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LEARNING MATTERS

Stretch, Support, Share, Innovate

Newsletter: *Courage*

INNOVATE Courage



Courage is the ability to face difficulty or uncertainty without being overcome by fear. It has its root in the Latin *cor* meaning *heart* because it encompasses inner strength and the ability to speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings.

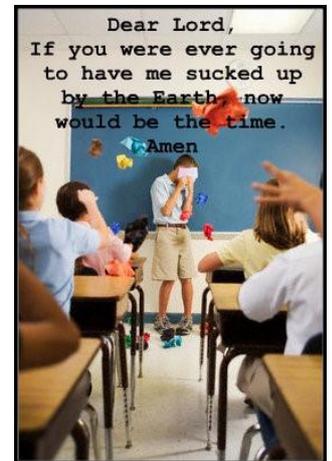
Aristotle suggests that courage is the most important virtue because it makes all the others possible. It is also the most important because so many outcomes depend on us having a good dose of it. It's the one that seems the most personal, or the most embarrassing because **trying out courage means exposing ourselves to mockery, refusal or disapproval.**

What does it feel like to be a learner?

Many of us lack courage in everyday situations: whether it's taking charge of the pen during INSET and risking ridicule by spelling simple words incorrectly; or dreading being the one to feedback in front of everyone after discussion in case you stutter; or applying for a new post that seems just out of reach. These feel like hugely risky situations, and in all likelihood we may find ourselves rolling the pen towards someone who looks literary, avoid eye contact with the questioner and put off filling in the application form rather than find the courage to overcome the fear.

What about our students?

Everyday our students have to find the courage to become scholars. They need courage to use academic language in front of their friends; courage to seek help and risk laughter from peers; courage to try hard and then fail; courage to try to be creative and then hand their raw ideas in to a someone they don't know all that well; courage to risk an answer after being asked on the spot with a hands down question; courage to wear PE kit when they feel low about their body image... the list is endless.



Can we help?

It might not be possible to teach courage, but we can inspire it. Sharing stories of everyday courage – including your own experiences – gives students a reminder that trying to do the right thing, even if we fail, makes learning and living more positive.

Use the AGS Learner boards to start a conversation about courage. You don't need to provide the answers – a supportive atmosphere ideal for nurturing courage will quickly develop as students realise that everyone experiences the same fear.

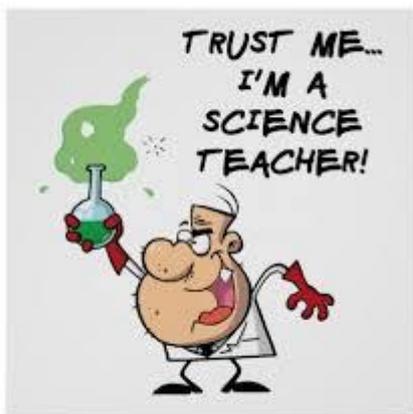
Use collaboration time – as little as a minute – during hands down questioning: a chance to check with a colleague is often all it takes for a shy student to find the courage to chance an answer.

Sign up to learn something new. There's nothing like experiencing fear to be in a position to talk about courage.

STRETCH Courage

Courage in the learning environment is about fostering an environment where students have the confidence to try out new ideas and make mistakes. For students who are generally successful and tend to grasp concepts with ease the prospect of being wrong can be daunting. It is important to nurture trust between both student and teacher and within the peer-group.

An atmosphere of trust will enable students to experiment with ideas and reflect on how to improve, become more accepting of mistakes and move out of their comfort zone.



In her article "If learning involves risk-taking, teaching involves trust-building", Marilla Svinivki suggests how this might be achieved: [Risk-Taking, Trust-Building](http://podnetwork.org/content/uploads/V1-N2.pdf) (<http://podnetwork.org/content/uploads/V1-N2.pdf>)

Model how to take risks:

By the way you handle errors and wrong turns, you demonstrate to students that even experts make mistakes.

Exude organisation and competence:

When the students are convinced that their teacher is "in control" and knows where the class is going, they will feel more comfortable about taking risks. They will be confident that if they make a mistake or go off on a wrong tangent, they will be brought back on target. Being well-organised and solidly grounded in the content so

you can handle any eventuality, will support this conviction.

Minimize the pain of making an error:

Allow students to work together on new ideas. That way their initial errors will be tempered by the responses of their colleagues before being shared with the teacher.



SHARE Ownership, Motivation, Resilience, Innovation, Courage

If you are wondering how well the message is getting through to students see the following email from a year 10 student to Mrs Wilson:

"Hi Miss,

Attached is my homework, action points for the Breathing and Respiration test. It must have fallen out my book so, as a solution I went the extra mile in being a fantastic ags learner and took ownership of my learning by being resilient in picking myself up when I left my work at home, courageous in emailing you about my work instead of shying away from it, innovative in coming up with new ways to enhance my learning even if my work was left at home and motiveive by motivating myself to write this email by telling myself if I write this I can learn extra biology as a reward :)

Ps: I also found out that motiveive is a word :D"

SUPPORT Courage

What is the right thing to say when a child's answer is wrong?

It's not hard to deal with incomplete answers or tangents but what about the responses that reveal serious gaps in knowledge and understanding? At these times we tend to remind children to listen or to stop doing something, such as doodling, chatting or playing.

What children often stop doing, though, is answering questions.

It would appear that too many children are going through school thinking of it as a competition rather than an opportunity – the golden opportunity to make some mistakes with impunity, to experiment, to explore and, most importantly, to think, before all the responsibilities of adulthood crowd in. Of course, we want students to experience success and achieve their goals but equally we want them to develop self-knowledge, realism and resilience.

These things come from having the courage to try and, sometimes, to fail.

As adults we are highly specialised and yet we fail all the time – financially, in relationships, as parents and in our working lives. Life is a constant stream of exasperating personal and professional challenges from which no one is exempt. It seems that developing an understanding of how we handle unwanted news – **knowing that we can handle it** – is so much more useful to us than focusing on how we celebrate the good; it's a much deeper seam to mine. As learners, our limitations, differences and struggles should be acknowledged, explored and embraced rather than avoided. But how?

What if teachers were to afford children in school the same considerations offered to adults in the context of professional training?

In CPD sessions, adults are often given reference materials (the answers) in presentations, they are rarely singled out for questioning, they tend not to be assessed in a public forum, and they would be rightly offended by personal comments about their organisation, bathroom habits, fidgeting or learning style.

Put simply, when training adults we show respect for their fear of failure and we acknowledge their experience and their pre-existing knowledge, whatever that may be.

This kind of respect children hope for and recognise but rarely expect and have little power to demand.

If the new Act and the new SEN Code are to succeed in placing the needs, wishes and futures of children with SEND at the heart of schools, we need to address this reality by ensuring that due consideration is given and **this fear of failure is dispelled once and for all**. If we are going to be good teachers of children with SEND, we have to find the thin line that exists between a challenge and a risk. On that line we have to find the motivation and the courage to try, whatever the outcome.

A great teacher recognises and respects what it feels like not to understand. Find out more on the [Courage to Fail](https://senmagazine.co.uk/articles/articles/senarticles/the-courage-to-fail) site.

(<https://senmagazine.co.uk/articles/articles/senarticles/the-courage-to-fail>)