mind, I am so pleased to present an interview discussion with Dr. Theresa Pham, a post-doctoral researcher sharing her research insights into the Talk Moves program.

Last issue, we heard from an elementary school teacher on the positive benefits of this program in her classroom, especially how it helped to give voice to those children that are not typically able to share for various reasons and thus gave them a chance to participate.



*Thank you, Theresa, for joining me today and giving your time for this worthwhile interview. Would you please tell our readers a little about yourself and how you got involved in Talk Moves?*

As a bit of background, I did a Speech Language Pathology clinical degree, as well as a PhD at Western University. So as part of my clinical coursework, I came across this concept of Talk Moves

in Dr. Lisa Archibald's class, with whom I am working closely now on this project.

Talk Moves is a way to support oral language in the classroom and it took off with Ontario having a Right to Read inquiry. This inquiry report specified recommendations that science-based, evidence-informed practices are necessary to teach reading. The challenge, however, was that although there were a lot of great recommendations for word recognition and phonics, the oral language piece was missing in the recommendations. We thought that Talk Moves would be the best way to address the oral language component of reading comprehension because you need both for a successful reader and a literate student.

From here, the Right to Read Inquiry allowed me to gain funding to use the Talk Moves program as an intervention in many elementary school classrooms.

*That is so wonderful! How were the classrooms chosen for this intervention study?*

Once we secured funding for the project, we put the call out to reach interested teachers. We were able to study elementary school classrooms across the country.

*I'm curious how the implementation of the Talk Moves program would progress in a classroom. Also, why would a teacher be interested in incorporating this program in their classroom?*

The great thing is that most teachers are already practicing many of these strategies, so we are really building on the strengths that teachers already possess. We emphasize that Talk Moves does not add yet another strategy which can overwhelm classroom practice; instead, they enhance strategies that most teachers are already using. For example, one Talk Move is called 'Wait Time'.

Most teachers are already waiting three seconds for students to respond to questions or comments, but with the Talk Move, we encourage teachers to wait 5 seconds and up to 30 seconds for a student to respond! At first, it can feel very uncomfortable to wait that long, but we noticed that sometimes, students are ready to contribute at the 29-30 second mark!

In the intervention study, we met with teachers every two weeks to introduce a new Talk Move. Time was taken to highlight the benefits of the new strategy and how they could use it and encourage the students to use it as well. I introduced the Talk Move, picture icon to post in class, and associated gesture

gesture and sentence starter. Teachers would then teach it to their classroom. In all classrooms, a picture icon with sentence starters was used to identify a certain Talk Move, which allows students to reference the picture icon and encourages them to use that Talk Moves when engaging with each other in class.

We noted that students with weaker language skills used the picture icons or gestures more readily, making this more beneficial and inclusive for all. With this process, it is tailored to individual teachers, and they are then able to use what is most suitable for them.

### *How would teachers use the Talk Moves program, outside of a research implementation?*

As part of an Ontario Ministry of Education initiative, a Talk Moves Professional Development series is being developed and delivered asynchronously and available for free online. We are hoping to reach as many educators as possible with this series. There are many resources available in the Talk Moves program, to engage all students at various levels of language, both verbally and non-verbally.

### *Can you please give me an example of the engagement piece for students?*

Certainly! Originally, Talk Moves was designed for older high school students, and designed specifically for helping conversations in Math and Science subjects. In our current project, we want to see if we can use Talk Moves with younger students and across the curriculum, as conversations happen in all subject areas. In addition, previous research has focused on the teacher using Talk Moves to initiate the conversations.

In this study, we want to see if students themselves can use these sentence starters and gestures and make them a part of their daily participation and activities. So, we really emphasized having the students talk to each other. Typically, our observations show that before introducing Talk Moves in a classroom, it is more often the teacher initiating a conversation with one of the students, and the remaining students are quiet or have 'checked out'. In addition, it is usually the students who have the right answer first or are the fastest at responding who are likely the only ones who participate in classroom discussions.

So, for example, the 'Wait Time' we discussed, becomes so important to give everyone a chance to first understand the question, then formulate their thoughts and finally engage with each other in discussions.

With other Talk Moves, like 'Agree' or 'Disagree', a safe space is created and from that, it helps students to learn how to argue productively. They don't feel bad if they disagree and have a different idea than their friends.

