

CHAPTER 2

Failure or Success, Confidence or Self-Doubt

For the past 50 years I have been working in the field of educational testing. Why, you might ask, would anyone spend a lifetime working with something that made everyone so apprehensive in school? Most of us are elated that we don't have experience the anxiety of those tests in our adult life! Who hasn't awoken in a panic from that dream in which the final exam is tomorrow and you haven't been studying?! Obviously, this is a very emotional realm. Again, who builds a career there and why!?

I did and for reasons related to that dream or at least to the emotions it triggers. As a result of personal experience and decades of professional study I have come to believe that the testing process can do and has done more harm to or good for student learning success and self-confidence than any other facet of the schooling process. Here's why:

The ongoing evaluations we experience as part of the schooling process form the very crux of our sense of ourselves as learners; they reside at the heart of the confidence or doubt that we carry forward as we move on toward life's ongoing learning challenges. Low performance shakes our confidence and can give rise to doubt.

Success offers encouragement and builds confidence. Depending on how we respond emotionally to our evaluation results, they can power us forward toward success or defeat us. Each student gets to decide which it will be for them in each classroom testing instance. That decision will be based on past learning success and, paradoxically, their ongoing school success depends on how they decide to respond. As it turns out, their teachers can help students respond in positive, productive ways regardless of their past record, allowing and encouraging them to power forward in their learning. This book is about how students and their teachers and parents can work as a team to maximize students' learning success, wise decision making, and confidence.

During my early schooling years, I endured some pretty embarrassing and even defeating testing experiences. They robbed me of my self-confidence as a learner both in school and beyond. I'll share details about those experiences as we go. The thing is, students are still living through these same kinds of potentially damaging testing experiences every day. Here's my really big deal point: In our society, we tend to believe that that's the way it's supposed to be! Hidden in plain sight is an almost universal belief that students won't be motivated to learn without the threat, intimidation, and anxiety of pending tests.

But hang on! Later in my learning life, I experienced other testing events that were used in different ways by my teachers. These weren't intended to intimidate. They were designed and used to help me; that is, to support my learning success. In fact, they did just that, helping to me to learn more better and faster; they rekindled some of the confidence I had lost in myself as a learner. I'll share those stories too. They defy the above-mentioned societal blind faith in the inherent power of the threat and intimidation of pending tests. These experiences aimed for an entirely different set of more positive, productive emotions surrounding the development as a learner. They became the *cause* of my learning success, not merely the measure of it.

I have spent my career trying understand the differences between these two kinds of assessment experiences. Why are those two sets of emotional dynamics—threat and anxiety versus the success and growing confidence—so different and how does each relate to learning success? If I could answer this question, I told myself, then we might come to understand how to bring positive, productive, confidence-building practices into the classroom *for every student all the time*. Had it not been for those productive turnaround testing experiences early in my life I would have missed out on life-changing experiences and opportunities.

Over the decades, my colleagues from around the world and I have worked diligently to deepen our collective understanding of this human side, the student side, the emotional side of the school testing. Among the most crucial insights to emerge from this work has been the realization that the use of day-to-day classroom assessments to instill confidence in students while they are learning is a far more powerful motivator than using the threat of pending tests to trigger anxiety, intimidation, and the fear of failure. Positive expectations trigger hope. Hope, in turn, gives the learner the optimism needed to invest what it takes to earn more academic success, even when it's really difficult. My intent in this book is to share the lessons we have learned about these dynamics *from the student's point of view*.

In essence, what we have learned is that *successful learning in any context is as much about emotion as it is about cognition*. Further, and in that same spirit, *good teaching is as much about managing student emotions as it is about managing instructional strategies*.

One very meaningful way for me to explain the emotions that accompany judgments of success or failure in school is to tell you how those dynamics played out for real in my learning life. My first experiences with these emotions came early, as I explained at the very beginning of Chapter 1. So, let me pick up my story from there. I will share more experiences from my childhood, in my military training,

college, graduate school and even into my professional life have added to the depth of my understanding of those judgments. I hope my retelling will trigger memories about your schooling experiences. The emotions we experienced—positive or negative—are being experienced by every student in every classroom today.

