

CHAPTER 1

Cringeworthy Moments

Why Would I Want to Be a Novice?

“An expert is a man who has made all of the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field.”

—Niels Bohr
Nobel Prize-winning physicist

The year was 1995. Picture a room filled with thirty-two fourth-grade students arranged in groups of three or four. I am the earnest student teacher at the front of the room teaching a lesson that should have lasted ten to fifteen minutes. I am enthusiastically teaching for nearly forty-five minutes. Four students are remarkably engaged, but I really have no idea what the other twenty-eight students are doing as I am passionately inspiring these four students. My cooperating teacher sits in the back of the room, cringing behind the camera, recording this antithetical example of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Mercifully for twenty-eight students, my lesson finally ends. My cooperating teacher says very little to me. However, there is a devious twinkle in his eye when he requests that I sit down and watch the video with him.

I wonder what sadistic enjoyment he hopes to take from this, but I agree. I did not really have a choice. After school, we sit down and put the VHS tape in the VCR. I don't know why I am sweating, but this is a miserable experience. However, it is not that bad . . . for the first five minutes. Then, I actually get bored watching myself. At about the twenty-eight minute mark, without me noticing, the camera slowly pans to the left side of the room, which should have been in my peripheral vision. A male student has his knees on his chair and is absentmindedly humping his desk. This “activity” continues for nearly five minutes. The camera is actually shaking because my cooperating teacher was laughing so hard. Neither the student nor the highly amused cooperating teacher was a big enough cue to make me aware while teaching. I became aware of this student's extremely off-task behavior when watching this video of him and twenty-seven other students disengaging from the lesson.

I know I was not the only new teacher to struggle. I get the opportunity to watch beginning teachers struggle all the time as a professor and student teaching supervisor. I sit in the back of student teachers' classrooms watching disaster after disaster unfold before me. Here are a few vignettes from my supervision notes:

- Student has been loudly sharpening his pencil for three minutes—and only stopped because he ran out of pencil.
- Teacher just gave student her third warning before having her move her stoplight to yellow, which itself is . . . A WARNING!
- Two students are physically fighting in their chairs at the back of the classroom. *How is it possible to fight entirely below desk level while seated?*

You may be checking the cover to this book and wondering why anyone would suggest that there is a novice advantage. You certainly have a vision of struggling teachers from these examples.

Aren't we supposed to be striving to be experts instead? Certainly, there is a great divide between experts and novices. We also know that experience does not equal expertise (Hattie & Yates, 2014). To gain expertise, we need deliberate practice—practice that includes guidance, goals, objective assessment, feedback, and reflection (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Hattie & Yates, 2014). As painful as watching ourselves teach on video can be, if coupled with guidance, goals, assessment, feedback, and reflection, this can be a powerful tool for growth (Knight, 2014).

Experts notice features and patterns, organize knowledge in ways that demonstrate deep understanding, can flexibly retrieve knowledge, can “chunk” information, and have many hours of deliberate practice (Berliner, 2004; Hattie & Yates, 2014; National Research Council, 2000). In his best selling book, *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) popularized the notion that experts in fact need ten thousand hours of deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993) in a particular area to become experts. That is over eight years of teaching, *if* all of that teaching is deliberate practice.¹ Researchers have illustrated the benefits of experience for student learning (Ladd & Sorensen, 2014; Papay & Kraft, in press). However, experienced teachers are not necessarily expert teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

We have no idea what classrooms will look like ten years from now. Embracing change, or standing firm on principled practice will require reflection, risk taking (sometimes not changing is a risk), and a novice mindset. Traditional teacher preparation programs, alternative route providers, teacher residencies, and district mentoring and induction programs must

¹ That is 8.5 years if a teacher has 6.5 hours of student contact time per day for 180 days per year. Teaching obviously entails far more than student contact time, but you get the idea—expertise takes a while to develop.