*Have you received any feedback from students?*

Yes, I interviewed all consenting students, before and after the study. Some of the questions I ask are, "What are the rules for talking in class?", or "Why is it important to talk in class?". Many of the answers are usually that, 'a teacher wants to hear your answer', or 'you need to listen to the teacher'. With Talk Moves, we are helping students to shift that communication with each other, to have that engagement, allowing them to practice complex sentences, share ideas and make peer collaboration more important.

I also remember coming into the classroom, and students run up to me, eager to show me the Talk Move gestures they've been learning and using in class.

*I noticed from both this interview and one with a classroom teacher, that 'Wait Time' and 'Agree/Disagree' are big takeaways.*

Yes, for sure. Nonverbal gestures are a safe way for students who have anxiety to show that they are participating and that is a vital first step in feeling more comfortable in class. By only showing the gesture (sign), that is a way of participating which is more informative to the teacher than if they were just sitting and not doing anything to indicate they are listening and understanding.

I think these talk moves are big takeaways too because they are strategies that teachers are already using in the class. The Talk Moves program highlighted the importance of this practice and encouraged teachers to use Talk Moves more intentionally and patiently.

*I'm so interested to hear about some of your preliminary findings of this research so far!*

Although the data has not yet been fully analyzed, there are some exciting trends appearing. A fun experience from these studies happens when I share some of the preliminary findings with the students, and their feedback is always so positive, stating how happy they felt as they acknowledged that these results are from the work they did! So that's really great!

One preliminary finding so far is an increase in action words and tier 2 words uttered by students. Action words,

also known as mental state words, and tier 2 words, high-frequency academic words, are important for mature language learners.

Another positive trend noted after intervention, is that students are using more words per turn, showing that sentences are getting longer but not necessarily more complex with initial results. Further, trends in the feedback from the interviews with the students post intervention, include claiming to feel more confident in conversations, acknowledging that their peers are listening to them, and they are feeling like they are more active participants in classroom discussions. Teachers have also shared similar experiences about the Talk Moves program.

*That is all very positive and exciting! I really feel this program is very inclusive and levels the playing field for many*

*children, whether it is a communication issue, a confidence issue or even a form of anxiety. If I may ask, what is your opinion on the connection between communication and student's mental health in schools?*

Mental health is not my area of expertise, but I think that Talk Moves gestures and sentence starters help give a way for students to join in conversation, especially if they do not have those skills to naturally engage in academic conversations.

*Thank you, Theresa, for the work you do and your time today for this very informative and important topic. The Team at Wellness Education Magazine wish you the best of luck in all your work and research and look forward to updating our readers on the final results of this worthwhile research project.*



# TALK MOVES:

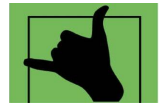


Western

There is a strong connection between rich class talk and students' learning. Talk moves are sentence starters and gestures that teachers and students can use to encourage talk and participation in the classroom.

For example: **Talk Move - Agree:**

- Gesture: Point thumb to self and pinky to speaker to show, 'You and I, we're thinking the same thing!'
- Sentence starter: "I agree with you because..."