The French philosopher, Marcel Proust, reminds us that “a voyage of discovery consists not only of seeking new landscapes but of seeing through new eyes.” As it turns out, over those decades, I lived an astonishing voyage of discovery. The personal and professional landscapes I have seen and the new eyes through which I have learned to view them have yielded surprising insights. As a result, I see a future for our students that promises to help students face their fears, muster the hope needed to want to learn, take the risks of trying to learn even when it’s difficult, move on in the face of unexpected setbacks, and build on their successes to find fulfillment. Come back with me now as we explore those emotional dynamics starting with my earliest learning years.

EARLY LEARNING IN FISHING SCHOOL

I grew up in the small city of Canandaigua on a beautiful lake in western New York State. It’s 5:00 AM on a summer Saturday. I’m 5 years old. Dad just “rousted” (his word for it) my big brother and I out of bed for a day of fishing in a boat on Canandaigua Lake, one of the Finger Lakes of my home state. Anyway, I was already awake, having tossed and turned most of the night. Who could sleep?

Mom recounted that I used to be so excited on those fishing mornings that I would be visibly shaking with anticipation. I inherited that passion from Dad. As it has turned out, this gift of passion would extend far beyond fishing into all personal and professional corners of my life.

The first and perhaps most important thing I learned in the “fishing school” was the importance of optimism. An elderly angler friend named Granger reminded me that it’s

called “fishing” and not “catching” for a reason. Sometimes, he said, fish can be hard to find, let alone catch. That’s when you have to concentrate on remaining optimistic, he taught. Even when it’s tough out there on the water, you have to expect to succeed. If you lose hope, you might as well go home. He urged me to become a student of fishing, constantly picking up and actually taking notes on fishing tactics that worked. The more you learn about what works, Granger said, the easier it becomes to work through your bag of tricks to find that special something that works when you’re not catching. This made sense to me: To learn out how to catch fish, I had actually to catch some! In this sense, success (forgive the pun) spawns even more success. This meant I would have to fish a lot to learn how to succeed! No problem there! Oh, and by the way, hidden in these early experiences was the realization that passion is necessary but certainly not sufficient for success. You have to be willing to do the work of learning too. If you’ve given up hope, Granger told me, you’ll lose interest in doing that work.

Luckily, my teachers (Dad and Granger) helped me succeed enough in those early days that I stayed with it, learned a ton, and gained confidence. And the thing is, I came to love the process of trying to figure out how to catch fish on those tough days when they weren’t biting. The more I succeeded on those days, the more confident I became. I came to believe I could succeed every time I left the dock. Little did I know I was learning critical life lessons back then, lessons about far more than fishing.

But these were lessons I began to learn as a munchkin in “fishing school”. Then there was elementary school. It was hard for me to remain optimistic there; that is, to feel in control of my success, because I didn’t experience much of it. I told you my reading story already. I lost touch with Granger’s wisdom. I didn’t learn enough to learn how to learn. I didn’t experience enough success to figure out what actually worked. Eventually, I lost all confidence as a learner in school. I lost hope. The consequences of my decision to give up trying were both troubling and long lasting. Now let me tell you how my turn around from failure and doubt began.

IN SEARCH OF CONFIDENCE

After a brief trade school experience followed by a few months of work in that field, I enlisted in the Air Force. Had to. I drew a low lottery draft lottery number and so was headed into the military one way or another. So, Air Force it was, and I headed off to Basic Training in Texas—my first time away from home.

Little did I know that I was about to be shocked into adulthood, ready or not. As part of this transformation, I was about to discover that those early judgments that I had rendered about my mental prowess were wrong. As you read on, note how my Air Force technical trainers used the emotional dynamics of being evaluated to advance our confidence and learning success.