David Berliner Describes the Research on Expert Teachers

Expert teachers often develop

- automaticity and routinization for the repetitive operations that are needed to accomplish their goals;
- sensitivity to the task demands and social situation when solving pedagogical problems;
- flexibility in their teaching;
- ability to represent problems in qualitatively different ways than do novices;
- fast and accurate pattern recognition;
- problem-solving ability that may be slower than novices, but brings a richer and more personal source of information to bear on the problem they are trying to solve . . .

Expertise is specific to a domain, and to particular contexts in domains, and is developed over hundreds and thousands of hours (2004, p.13).

help novices capitalize on these strengths. This is essential for our system as the modal years (most frequently reported—think mean, median, and *mode*) of experience for U.S. teachers is one. This means that the most common teacher by experience is a first-year teacher (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

In order to become experts we must first be novices, as Niels Bohr's quote at the beginning of this chapter recommends. He was a Nobel Prize winning Danish physicist, in addition to being a 1908 Olympian in soccer, who gave the world the Bohr model of the atom and the foundation to understand much of what we know about quantum physics. A man as gifted as Bohr attributes his success to making mistakes. He reflected on them and learned from them. James Joyce, renowned author, took this even further. He wrote in *Ulysses*, "A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery." When we stop reflecting, risking, and revising our attempts, we stop learning.

THE NOVICE ADVANTAGE

This is the distinct advantage of maintaining a novice mindset. People that are successful in any profession are constantly learning—risking, reflecting, and revising. In today's changing economic, cultural, and educational conditions, learning and application of that learning may be more valuable than

knowledge. In fact, as prolific writer Parker Palmer points out, there is tremendous value in being a novice. “To get unstuck, I must let go of my ‘career’ as an established writer and begin again as a novice. In truth I am a novice in every new moment of the day, each of which presents possibilities unknown and untried” (Palmer, 2015).

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While writing for a business audience, Liz Wiseman (2014) identifies the curious and flexible mindset of rookies. Her team’s research indicates that rookies have significantly higher levels of self-awareness, are more likely to seek out expertise, tend to deliver more timely solutions, and are more attuned to politics than veterans

in business. She describes four mindsets that provide a rookie advantage. Effective rookies are Backpackers, Hunter-Gatherers, Firewalkers, and Pioneers.

Novices as Backpackers vs. Veterans as Caretakers: Rookies in business are open to new possibilities, unencumbered, and do not rely on habits and practices of the past. Veterans can become Caretakers. Having demonstrated previous success, they seek to protect their gains and maintain the status quo.

Novices as Hunter-Gathers vs. Veterans as Local Guides: Rookies lack knowledge so they seek out experts and return with ideas and resources. Veterans can become Local Guides who stick to what they know and offer advice.

Novices as Firewalkers vs. Veterans as Marathoners: Rookies take small, calculated steps but move quickly and seek feedback. Veterans can become Marathoners when they pace themselves and plod along assuming they are still doing good work.

Novices as Pioneers vs. Veterans as Settlers: Rookies keep things simple and focus on meeting basic needs while improvising and pushing boundaries. Veterans can become settlers when they are protecting territory and remaining in their comfort zones.

(from Wiseman, 2014)

Echoing what I hear from beginning, veteran, and accomplished teachers across this country, we need teachers who innovate, risk, create, reflect, and grow. “Teaching is a natural, human act that occurs between humans who express a desire to connect with each other and join their knowledge” (Rodriguez & Fitzpatrick, 2014, p. 19). The classroom has to be an exciting place to grow. For twenty years (including a one-year-long interlude at the U.S. Department of Education), that has been what the classroom has been for me. I constantly go back to my first years in the classroom. In fact, as a

professor, I go back into public school classrooms to teach physical science units each year. I bring student teachers to observe and assist so that my practice is transparent and my reflection is visible. Sometimes we cringe when we go back to our beginnings, but if you are like me, you also remember the passion, energy, hopefulness, persistence, and curiosity.



Fearless Reflection

▶ This box and subsequent boxes are intended to help you begin to apply some of the ideas in the book with the hope that this will accelerate growth as you reflect, risk, revise or reject. Think of these boxes as the groundwork for the action steps at the end of subsequent chapters. Whether you are reading this on your own or with a group of educators, you have to be fearless in your honesty. Many of these boxes will ask you to rate yourself or others. Don't get hung up on the technical quality of the rating scales. These are not scientific, but are designed to force you to be honest and take a position so that you can reflect and grow.