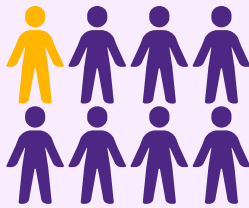


## We wanted to know:

### Will Talk Moves support students' oral language and participation skills?

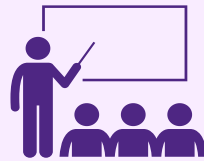
## Methods

### Participants:



Grade 2/3 classroom

### Measures:



Classroom observations



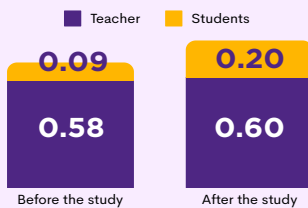
Interview with teacher & students



Language & reading tests

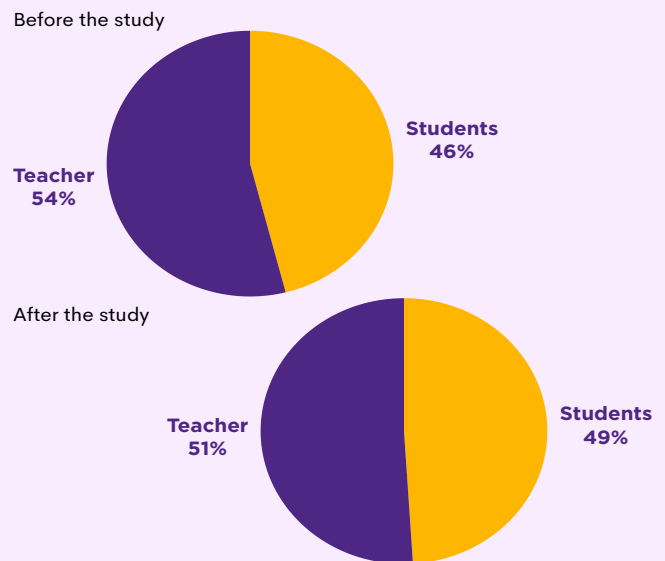
## WHAT DID WE FIND?

### TALK MOVES



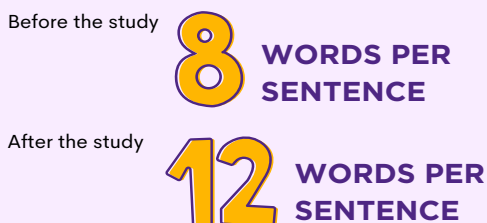
The teacher was already using talk moves before the study. The teacher and students used slightly more talk moves per turn after the study.

### PARTICIPATION



Participation was measured by number of student turns divided by total student and teacher turns. Students participated about half the time in conversations!

### SENTENCE LENGTH



Students' sentences were significantly longer after the study! But sentences were not necessarily more complex.

## VOCABULARY

Before  
the study



0.46 WORDS PER TURN

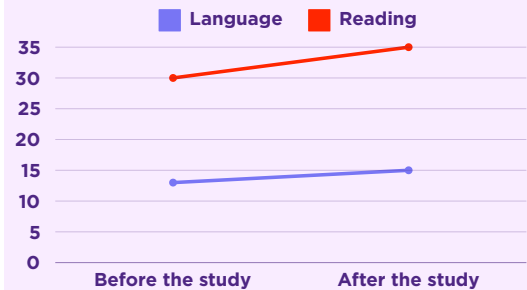
After  
the study



1.03 WORDS PER TURN

Mental state verbs are action words used to share thoughts, knowledge, or feelings (*know, think*). Tier 2 words are used by mature language users (*reason, agree*). Both are important for academic success and reading comprehension. Students used anecdotally more sophisticated vocabulary per turn after the study!

## LANGUAGE & READING TESTS



Students' language test scores significantly increased after the study. Improvements in reading scores approached significance.

## CONFIDENCE



Students reported significant increases in confidence and comfort talking and participating in class with Talk Moves.

## CONCLUSION

Preliminary results are promising! This study advocates for the use of **talk moves** in class to support students' **language and participation** skills. The good news is that educators are already using some talk moves in their practice. Seeing the positive impacts of talk moves can enhance current practice.

Interested in learning about Talk Moves? Check out our **free professional development** series:  
[https://www.scilearn.uwo.ca/resources/talk\\_moves.html](https://www.scilearn.uwo.ca/resources/talk_moves.html)

Contact:  
Dr. Theresa Pham | Dr. Lisa Archibald  
tpham62@uwo.ca | larchiba@uwo.ca  
Western University



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ALP PARTNERS WITH EDUCATION LEADERS TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN LEARNING SYSTEMS

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### EMPOWER YOUR TEAM

Implement research-based strategies & practices that address specific needs and leverage unique strengths.



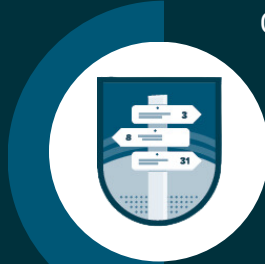
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- Inform selection and talent development systems



### WORKLOAD REDUCTION THROUGH AI

- Build educator capacity to leverage AI and reduce workload in everyday tasks.
- Increase time and ability to focus on collaboration and student learning.



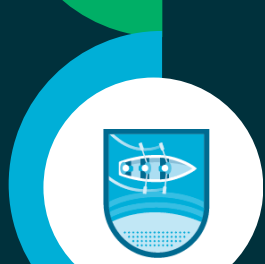
### OPTIMIZE MEETINGS

- Increase efficiency and effectiveness of meetings.
- Reduce meeting volume and frequency
- Build procedures, tools, and automations to "Take back your day" and focus on the work.