After completing basic training, I was ordered to proceed to aircraft mechanic school. This technical training program was divided into five segments. Segment one built our understanding of how airplane systems work—engines, electronics, hydraulics, avionics, airframe, etc. On day one, they informed us that, after three weeks of intense instruction, we would have to pass a 100-item multiple-choice final exam (here we go!) to qualify to go on to segment two. They told us we would only get one shot at passing this test.

Now here was the big surprise: The instructors did something I had never seen before in school: They gave us a copy of the final exam that had just been taken by the previous class. They said our exam would include different test items but our final would cover the same range and kinds of material. They didn't keep the key learning targets a secret the way my high school teachers often had. No surprises and no excuses. No need to "psych out" the teacher. So, each day at the end of instruction our last activity was to go into that previous exam on our own (not instructor) and dig out the test items that related to what we had studied that day. Then we would figure out the right answer to each test item and why the incorrect answers were wrong. This really helped us understand the material we were learning as well, in effect, as the learning expectations of

our instructors. Besides, this process always helped us find out whatever we still needed to work on. It really did build our (my) confidence. Please remember what my teachers did with that old test here to keep me in touch with the intended learning targets. This is HUGE and will come up again as we proceed into the later chapters of this book.

In the end, we took that final exam and I remember scoring near 100%. Two things were important about this: First, I had never before scored that high on any exam every in any context my entire life. I was stunned.

Second, my classmates did well too. This was new. In high school if this happened, the teachers would have been accused of being too easy, of promoting grade inflation, and for giving too many easy A grades. But here's what we have to realize: Unlike high school, the Air Force is not seeking to rank students in order of mechanical ability by the end of training as high school did. The mission of our technical instructors was different. They needed *every one* of us to come to believe we be really could fixing airplanes! Pilot's really want that—count on us. Our instructors' mission was to keep us believing in ourselves, trying to learn, and succeeding at it. Their assignment was to produce universal competence. They delivered. The emotional dynamics were different here: competence and confidence rule.

Does this sound anything like my Chapter 1 mention of federal educational policies calling for learning no child behind, every student succeeds, and every student ready for college or workplace training? Of course it does. Hold onto that thought. We will come back to it.

But back to my story: This little win during the first weeks of tech school lit a small flame of confidence in me that had not burned there previously.

With my foundation of airplane knowledge in hand, I went on to aircraft mechanic school segment number two. This time we were to learn how to use our new knowledge to diagnose problems in airplane systems: why is this engine not starting, the propeller not working properly, where

electrical shorts in the instrument panel? These instructors had mocked up simulations of the various airplane systems in which they could make things go wrong and our assignment was to learn how to find the problems so we could identify possible solutions. Once again on day one, they showed us specifically how to succeed. The instructors took turns triggering system problems for each other to diagnose and then thinking out loud through their own diagnostic process so we could see their reasoning processes. After three weeks of instruction, practice, and feedback, our final exam was to diagnose ten new problems we had not seen before. We had to diagnose seven of them correctly to pass. I got them all.

Two segments completed, two surprising (to me) successes! I was on a little winning streak! My confidence flame burned a little brighter. The Air Force had scared me twice, first during very challenging basic training and second by sending me off to a really tough technical school. At this point, I began to feel that I might actually succeed here.

There is no need to continue with details of my Air Force training this story. This kind of teaching leading success leading directly to confidence building went on for the rest of the program. Clear learning targets were shared with us at the beginning of each segment, along with concrete examples of poor and good performance. Guided practice was continuous based on really helpful feedback (these guys were really good coaches!). Continuously unfolding self-assessments helped us stay on track as we learned. Tough but fair final exams ended of each segment, showing very high rates of success for me and my teammates. These technical instructors were, and I'm sure still are, the very best.

At the end, I was riding a very real winning streak and, more importantly, I felt a kind of control over my own ability to learn that I had never felt during my school years. The thing is, success early on began to build on itself as I grew. The building confidence within me formed a foundation from which to continue to face the risks as I pursued more wins. Success spawns more success. At some point,

the occasional setback was no longer discouraging. It triggered determination to dip into my bag of tricks to find keys to success (Thanks, Granger!).