On a scale of 1–10, how much value do you place on learning vs. knowledge?

- 1 = "Knowledge is all that matters."
- 10 = "Learning is all that matters."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Based on the notion that ten thousand hours of deliberate practice equals expertise, where do you fall on the expert novice continuum for teaching?

- 1 = "I have zero hours of deliberate teaching practice."
- 10 = "I have had ten thousand hours of deliberate teaching practice."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What are the implications of your view on learning vs. knowledge and where you fall on the novice-expert continuum?

IT'S NOT ABOUT "NOVICE" INSTEAD OF "EXPERT"

I am certainly not arguing that we should simply replace experienced teachers with new or unprepared teachers. In Wisconsin, legislation has been considered that would allow anyone, even a high school dropout, to be licensed to teach (Richards, 2015). This is not the novice to which I am referring, and I certainly do not want to romanticize being a novice. There

are many drawbacks and challenges associated with being new to teaching, the most challenging aspect of which is the self-referential focus that makes it difficult to be fully aware of students. Sometimes, we refer to this as a teacher's "radar"—novice teachers can be so focused on what they are doing that they only see teaching and not learning. This is a significant challenge to overcome in addition to learning new curriculum, understanding the school and community culture, and figuring out how best to meet the needs of as many as two hundred individuals in the course of a day.

What I am arguing is that there are certain ways of thinking that novice teachers may demonstrate, out of necessity or naiveté, that some veteran teachers lose. Whether they are twenty-one-year olds or forty-five-year old career changers, novice teachers often demonstrate playful innovation, flexibility, and desperation born out of necessity and hubris that have distinct advantages in an ever-changing education landscape. These attributes are not unique to the novice but do seem to be more typical. This may be due to the fact that novice teachers do not know all of the reasons why an idea won't work. The knowledge of the many barriers in education can be one of the major constraints on my creativity as a twenty-year teaching veteran.

Whether they are twenty-one-year-olds or forty-five-year-old career changers, novice teachers often demonstrate playful innovation, flexibility, and desperation born out of necessity and hubris that have distinct advantages in an ever-changing education landscape.

Many accomplished teachers maintain this playful innovation and are always experimenting, reflecting, and adapting. Because of their experience and deep understanding of teaching and learning, this can make them extremely effective. However, some veteran teachers lose this mindset and, in so doing, lose the joy and excitement of teaching. Novice teachers experience the exhilaration mixed with terror of learning

alongside their students and with other colleagues. Over time, they can refine those innovations and make them better, but they should not lose their willingness to take risks.

THE NOVICE MINDSET

Stanford University Professor, Carol Dweck (2006), has researched and written extensively on the growth mindset and its implications for parenting, business, and education. Dweck asserts that we must move beyond a "fixed mindset" to a "growth mindset" when thinking about intelligence. If intelligence and ability are fixed, some people are smart and some people are not, some people are capable and others aren't, and there is nothing we can really do about that. If intelligence and abilities are fixed, then there is no reason to struggle and grow in our understanding and practice. If intelligence and ability are fixed, reflection on risk and struggle do not lead to growth because there is no real room for growth. In fact, even those of us

who think we have a growth mindset may be limiting the growth of students because of underlying assumptions from a deeply rooted fixed sense of intelligence and ability with labels derived from tracking or special education status (Hattie & Yates, 2014). If these things are fixed, then most of us should just give up.

However, if we approach education from the growth mindset, there is hope for all of us. Struggle, risk, and reflection are welcome tools of increasing knowledge, skills, and intelligence. We are naturally curious, but how do we get students to think? In fact, cognitive scientist Dan Willingham describes thinking as unnatural for humans (Willingham, 2009). Teaching is an infinitely challenging task.