### SELECTION & TALENT DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

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# Read Well, Be Well:

## How Our Kids' Success is Defined by How They Are Seen

by Julia Rivard Dexter

So, this is how it starts: with two amazing parents and their belief that a little girl could do anything. What's more powerful than that? I set out with the unchallenged confidence of a child, ready to take on the world.

Life was good and simple growing up in North Bay, Ontario. A small town by most standards, but it felt like a big city. My adventures took me around the block on my Big Wheel or down to DeMarco's on Algonquin Avenue for the one or two things Mum needed for dinner. My memory has never been great, but the feelings I have about those days are comfortable and easy.

Comfortable and easy, it turns out, is not how I would roll. At Pinewood Elementary I tried, but good grades were hard to come by. I had a speech impediment and was well behind grade level in my reading. By grade four, declining school enrolment divided our class into a grade 3-4, and a grade 4-5 split. I was relegated to the 3-4 split, which not only the students, but even the teachers called the "dumb class." My best friend Ryan made the experience tolerable, but inside I was screaming.

A child can't really understand the concept of potential in grade 4, but I wanted to be recognized for something great. How about a special glitter sticker placed on the corner of my homework? Or having my name called out on the school loudspeaker, for the 'right' reasons? I was seeking recognition that I'd never get in the dumb class, and so, my confidence was shaken.



Away from the frustrations of the classroom, in the chlorinated spaces of swim practice, I started to find that feeling. I was working hard, my coach

commended me, and it was paying off. All that misdirected energy and that yearning for recognition? Now, there was a place to put it. I focused on sport, I competed, and I won.

I continued to excel, motivated by the encouragement I got from being seen. So much in fact, that my dream became a reality when I had the opportunity to compete for Canada at the Olympic Games. Not so bad for the little girl in the dumb class. Without sport, I would have been left behind, with a lack of belief in myself that would have blanketed all parts of my life. I know this because the feeling of not being smart enough never did go away.

Years later when my son was in 4th grade, I saw the pattern repeat. His confidence tanked as he struggled publicly in class with reading and eventually, gave up. The struggle was real to help him believe he was smart; that he had exceptional potential.

My experience and Max's led me to find a way to help all kids feel seen, to feel capable and confident and smart. In a way, all kids are screaming inside. To be seen is to be changed. Great coaches, teachers and mentors open the door to our potential, however buried it is. I decided the best place to focus this effort was to help every child

gain confidence by being supported in becoming a reader. Because to read well is to be well.



I'm reflecting on this a lot as my colleagues and I build a learning company, Shoelace Learning. We design great tools for education, from the viewpoint to ensure that each child has this feeling of being seen. Now that we can use technology to adjust to each learner, no child needs to be left behind.

Unlike the old practice of picking the levelled book off the shelf in front of your friends, and being ridiculed for being behind, we can understand each learner's unique ability and push them at a pace that is right. In this way, we are helping to build confidence and limit frustrations, in environments that

are safe and motivating. We maintain and grow confidence by helping every learner be seen, because there is no stopping a learner with confidence.

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shoelace

Julia Rivard Dexter is an impact tech entrepreneur, one of Canada's top 50 Women in STEM, and has been recognized as a leader in Global Growth and Innovation.

Julia is CEO of Shoelace Learning, recognized in the top 20 innovative EdTech platforms globally. Shoelace delivers reading assessment, instruction and practice through video games kids love and reaches over 7 million users in over 100 countries.

She is an Olympian (2000) and mother of 4. She has been an associate for Creative Destruction Lab Atlantic, on the Prime Minister's Economic Round Table for the Digital Industries and a member of the Board of Directors of Nova Scotia Power.

# The *Subtle* Strength of Gratitude:

A Mindset Shift for Wellness at Home, School, and Work

By Steven Langer



Imagine you're holding a glass of water. At first, it feels light and manageable. But as time passes, your arm begins to ache. The longer you hold it, the heavier it becomes. This metaphor, beautifully illustrated in Karen Lorre's video, is a powerful reminder that holding onto negative thoughts or frustrations can wear us down in much the same way. But what if we could choose to put the glass down? What if we could change how we see others and ourselves by choosing to focus on gratitude instead?