Obviously, this was a transformational personal experience for me, as impactful as the frightening events of high school final exams and state examinations. But, this time, fear and anxiety as the motivator were replaced by instructional practices specifically designed to build confidence, pride and growing competence. I was ready to head for the flight line and real airplanes and was darn proud of it.

As things turned out, this experience taught me lessons about truly effective teaching and learning in any educational context that would come into play again later in my career. But first, I had more school work ahead of me to overcome doubt and develop self-confidence as a learner

PUTTING CONFIDENCE TO WORK

After my military service, I decided to risk my admittedly fragile confidence as a learner in a tougher context: college. As one of my fishing buddies says, “you have to risk to win.” OK, let’s risk and see what happens: I enrolled for full-time study at the State University of New York (SUNY), Plattsburgh.

I had no idea where this was going. Mostly, I think I wanted to test the limits of my new confidence. This represented a huge risk for me. I had succeeded in one context but was totally naïve about this new one. The two environments—military tech school and university—are so different. I know that aircraft maintenance school isn’t rocket science . . . well no, actually it is . . . but still, it wasn’t academic and so I went in on shaky ground.

I went into this knowing two things: First, this was going to require really hard work on my part. But in my thinking, I had worked really hard in Air Force tech school and succeeded. I was confident in my work ethic.

Second, I needed a really big win right away in college. If I failed early, my confidence would be shattered and I would need to find a new life path. This represented high stakes for me. I had to sell my car to pay the first semester's tuition. So, it came down to succeed or hitchhike home.

There's a funny thing about confidence. We already have spoken of this: If you have lots of it as a result of past success, the occasional setback is not a problem. You just reload and power through. But if your confidence is thin, you may lack the inner reserves to keep going. It's just easier to give in and give up.

These things also are influenced by the stakes of failure. If you're strongly confident, you can take bigger risks—raise the stakes, if you will. But the combination of thin confidence and high stakes can make it harder to take the risk of trying—of taking on a challenge, let alone meeting it.

I went into Plattsburg with uncertainty bordering on doubt. I was ready to work but worried that my academic capabilities might not be strong enough to succeed; that is to meet the expectations of these “professors.” That was why I needed a strong win as fast as possible. I needed to earn the confidence needed to stay. That's the thing: confidence doesn't just appear in our thinking as if by magic; you have to work hard enough to believe that you really earned it. To refer back to fishing school, I needed “catch” some successes quickly to learn new insights about success.

It came in one of my first classes, “Experimental Psychology.” We each were to conduct and report on an experiment. I chose a study of visual perception. I am going to share a few details of this experience because it was crucial for my success/confidence equation. In my thinking, if I failed at this, I was gone. High stakes . . .

My study was challenging to design, interesting to conduct, and offered interesting results both for me, my classmates, and my professor. I studied the size of the blind spot in the human eye where the optic nerve connects into retina. This small spot has no light sensors. So, we ought to have a blank

spot in our visual field. But we don't. As it turns out our amazing human brain fills in for the blank spot for us using both of our eyes at the same time. But enough of the details. Anyway, I got an A in my first big college assignment. A win when I needed it desperately. This was a huge boost for my shaky confidence. I cannot tell you how important this success was in my life. It was foundational. I always am for the doubtful learner.

From then on over the next three years, I was able to build an academic record and foundation of the confidence needed to proceed through ever more advanced studies. As graduation approached, my professors suggested that I investigate graduate studies in psychology. While I had never considered such a path and had no idea what it even meant, I really had come to love the learning. Honestly (and I really mean this), by the end I have stopped paying attention to the grades I was receiving. I was having a ball independent of that. I investigated the graduate school options and, yup, here we go again: success leads to confidence leads to willingness to take more risks. These emotional dynamics are real!