Since there are countless opportunities for novices to struggle, risk, and learn from mistakes, their greatest asset may be a particular type of growth mindset: the novice mindset. The novice mindset is the belief that we grow continuously through fearless, deliberate practice. This is an orientation toward growth that prioritizes risk, reflection, and revision while humbly seeking feedback and insight from a wide range of sources. The novice mindset allows us to get better at getting better. Accomplished teachers know that they never really arrive at great teaching—they are always refining their practice and have formally and informally honed their skills at getting better. The sooner we figure this out for ourselves and recognize that failure, creative struggle, and building on success are requisite components of improvement, the faster we will grow.

The novice mindset is the belief that we grow continuously through fearless, deliberate practice.

FIXED TEACHING MINDSET	NOVICE TEACHING MINDSET
Struggle should be avoided.	Struggle is an opportunity for growth.
Risk is dangerous.	Risk is an opportunity to learn.
I know what I need to know.	I need to learn from others.
Compliance and fear drive my work.	Creativity and courage drive my work.
Every day is just another day.	Every day is another day I can get better.
Practice = experience	Deliberate practice = expertise
I receive feedback when I have to.	I seek feedback.
New challenges mean more work for me.	New challenges are opportunities to grow.
Teaching can become stale.	Teaching is never boring.
Change induces fear and should be avoided.	Change can be embraced if it is in the best interest of my students.

CREATIVE STRUGGLE

Teachers with the novice mindset embrace creative struggle to improve their deliberate practice. Creative struggle is a critical component of what we do. Sometimes creative struggle comes from failure that motivates us and can lead to innovation.

Thomas Edison changed the world by engaging in creative struggle for decades. As a student who probably dealt with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, he was considered “addled” as a child. However, this energy made his creative struggle almost mythical. He would work assistants into the ground sometime going non-stop for twenty-four to thirty-six hours at a time. The light bulb, his most famous invention, allegedly went through ten thousand iterations before he settled on a workable solution. Translation: that is ten thousand failures.

Michael Jordan, the greatest basketball player who has ever lived, spent his entire career motivating himself through failure. His basketball career really started when he did not make the varsity basketball team his sophomore year of high school. In his Hall of Fame induction speech, Jordan talked about the guy who took his spot on the team. “Leroy Smith was a guy when I got cut he made the team and he’s here tonight . . . I wanted to prove . . . to the coach that picked Leroy over me . . . you made a mistake dude.”

Jordan was being inducted to the Hall of Fame and he was still talking about Leroy Smith.

Throughout his career, Jordan’s creative struggle was fuel for innovation. After winning three championships, Jordan realized he could no longer continue to take the punishment of driving to the hoop constantly, so he developed one of the most potent turnaround jump shots in basketball history. He won three more championships.

While most of us do not like to talk about failure or struggle—at least until we have succeeded—we can all identify with it.

While most of us do not like to talk about failure or struggle—at least until we have succeeded—we can all identify with it. Success does breed more success, but there is usually some form of failure that has accompanied or driven us to that success. Failure in fact is one of the

exceptional cultural aspects of the United States. In some ways, American failure is the envy of the world. A piece in the *New York Times* describes the enviable culture of fearless failure that drives the U.S. economy. Silicon Valley’s mantra of “Fail fast, fail often” signifies that

The freedom to innovate is inextricably linked to the freedom to fail. In Europe, failure carries a much greater stigma than it does in the United States. Bankruptcy codes are far more punitive, in

contrast to the United States, where bankruptcy is simply a rite of passage for many successful entrepreneurs. (Stewart, 2015, para.15)

I am not advocating haphazard risk taking and failure that might lead to market-driven improvement in education. When students' lives are at stake, we cannot treat them as the collateral of education's version of a failed tech start-up. I am advocating for teachers who continue to build expertise through disciplined, yet fearless, risk taking. "Disciplined risk taking" is bounded by reflection on the front and back end. Reflective teaching practice is not new, but sometimes, thinking like a novice is the most productive way to do this fearlessly.



Fearless Reflection

► On a scale of 1–10, how willing are you to enter into creative struggle?