Gratitude is more than a feel-good buzzword; it's a mindset that can change how we interact with others, handle stress, and approach daily life. It's a way of seeing the world that shifts our focus from problems and imperfections to strengths and perspective.

Whether you're a parent, educator, or leader in your workplace, adopting a mindset of gratitude can help you see beyond mistakes, frustrations, or conflicts—and allow you to appreciate others more deeply, creating the foundation for a healthier environment.

## **The Gratitude Shift: From Criticism to Appreciation**

Every relationship—whether it’s with a student, a coworker, or a family member—has its ups and downs. We can get caught up in small frustrations: a student’s persistent lack of focus, a coworker’s missed deadlines, or a family member’s forgetfulness. When we view these behaviors through a lens of irritation or disappointment, we risk holding onto those feelings and creating barriers in our relationships. But what if, instead, we chose to focus on the positive aspects of these individuals?

Research shows that practicing gratitude can reduce feelings of anxiety and depression, while increasing feelings of happiness and satisfaction. And the beauty of it is that you don’t have to wait for someone else to change for you to start feeling better. When we shift our mindset to appreciate others’ strengths and express gratitude for their efforts—even if they fall short at times—we begin to change the dynamic of our relationships.

Think about it: when we’re grateful, we can’t simultaneously feel resentment or frustration. Gratitude, in a way, cancels out those negative emotions and gives us the space to see people clearly—flaws and all—and value them for who they are. It becomes easier to

have compassion and patience, whether it’s for a child who struggles in class or a colleague who is still learning.

## **The Science of Gratitude and Wellness**

Gratitude has been linked to better sleep, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, and even improved physical health, such as lower blood pressure. This is because when we practice gratitude, our brains release dopamine and serotonin—the “feel-good” neurotransmitters that enhance our mood and make us feel more positive.

Regularly practicing gratitude has been shown to improve sleep quality by 25% (Wood et al., 2009). Moreover, a meta-analysis found that individuals who frequently express gratitude have a 23% lower level of cortisol, the hormone associated with stress, leading to enhanced resilience and emotional well-being (Krause et al., 2017).

In the classroom, this can translate to educators feeling more connected and empathetic toward students, reducing burnout and improving job satisfaction. For students, it means feeling more supported and valued, which can enhance their academic performance and social confidence. At home, practicing gratitude can strengthen family connections, increase emotional resil-

ience, and reduce stress levels.

In the workplace, leaders who express gratitude set a tone for openness and appreciation. A study conducted by the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania found that employees who felt appreciated by their managers were 50% more productive. Leaders have an inherent ability to set the tone for their teams. If a leader practices gratitude consistently, it sets the tone for the company for what is expected.

### **Applying Gratitude: Putting Down the Glass**

Applying gratitude starts with the decision to metaphorically “put down the glass.” Instead of dwelling on minor annoyances, we can choose to see the positive intentions that are underlying the potential failure or frustration. This doesn’t mean ignoring issues or letting go of accountability; it means approaching situations with understanding and a genuine intention to see the person behind the behavior.

Here’s how you can put gratitude into practice:

- **Find the Hidden Gem:** When a student or child does something frustrating, try to see the underlying effort or intention. If a child talks out of turn in class, consider that they’re enthusiastic and engaged, rather than disrespectful

or inattentive. By framing it positively, you’re more likely to respond in a way that encourages their strengths.

- **Shift the Focus in Conversations:** At work or home, make it a point to acknowledge the efforts of others. Instead of leading with critique, start by expressing appreciation for what they’re doing right. This sets a positive tone and helps the other person feel valued and respected.

- **Create a Culture of Appreciation:** In the workplace or classroom, set aside time for “gratitude shout-outs,” where people can recognize the contributions of others. Whether it’s during a team meeting or a family dinner, this practice can build a more cohesive and supportive environment. One really powerful element of this is to recognize the effort and intention even when things go poorly or not as planned.

People will see that you value effort and intention – process over product – and trust and value them regardless of outcomes. It is powerful because it allows people to be more open and honest rather than simply trying to sugarcoat a situation; and they truly feel seen and recognized for their efforts.

## **Transforming Relationships: A Personal Story**

A few years ago, I worked with a teacher who was struggling to connect with a particularly challenging student. The child was often disruptive and uncooperative, and the teacher felt defeated, believing that no progress could be made. After a particularly tough day, I suggested that she write down three things each week that she appreciated about the student, no matter how small.