On departure from Plattsburgh, I spent a year strengthening my academic record by completing a master's degree in Counseling Psychology while teaching introductory psychology to the freshman class of Springfield College in Massachusetts. From there, I accepted a fellowship for doctoral studies in educational psychology at Michigan State University. Events of the next four years at MSU would form the foundation of my career.

This was the major leagues of academic pursuits, requiring performance at levels far beyond anything I even understood, let alone had attained. Once again doubt arose in my thinking: Do I really belong here? There was a counseling center available for students at MSU. I made an appointment. My helper asked an interesting question to begin with: What was it about you that allowed you to be successful up until now? On reflection, I found myself quoting the lessons taught to me by old fishing buddy: his lessons about optimism, working hard, taking risks,

building on success, learning how to succeed and gaining confidence. As our conversation wound down, my counselor simply asked, “Do you think those lessons somehow deserted you while you were driving here?” Her simple point was that, if one has a record of success, then there is evidence upon which to stand to remain hopeful of the future. She suggested that I just give MSU a try and see what happens . . .

Hidden in plain sight behind this experience, I came to realize later, is the fact that the absence of any evidence of past success leaves one with no basis for hope. I will return to this below.

We all have an inner voice and, to succeed long term, we need that voice continuously to speak to our strengths. Accumulate evidence of success and believe it. We need continuously to tell ourselves, “I’ve got this. I AM in control here.” It is as if the mere process of saying those things to ourselves sends a kind of energy out into the world in front of us that allows that world to line up before us in the service of our ongoing success. Does that sound crazy? For me, this paragraph represents the very heart of this book. Please read it again.

LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING

I am not going to go into the details of my MSU course work, professors, or the challenges and successes I experienced. I kept up just fine and even excelled some. I studied in the general field of Educational Psychology with areas of concentration in educational measurement (school testing) and the psychology of learning.

But what I do want to share a few really important ideas I learned during my graduate studies. What follows are learning experiences that ultimately fed directly into the new pathways to student learning success that underpin the student success ideas that follow.

As part of my studies in the psychology of learning, I had the opportunity to study reading comprehension and how it works. As an aside, these lessons helped me understand the reading difficulties of my youth. But more importantly, they go to the matter of how reading comprehension and how learning in general happen in the human brain. I'll show you what I learned about this and then I will bring these ideas back to the very reason why I wrote this book. *I will show you how they underpin the emotional dynamics of helping every student believe in themselves as confident learners.*

To begin with, then, one can read with comprehension if, and only if, they bring two things to the table: First, they need to be able to decode the text (words and syntax) in order to lift the author's message from the page. Second, they must bring to the reading sufficient prior knowledge of the topic addressed by the author. In other words, we cannot comprehend text about something we do not already know something about. Both of these ingredients are essential.

Let me illustrate how they relate and what happens when one of them is missing. Please read the paragraph below it to see if you can comprehend it.

For some it is highly unsettling to come into close contact with them. It is far worse to gain control over and deliberately inflict pain on them. The revulsion caused by this punishment is so strong that many will not take part in it at all. But there is one group of people who seem to revel in the contact and the punishment, as well as the rewards associated with both. Members of this group share modes of dress, talk and deportment. Then there is another group of people who shun the whole enterprise—contact, punishment and rewards alike. Members of this group are as varied as all humanity. But there also is a third group not previously mentioned for whose sake attention in this activity is undertaken. They too harm their victims, though they do so without intention of cruelty. They simply follow their own necessities. Theirs is the cruelest punishment of all. Sometimes, but not always, they themselves suffer as a result.

All done? Please stop and think for a minute. How did you do? Most people have trouble getting this. Let me explain a bit more about reading as a mental process to show you why it's difficult to comprehend.

Reading experts tell us that we each carry in our own brain mental versions of the world as we understand it—this is made up of our own complex memories, ideas, and thinking. As the reader, we lift the author's message from the page (we decode words and sentences) and, in our thinking, we actively compare the author's message to our own mental version of the world as we understand it. If we get the author's message and can link it to what we know, we comprehend it. If we can't decode or don't have the proper background content knowledge, we can't compare them and see how they relate. In either case, as readers we control what happens in our own thinking. Comprehension is an active mental construction of meaning we carry out as readers.