- 1 = "Please give me a script to read my students."
- 10 = "I am energized by creative struggle and can't wait to give my students opportunities to struggle."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1–10, how strong is your growth mindset toward your students?

- 1 = "I don't want to teach my students anything new because I don't want to clutter their minds."
- 10 = "My current class of students has two future Nobel prize winners, a President of the United States, four Olympians, and three concert pianists."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1–10, how strong is your novice mindset toward your own teaching?

- 1 = "I am being required to read this book. I have no plans to get better."
- 10 = "I love to get better through setting goals, collecting evidence, getting feedback, and reflecting."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How might these three scores affect the way you read the rest of this book? How might they affect your students' learning?

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE CONDITION OF U.S. EDUCATION

Before we can really explore the various facets of the novice mindset, we must first explore the context in which they are applied. We have to understand the conditions in U.S. education to determine how to fearlessly embrace the novice mindset.

Nancie Atwell, a literacy guru and widely respected educator received the Global Teacher Award, a one million dollar prize for teaching. In an interview after receiving the award, she said, “Public school teachers are so constrained right now by the Common Core [State] standards and the tests that are developed to monitor what teachers are doing with them. . . If you’re a creative, smart young person, I don’t think this is the time to go into teaching” (Moeny, 2015).

While standards and testing do not have to stand in the way of creativity, many educators agree with Nancie Atwell. According to surveys (MetLife, 2012; 2013) of U.S. teachers, only 39 percent of teachers found their jobs “very satisfying” and 29 percent of teachers planned to leave teaching within the next five years.

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(MetLife, 2012; 2013)

In many states, there is a growing narrative about teachers that they are actually overpaid, their pensions are exorbitant, and educators are a drain on the system as opposed to a benefit (Andrea, 2013; Costrell & Podgursky, 2009; Riddell, 2014). Since Thomas Jefferson, one of the most attractive aspects of teaching has always been that educators, while not particularly well compensated, are key contributors to a democratic society. While many still view teaching as a noble profession that provides a valuable service, this view appears to be eroding (for a very readable examination of the teaching profession over time, see *The Teacher Wars* by Dana Goldstein, 2014).

Furthermore, the accountability culture in U.S. public schools does not necessarily lend itself to risk taking and creative struggle. Teachers and students must be allowed to innovate which means they will have to take chances, collect data, get feedback, and reflect. In many organizations that privilege innovation, they encourage employees to “fail faster.” Many districts have taken an approach that is antithetical to innovation. In these districts, there is talk of “teacher-proofing” curriculum and personalized online learning so that anyone can teach. This is not the fault of standards, Common Core, or otherwise. Standardized testing itself is not necessarily to blame, but is likely

an outcome of this culture. There is a pervasive lack of trust that inhibits risk, creative struggle, and subsequent innovation.

Much of this is not new. Several sociological conditions hamper the novice mindset. First, lack of trust within schools is tremendously problematic for growth to occur in teaching and learning (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hattie & Yates, 2014). Without trust, little progress will be made within schools. Second, the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) is another impediment to growth. Teaching is plagued by the notion that we all know how to teach because we have all been students. With this low view of teaching, informed innovation is difficult because there is a sense that we should just replicate models that we thought were effective as students and avoid the ones that did not work for us. This myopic view of improving practice can be extremely limiting.

Third, the egalitarian norms in teaching can be challenging for teachers. Many novice teachers bring an optimism and idealism to the work that they hope to do. Many of us entered teaching wanting to make a positive impact on the world. Somewhere along the way, many of us begin to confuse reality with pessimism and see the idealism of novices as naiveté. While the reality of the challenges we face in teaching is important to share, we must not crush the idealism that many novices bring. One of the most unfortunate aspects of our profession occurs when veteran teachers try to convince bright, optimistic beginners that this optimism is naïve and misplaced. Being realistic is necessary but should never be confused with pessimism. I would much rather see a teacher who is overly optimistic than someone who believes reality dictates that teachers should be pessimistic about prospects for students. How often do beginning teachers hear the following kinds of statements from veterans in buildings they enter?