Reluctantly, she tried it. Slowly, she began to notice small things: his creativity when answering questions, his ability to engage others in group work, his sharp sense of humor. Over time, her perspective shifted from seeing a “problem student” to seeing a young person with potential. Her approach to him changed, and gradually, so did his behavior. By letting go of her frustrations and choosing to see the student through a lens of gratitude, she was able to put down her “glass” and rebuild the connection.

## **Gratitude and Open Communication**

Of course, gratitude alone isn't always enough. It's important to communicate openly and address issues when needed, but gratitude provides a foundation of goodwill that makes these conversations easier and more productive.

When we express appreciation and see others' efforts, we're more likely to approach difficult topics with empathy and a solution-focused mindset.

Let's be honest – I have never met anyone who intentionally wants to frustrate others, miss deadlines, or forget key deliverables. People genuinely are trying, so when we approach conversations with a desire to move forward, to find the effort behind the delay, or with grace because life is busy, people will respond in kind.

## **Acknowledging Challenges and Focusing on Growth**

While gratitude offers numerous wellness benefits, it's important to understand that practicing gratitude doesn't mean ignoring or suppressing feelings of frustration, anger, or disappointment. Instead, gratitude provides a way to approach these emotions from a place of acceptance and mindfulness. This nuanced approach allows us to recognize and address issues in a healthy manner while maintaining a positive outlook.

Suppressing negative emotions isn't healthy or sustainable. Research has shown that unexpressed emotions, especially anger and frustration, can lead to increased levels of stress and even physical health problems, such as high blood pressure and digestive issues,

(Kross et al., 2011). Therefore, it's essential to acknowledge these emotions when they arise, instead of pushing them aside under the guise of gratitude. Emotions are signals—they let us know when something needs our attention.

Practicing gratitude doesn't mean pretending that flaws or mistakes don't exist. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Gratitude helps us shift our focus from dwelling on problems to finding ways to appreciate the good in a situation or a person despite the imperfections. For example, you might feel frustrated with a colleague who frequently misses deadlines.

While it's important to address this behavior through open and honest communication, practicing gratitude means you can also acknowledge their strengths and contributions as well, rather than just the flaws. Gratitude, in this context, becomes a tool for reframing how we view others. We can acknowledge the negative behaviors or challenges we face, but we choose to prioritize our appreciation for the positive traits and efforts that are often overshadowed by our frustrations.

By using gratitude as a tool to enhance communication, we can engage in healthier discussions and address frustrations more effectively.

A study by Algoe and Haidt (2009) found that expressing gratitude can strengthen interpersonal relationships by fostering trust and respect, which are crucial when navigating challenging conversations. When we approach issues with gratitude, we create a more constructive environment where both parties feel valued and understood, making it easier to move past the problem and find a solution together.

### **Intentional Gratitude Strengthens Relationships at Home**

Gratitude isn't just a concept my wife and I discuss in theory—it's something we intentionally integrate into our everyday lives. We believe that small acts of appreciation can have a big impact, especially when it comes to fostering a positive environment and strengthening our relationship. One way we do this is by making a conscious effort to notice the little things the other person does throughout the day and then expressing our gratitude for those efforts, no matter how minor they may seem.

For example, I'll intentionally take a moment to notice when my wife makes a fresh pot of coffee in the morning or gives me my preferred chair when we sit together by the fireplace. Rather than letting these moments pass by unacknowledged, I'll say a simple "thank you" to show that I see and appreciate her thoughtful gestures.

The same goes for her—she'll thank me for giving her some free time while I take the kids to play or for remembering a small detail she mentioned earlier in the week.

This habit of noticing and acknowledging these small acts of kindness helps both of us feel more appreciated and valued. It's not just about saying "thank you" but about truly seeing the other person's efforts. This practice has made our home environment feel more supportive and has created a positive feedback loop of appreciation.

Research supports the importance of these small expressions of gratitude in relationships, showing that couples who regularly express gratitude to each other experience increased relationship satisfaction, trust, and a greater sense of connectedness (Gordon et al., 2012).

