Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

COURAGE BLOOMS

"The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is implanted within each of us."

— Audre Lorde

OVERVIEW

Students describe situations at school that require courage, use mood meters to identify and name the emotions they experience when acting courageously, and represent their courageous acts and emotions as "courage blooms" on a classroom "tree."

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To celebrate acts of courage throughout the school year
- To scaffold ways in which students can choose to act with courage
- At the beginning or end of a unit/topic to actively reflect on building a brave space

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Handout or poster of a Mood Meter or a Mood Meter App
- Coloring pens and pencils
- Sample Courage Bloom outside and inside
- Sheets of foldable construction paper or card stock
- Pre-drawn large scale outline of a tree with multiple branches to display on the classroom wall
- Optional: a basket with pre-folded "courage blooms" to add throughout the school year

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify and name emotions associated with acts of courage
- Note a range of events at school that require personal courage
- Celebrate acts of bravery that can contribute to creating a brave and safe spaces in the classroom

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Courage
- Kindness and Compassion
- Empathy
- Forgiveness
- Humility
- Growth Mindset

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness and Relationship Skills
- Ethical Decision Making and Social Responsibility

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to recall a time when you engaged in an act of personal courage in your classroom.
- Select an instance that you are comfortable sharing with your students. For example you might say: "*I sometimes feel anxious or afraid when faced with a difficult situation or decision. Often, others around me are not aware of the range of emotions that I am feeling. For example, when I began teaching a new unit last week, I was very anxious that I might not be able to explain the content—and that my students might not pass their exam. When I stood up in front of the class to teach, I paused first to take a deep breath and to*

notice and to name the emotions that I felt (nervous, frightened and anxious). At that moment, I looked out and focused my attention on my students who were unaware of what I was feeling. Immediately, I recognized that the earlier anxiety had faded. In this short pause, I found strength and I began to feel calm, secure, and brave enough to begin our learning together. I proceeded with our lesson plan. Perhaps, you may identify with my experience."

- Consider how you felt before and after this event by referencing a [Mood Meter](#).
- Familiarize yourself with the range of emotions displayed in a [Mood Meter](#) as you prepare to share with your students during the activity.
- Create your "courage bloom"(or leaf) using a double-sided foldable (see sample [outside](#) and [inside](#)).
    - Take a sheet of paper/index card and fold it in half (you may cut it into a shape of a leaf)
    - On top of the inside fold, name the emotion(s) you felt prior to acting with courage (e.g., frightened or alienated).
    - On the bottom half of the inside fold, note a brief description or illustrate (draw) the event associated with your personal act of courage.
    - On the outside of the foldable, note the emotion(s) you felt after acting with courage (e.g., proud or at ease).
- Identify a space to feature your "Tree of Courage Blooms." Be creative!
- Post your foldable as a model bloom (or leaf) for the tree so that you can share the emotions you experienced before and after your act of courage.
- Finally, gather the "Courage Blooms" materials to distribute for your student activity.

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

- Tell students:
    - *Let's take a moment to connect ourselves to this space.*
    - *Look around the room and pay attention to any five items that you notice.*
    - *Now, if you are comfortable, lower your gaze or close your eyes, and bring your attention to any four sounds that you are drawn to. Next, bring your awareness, with gratitude, to what is holding you up—your feet, the chair.*
    - *Now, together, let's take three soft belly breaths, inhaling through our noses the energy in the room that grounds and connects us. Slowly, after each inhale, we will exhale any thoughts, feelings, or emotions that no longer serve us right now.*
    - *During today's activity, as we think about our emotions, you can choose to focus on your senses or on your breath at any time—if you feel it might be calming.*
- Next, provide the following directions and modeling:
    - *Today we will use a [Mood Meter](#) to identify and name the emotions associated with acts of personal courage—how we have responded to challenging or difficult situations that have required bravery in the classroom.*
    - *The Mood Meter has four sections to reflect the intensity of different emotions. Identifying and labeling emotions can help us become more aware of how our emotions change and even how our emotions can affect our actions or inactions.*
- Present students with an image of [Mood Meter](#) to review. Make certain that all words are understood.
- Share your personal story of courage identified when preparing for this activity.

- Next tell your students:
  - *Think about a situation when you acted courageously despite feeling fearful or anxious in our classroom. (Note: you may want to provide a few minutes for your students to write or reflect silently.)*
  - *Now, let's turn and talk in pairs. Share a time when you acted courageously.*
- Model how to make a foldable "courage bloom," encouraging your students to be creative in their own approach.. See a sample bloom, referring to the example in the *Reflection Before the Practice*.
- *Distribute the student* materials including paper, colored pencils, and an optional Mood Meter handout.
- Direct students to create their own "courage blooms" while drawing from the range of emotions depicted in the Mood Meter.
- Invite students to post their "courage blooms" on branches of the "Tree of Courage Blooms."

EXTENSIONS

- Invite students to a gallery walk to view and reflect upon the "courage blooms," asking:
  - *What do you notice?*
  - *What do you wonder?*
- Keep a basket of blank foldables and encourage students to grow additional "courage blooms" whenever they engage in a personal act of courage.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Seek informal student feedback to learn from their experiences. For example, you might ask:
  - *Were you aware of any sensations that arose in your body while you created your Courage Bloom?*
  - *Did you engage in a breathing practice at any time? If so, when and why?*
  - *How might we involve others in considering this practice outside of our classroom/school?*
  - *As our Tree of Courage Blooms expands, how can we pay attention to it throughout the school year?*
- Consider ways in which small acts of personal courage may be brought to light and celebrated in the classroom by you and your students over time.

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Researchers differentiate between two types of courage. While general courage is defined as the confident or seemingly brazen actions perceived by others, personal courage involves actions that require bravery in the minds of the actors themselves. In one study of 250 undergraduates, researchers found that students associated personal courage with both fear and personal vulnerabilities (such as struggles with their emotions).

Therefore, being able to recognize, understand, label, and express emotions are all important skills that can guide our decisions and actions (including courageous ones), and practicing these skills may lead to the best outcome for ourselves and others. Research suggests that working with tools like the Mood Meter (featured in this practice) can help educators and students become more aware of their feelings, supporting the development of emotional intelligence skills.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This practice recognizes, celebrates, and potentially encourages acts of *personal courage* which may otherwise go unnoticed by students (such as overcoming a fear of public speaking). As we support students in practicing personal courage in school, they may learn to better cope with emotionally challenging situations while striving to reach their personal and academic goals.

For example, students who engage in "academic courage" learn to persevere in learning despite their fear, which can lead to more positive academic outcomes. In fact, a more flexible mindset may lead to academic risk-taking that improves students' performance while boosting their social competence and overall well-being. Finally, when we ask students to note and label courageous actions they have already taken, this may help them to feel a greater sense of agency in school and in life.

SOURCE

Brackett, M. A. (2018). The emotional intelligence we owe students and educators. *Educational Leadership, 76*(2), 12-18.

Pury, C.L.S., Kowalski, R. M., & Jana Spearman, J. (2007). *Distinctions between general and personal courage*. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 2*(2), 99-114.