While the reality of the challenges we face in teaching is important to share, we must not crush the idealism that many novices bring.

“Oh, you are just being idealistic. Just wait a few years.”

“That stuff you learned in college is fine, but you don’t really need any of that.”

“That might work in some places but not here.”

“This is the best job we can do with these kinds of students.”

“Stop doing that. You are making others look bad.”

“That is not part of our contract.”

Watch what happens to a teacher when he or she is singled out for recognition or an award. In many school cultures, that teacher will be criticized, broken down, and ostracized. Daniel Duke (2008) describes this phenomenon with a crabbing metaphor. He calls it education’s “crab bucket culture.” A crab bucket does not need a lid because crabs will pull other crabs down

if they try to climb out of the bucket. While teachers' actions may be subtler than this, when teachers stand out there is a pressure to pull them back into the mainstream.

Steps need to be taken to empower novice and veteran teachers alike to feel that they can move beyond their own individual classrooms while not necessarily leaving them behind. This includes simple steps like professional learning communities where true collaboration occurs. The novice teacher might be able to assist others in some of the technical aspects of instructional technology, while more experienced teachers can help the novice understand different aspects of the school community and effective, contextualized teaching techniques. This collaboration must occur within the bounds of nonevaluative, nonjudgmental, supportive norms where teachers see each other teach.

Systemically, differentiated, career lattices, hybrid roles, policy fellowships, and other leadership opportunities for teachers to spread their expertise are essential (Alexandrou & Swaffield, 2014; Berry & Eckert, 2012; Berry, Byrd, & Wieder, 2013; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The most effective way to improve teaching and learning in schools is to increase deliberate practice. For that to occur, teachers need guidance, feedback, and time to reflect. That best occurs with other educators. This is a proposition that our current system does not seem to support based on the culture and structures in most schools. As teachers grow in their novice mindset and seek new challenges, opportunities and support must be available to continue to grow and expand their influence.

LOST OR TAKEN AWAY?

The novice's passion, energy, hope, persistence, curiosity, and creativity can be lost. They can also be taken away by systems that oppress and distrust teachers. Prescriptive teaching and "teacher-proofed" curricula do not create the conditions that will rid the system of ineffective teachers, much less catalyze innovation. The micromanaging of teachers that is occurring in many schools may minimally improve poor to average teachers, but it is driving good teachers out and is a deterrent to potentially talented teaching candidates from entering education as a career. The creativity of our students is the envy of the world. The best way to cultivate that creativity is by modeling it.

One of the strongest novice teachers I have ever seen, Marcey Wennlund, is an illustrative example of a teacher who is struggling against a system that lacks trust. In her first year of teaching in a third/fourth split classroom in a suburban Chicago public school, Marcey is attempting to meet the various needs of her students. She is an excellent reading teacher having worked under an outstanding mentor teacher. She has received proficient and exemplary ratings from her principal throughout her first year of teaching. On a weekly basis, multiple observers enter her room. This should be extremely beneficial to a novice teacher providing her in-depth feedback on her practice.

However, the feedback is primarily focused on the length of the varying components of her lessons. She describes the feedback she receives like this:

You took four minutes on your lesson introduction and you should have taken three. You gave students thirty seconds to talk in the pair-share portion of the lesson, and you should have given them forty-five seconds. Additionally, when you have them partner share, you should assign partner #1 and partner #2. Partner #1 should speak the first time and partner #2 should speak first the second time. After they have shared, then you should recognize their effort with two snaps of your fingers.

This is not an environment that privileges innovation. Marcey is in a compliance-driven atmosphere in which very few creative, innovative teachers will thrive—novice or veteran. Unfortunately, this is the type of environment in which many educators currently exist. Environments like this can be particularly toxic for novice teachers and deadening for veteran teachers. However, this is not the state of every school, nor does it have to be. In fact we know that for schools to be successful, trust must be at the center of the enterprise (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Contrast Marcey's example with that of another first year teacher, Graham Schultze. Graham is a fifth-grade teacher, also in the western suburbs of Chicago. He was hired at the school where he student taught. Graham is a prime example of a backpacking, firewalking pioneer. While he was a student teacher, his principal, Chris Silagi, described the challenges that Graham faced.