In the above paragraph, you easily decoded the text. There were no unfamiliar words or sentence structures. But because of the way it was written, I deprived you of the essential link to the necessary background prior knowledge. Because I removed all of the proper nouns, you had no way to link the text back to what you already know. I'm going to give you that link now, and, as you reread, the meaning of this paragraph will be completely clear to you. You are about to watch yourself actually engaged in the very act of comprehending text that you missed before; that is, you will be constructing your own meaning in your brain. Ready? OK, this is a passage about using worms as bait for fishing. Please go back and reread.

How did you do this time? Better I bet. As you processed the text this time you were able to link the message to your own knowledge, visualizing what the author was talking about. Now you will understand why, for example, most of us can't read a book on nuclear physics with comprehension because we're lacking appropriate background knowledge. In the above illustration, you didn't get it because of the word trick I played on you. But in the real reading world

comprehension hinges, not on word tricks, but on whether we bring the actual appropriate prior knowledge to the reading.

Given this illustration of the mental act of comprehending reading material, here is an interesting insight: The way we all use our reading comprehension capabilities depends of why we are reading. Note again that you are in charge and control of the actual process of making the meaning in your own brain. For example, if we are reading an exciting novel for pleasure, we rely on our memory literally to visualize what's happening. This is what well-written and exciting "page burner" novels are all about. *But if we read for learning, we decide whether or how to change our existing mental versions of the world based on what the author is intending to teach us.* This is an actual mental construction you build as you study. You are in charge.

Hidden in this illustration of the psychology of reading is a major insight about learning itself: Just as reading comprehension is an active process in the thinking of the reader under the control of that reader so too is all learning an active process in the thinking of the learner under the control of each learner. Let's think more about this.

Consider once again that thing I said about "reading for learning"; that is, we compare our mental versions of the world as we understand it to the author's message in the mental process of comprehending. As we read to learn, we change our understanding based on the new insights provided by the author as we read. Remember how I said that if I don't bring the appropriate prior knowledge to the text then, in effect, the distance between our current understanding and the author's message will just be too far (if I lack appropriate prior knowledge), I won't be able to "get it"? Well, this effect generalizes.

In any learning context, if I am the learner wanting to learn something new and my teacher makes the learning target appear to me to be within reach for me (not too much of a gap *in my opinion*), then I am likely to try and I probably will succeed at narrowing the gap; that is, at learning. But even

if I want to learn it, yet I find the target to be a reach too far for me (gap too wide), I am more likely to give up. *Note who gauges the gap and judges whether or not to keep trying here (who's in control of likelihood of success). It is me, the learner.*

The important dynamic here is my sense of whether to go for it or not is based on my own interpretation of my chances of learning success. If I have experienced success recently and my confidence cup is full, even if it's a stretch, I just might still take the risk, invest the energy, and go for it. But I have failed recently or frequently over time, I may have lost confidence in my learning ability and so I may give up more easily. The generalization here is that the decision to go for it or not turns, at least in part, on *my judgement* of chances of my success—my confidence.

One key to learning success is for teachers to keep learners believing that success is within reach for them. Keep their confidence up. Only then will they stay invested in their learning. The whole idea for those who teach or learn in any context is to manage the gap between old and new so as to maximize learning success. Success builds confidence in the learner and the inner reserves needed to continue to take the risk of trying.

This leads us to really big deal question: How might we keep students believing that success is within reach for them? How can we maintain their confidence? Remember how my Air Force instructors did it? They used an old exam to help us see the learning target from the start and to help us watch the gap closing between us and the learning target. They showed us how to self-assessment as we were growing to create our own record of ongoing learning success to instill confidence that success is within reach. This left us feeling increasingly in control of the likelihood of our own learning success long term. The foundation of all of this was our ongoing self-assessment of our learning as it was happening.