Expressing gratitude for these small acts also provides a buffer against the natural challenges and frustrations that arise in any relationship. It's easier to handle a moment of miscommunication or a stressful day when you know that your partner sees and values the everyday ways you contribute. This shared practice of gratitude reminds us to focus on the positives and gives us a healthier perspective when navigating the inevitable ups and downs of life.

Conclusion:

## **Gratitude as a shift towards Wellness**

Whether at home, in school, or in the workplace, gratitude is a powerful tool that can transform our relationships and our own well-being. It shifts our focus from what's missing or frustrating to what's present and valuable. It allows us to see others in their strengths, efforts, and potential—creating an environment where everyone can thrive. So, the next time you find yourself holding onto that metaphorical glass, take a moment to put it down. Choose gratitude and watch how your perspective—and your relationships—change.

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Keynote Speaker  
Workshop Facilitator &  
Organizational Wellness Consultant

*Steven Langer*

Steven is a highly-rated speaker and facilitator with years of experience as a senior leader and executive in public and private sectors, as well as executive HR management and organizational behaviour.

Steven works with organizations to amplify their organizational wellness, support healthy workplace cultures, and empower teams to reach their optimal potential.



*Speaker Video*

## SIGNATURE TOPICS

- ✓ Thriving not Surviving: Building Sustainable Habits for Wellness
- ✓ Healthy Leaders, Healthy Teams
- ✓ Knowing Me Knowing You: Designing a Healthy Workplace Culture
- ✓ KPI's: Turning the Unicorn into Actionable Wellness Strategies
- ✓ The Human Factor: Unleash Wellness to Combat People Risk in the Workplace
- ✓ Cultivating Connections: A Blueprint for Thriving Remote Cultures

## TESTIMONIAL

*"Steven's presentation was engaging but also incredibly insightful. His passion for wellness shines through, and his keynote was a valuable reminder of the importance of taking care of our well-being. Thank you, Steve, for an eye-opening session!"*

✉ [steven@wellbydesign.ca](mailto:steven@wellbydesign.ca)

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We are a Calgary based independent clothing company focused on improving the mental health of our community by sharing our stories through art, charity, and positive mental health messaging. The main goal is to end the stigma towards mental illnesses. A percentage of each sale is donated to Canadian mental health awareness initiatives. Interested in exploring corporate collaboration opportunities?

Email: [hayden@moregooddaysclothing.com](mailto:hayden@moregooddaysclothing.com)

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# About Us



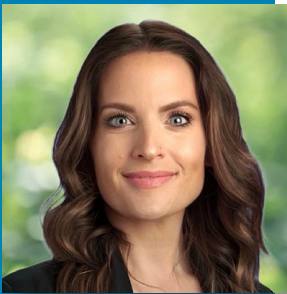
**Dr. Gina Cherkowski, Editor in Chief**

Social Justice Educational Researcher and equity advocate. Gina's current research focuses on Mental Health, Neurodiversity, Inclusion and Belonging. Dr Cherkowski loves reading, dreaming up crazy ideas, and spending time with family and friends.



**Demetra Mylonas, Associate Editor**

Education researcher, neurodiversity expert and advocate. When not engrossed in books of various topics, can often be found frolicking through the mountains and rivers with her family and puppy!



**Dylan Dean, Nutrition and Wellness Expert**

Dylan is a certified nutrition expert, a yoga instructor and a certified MindUP coach. She is a nature enthusiast, neuroscience nerd, and yoga & mindfulness practitioner who finds joy in reading, exploring the great outdoors and spending quality time with her family.



**Steven Langer, Adult & Organizational Wellness Expert**

An Organizational Wellness Consultant focused on enhancing personal, professional, and organizational wellness. Offering keynote presentations and collaborates with companies to foster healthy workplace cultures and performance. He enjoys time with his family, camping, tennis and off-leash visits with his dog.



**Monique Joy** is a dedicated professional with a focus on fine arts and community events. She has excelled in project management and event production for many years. Monique is deeply invested in mental health and wellness education. She enjoys spending time at the lake embracing nature and finds joy in live music, films, and socializing.



**Wayne Carley, Publisher**

Since 2006, Wayne has published a variety of educational magazines that include STEM Magazine, STEAM Magazine, STEM Canada and several others globally. Wayne is excited about Wellness Education Magazine and feels strongly about its value and influence.

# WELLNESS

E D U C A T I O N M A G A Z I N E