His fourth grade class had most of the boys who rode the bus to the school from government-subsidized apartments. He just connected well with them. In fact, I had gotten approximately thirty office referrals from the bus these students rode to school, so he began meeting weekly with the student ringleaders on the bus as well as visiting the bus daily before it left. During that month, we got one office referral.

Graham was hired to teach fifth grade at that same school. He requested each of the boys from that bus for his class. They have made tremendous gains academically and socially this year. His principal has given him the latitude to test innovative instructional practices and given him space to build relationships with his students. Each week, the class focuses on a different desirable character trait such as respect for others, compassion, or diligence. When these traits are demonstrated and identified by Graham or other students, students earn "skrilla" (class currency). Each Friday, students turn in their "skrilla" to Graham's alter ego, Jerry "Big Bucks" Wilson to determine who will be that week's "skrillionaire." With this much esteemed recognition comes a picture with Jerry "Big Bucks" Wilson that goes on the "skrillionaire" board and the privilege of keeping a Captain America statue on the student's desk for the coming week.

Image courtesy of Jill Jakabowski, photographer.



FIGURE 1.1 Graham with Skrillionaire, Quinn

This is not something that could be scripted. This is not something that would work for every teacher. That is the point. Graham is effective because he playfully innovates. The innovation is derived from necessity. Some of the innovative ideas will certainly fail, but he will reflect and then revise or reject. Importantly, so will his students. He has developed a classroom community where taking chances is celebrated and modeled. He is not worried about looking foolish or failing. He is a savvy teacher who is using a novice mindset.

FROM CRINGEWORTHY TO DESIRABLE

Whether we are novices or veterans, how do we employ the desirable characteristics of being a novice while not being cringeworthy? Rule #1: Do not worry about being cringeworthy. The examples I shared at the beginning of the chapter are certainly not desirable teaching practices. However, if we constantly worry about making mistakes and failing, we cannot succeed.

Rule #1: Do not worry about being cringeworthy.

Each year, I made my elementary and middle school students memorize the following quotations so that true success was at the heart of our enterprise for that year. They had to stand in front of the class and recite them to each other—part of not fearing failure. These are good reminders for us as administrators, teachers, parents and human beings.

“I can’t accept not trying.”

—Michael Jordan

“There is no substitute for hard work.”

—Thomas Edison

“Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much, nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.”

—Theodore Roosevelt

The final quotation captures the strength of the novice mindset, the novice that will be successful at least. Teachers employing the novice mindset cannot worry about failure. Our only concern should be the “gray twilight” where nothing is risked and nothing is gained. When teachers model this, students begin to live and learn this way as well. This book is devoted to avoiding the “gray twilight.”

Figure 1.2 illustrates the basic premise of this book. Starting with a novice mindset (Chapter 2), we apply a process (Chapter 3), to practices (Chapters 4–7) that will allow us to continue to grow perpetually (Chapter 8). This is an iterative process that should inform and perpetuate itself over the course of our careers as we move toward expertise.



Fearless Reflection

► On a scale of 1–10, how would you rate the level of trust in your school and district?

- 1 = “No one trusts anyone.”
- 10 = “Everything we do is predicated on trust.”