The best way to support productive learning is to promote and build on success. Catch more fish and you learn how to succeed at it. Succeed more and you come to believe in

yourself—confidence. As confidence grows and so does effort. The bottom line here is that learning is not merely an intellectual experience. It is emotional as well.

EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS IN A NUTSHELL

In my studies of the emotions of success and failure I found very helpful insights in the writings of Harvard business professor, Kanter, in her 2004 book *Confidence: How winning streaks and losing begin and end*. Professor Kanter observed the dynamics of winning and losing among prominent athletic teams and Fortune 500 corporations. I was stunned to see how her conclusions generalized to the context of schools and education. She speaks of confidence, not as a fixed emotion but as evolving tendencies, patterns or trajectories. In essence, success or failure can become self-fulfilling prophesies. “Success makes it easier to view events in a positive light, to generate optimism . . . easier to aim high . . . easier to find the energy to work hard because it looks as if hard work will pay off.” (p. 29). In effect, success can give rise to (read: *cause*) even more success. On the other hand, she points out, “losing streaks begin in response to a sense of failure, and failure makes people feel out of control. It is just one more step to a pervasive sense of powerlessness, and powerlessness corrodes confidence.” (p. 97). This is exactly what happened to me as I struggled to learn to read.

These are very personal dynamics. Based on their own record of learning success (or the lack thereof) as reflected in their own interpretation of their assessment, students will approach new learning in any context somewhere along a continuum from very confident to very doubtful about the probability of their future learning success. If they come to the new learning challenge carrying extreme doubt, this thinking probably will lead them to a “why even try?” conclusion and obvious results. But, even if this struggling student musters the courage needed to try anyway, she or he may approach the new challenge under an umbrella of stress and anxiety which, as we have established, are the enemies of learning and performance.

The only way to turn these struggling students around is for them to experience what they regard as at least a small success that they can attribute to their own efforts. If this kind of success is not forthcoming for them, **they are doomed**. Unavoidable failure triggers more hopelessness. However, if they quickly experience at least a mini-success, faint hope might emerge leading to a little more investment and a bit more success. The result can be the opening of a possible pathway to success and a tinge of confidence. Optimism might grow in them. Practice might become more persistent. A winning streak might form, raising the likelihood this learner will withstand other setbacks on their way and ultimately achieve success. What was the foundation of this progress? Please answer.

On the other hand, if our learner approaches new learning with confidence, he or she is likely to jump in with enthusiasm. Immediate and persistent effort is likely to lead to success, that reinforces confidence, risk taking, strong effort and even more success. Over time, these learners will build the inner reserves needed to power through unexpected setbacks. But if an unexpected failure is so strong as to crack their confidence and cause it to waver, as above, an immediate success that the learner feels is due to their own work can patch the crack. Their winning streak can continue. Again, I ask what was the foundation of this progression? Please answer.

The question we are addressing together in this book is: what could or should be the role of the classroom assessment process in instilling confidence or doubt? Should we merely think of testing in school as the dipstick used to judge success or failure at particular point in time and, having judged, we move on? Clearly, this has been our tradition in the winner vs. loser grading for sorting context; assessment for triage into the winner or loser column. Or might we weave assessment into the teaching and learning process as a continuous source of dependable evidence of strengths and areas in need of improvement so students and teachers can plan learning experiences needed to bring students to their desired levels of competence? Should assessment merely be thought of as measure of achievement or might it also *be a cause* of that achievement;

assessment for learning? As it turns out, it can serve both purposes. Let's discuss how.

Teacher/Parent Teamwork Suggestions

I recommend that team members reflect on, collect, and share your own stories from your experiences in school or those of your children or grandchildren that resulted in a loss or strengthening of confidence or that impacted on student learning. Share your stories looking for the general insights they offer. Carry your stories and insights forward for use in discussions involving others or in deliberations about actions to be taken. They will serve as valuable resources in helping school leaders and policy makers understand how and why to use assessment FOR learning.

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