School: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

District: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

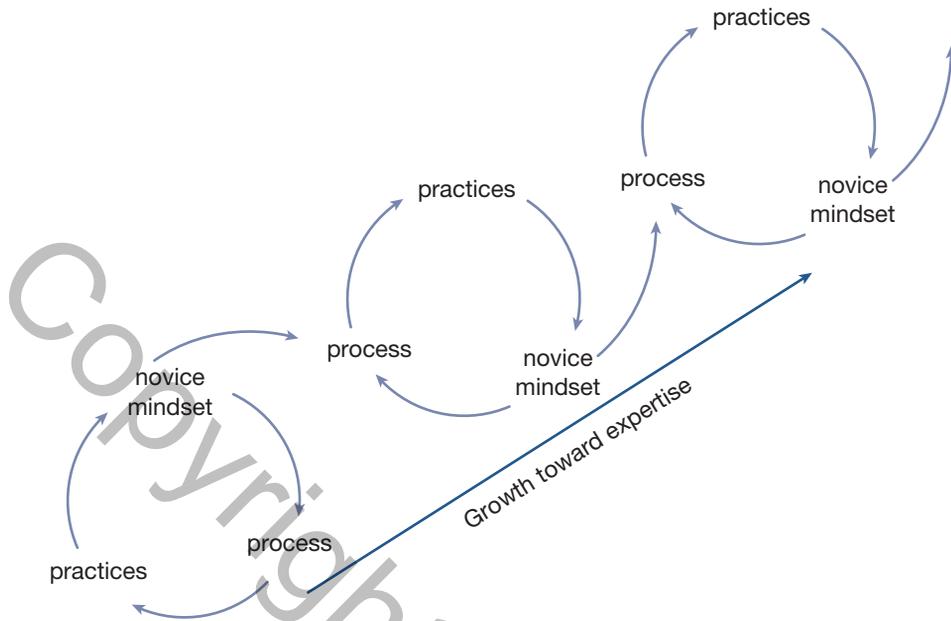
How is the current climate in education affecting you and your school?

Is your experience more like Marcey’s or Graham’s?

What opportunities do you have to build trust, collaboration, and a stronger teaching profession by breaking down the crab bucket culture?

How would the novice mindset help?

FIGURE 1.2 The Iterative Theory of Action Production



I hope you will embrace this work as we move away from the “gray twilight.”

Key Takeaways and Fearless Practices

- The novice mindset is the belief that we grow continuously through fearless, deliberate practice.
- The novice mindset is an advantage as an expansive view of teaching. You can
 - acknowledge how little you know,
 - take chances,
 - seek advice,
 - see opportunities, and
 - cultivate a hopeful optimism.
- Given the rate of change in education and the fact that we are always meeting new students, we are all novices to some degree.
- In a “crab bucket culture” that lacks trusts and prioritizes compliance, you need the novice mindset.
- Whether you are a novice or veteran teacher, we can grow through transparent, deliberate practice.
- Find a setting where you can grow by taking disciplined risks.
- Don’t worry about being cringeworthy.
- Avoid the “gray twilight.”

Open-Ended Case Study

Let us return to Marcey, the first-year teacher from this chapter. In her context, she feels extremely constrained and limited in her ability to take risks. She is not receiving much support from her administrators that would really help improve her practice. She does have a small but growing network of colleagues in her building, district, former student teaching placement, and virtual connections through the Center for Teaching Quality. However, like all teachers, her time is extremely limited. What would you do if you were in Marcey’s position?

Reflect

- What are the advantages of the novice mindset when approaching the current challenges in education?
- Who are some colleagues who display the playful innovation and energy of the novice mindset?
- How can you foster a novice mindset in yourself? In students? In colleagues?
- What steps could you take to move toward becoming an expert novice?

Risk: 3-2-1 Action Steps

- 3: Identify three novice mindset strengths that you will develop or capitalize on this semester.

Possible Steps:

- Acknowledge how little you know—Seek out a colleague to learn from either inside or outside your building.
- Take a chance—try something bold.
- Cultivate hopeful optimism—identify an issue about which you have been negative. Think and speak about it in only positive terms for a week.

- 2: Identify two colleagues who have a novice mindset and engage them.

Possible Steps:

- Talk to colleagues and identify others who seem to always be growing and improving.
- Take fifteen minutes to discuss with the two people you identify and try to implement one idea from each person this week.

- 1: Identify one opportunity where you can push beyond your comfort zone to develop your novice mindset.

Possible Step:

- Tell a colleague you trust about a cringeworthy moment from your teaching. Reflect on what you learned. How can you continue to grow from this experience?

Revise or Reject

After taking a risk, determine what to do next. Was it worthy of revision or rejection?

- Reject
- Revise

Write down a few notes about what worked, what did not, and what you might change.

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