Learning about learned helplessness: gritty teachers can teach grit
https://tinyurl.com/CARS2018-LH
WELCOME!

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- PhD Psychology
- >$85,000 in debt
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WHO’S IN THE HOUSE?

• I am a K-3 teacher.
• I am a Grades 4-5 teacher.
• I teach secondary school students.
• I am an administrator.
• I am a pessimist.
• I am an optimist.
LEARNING TARGETS

PWBAT:
• Describe the construct of learned helplessness and its various manifestations
• Identify the antecedents and consequences of learned helplessness
• Discover LH’s antidote- Learned Optimism
• Examine how teachers can use 10 LH-busting techniques in their classrooms
AN EXPERIMENT...

How was learned helplessness induced?

What were two major LH symptoms you observed?
Def. 1 Refers to the passive resignation produced by repeated exposure to negative events that are perceived to be unavoidable.
ACTIVITY I
Evolving LH Definitions

Turn ‘N Talk:
Pick three critical themes common to majority of the definitions.
POLITICS: People are becoming discouraged with the political process and not turning out to vote because nothing gets done.

WEIGHT LOSS: There are so many weight loss programs that are ineffective that they discourage people.

STUDENTS: Students with poor study skills or are using ineffective strategies start to give up on their classes and resign themselves to poor grades.

MANY EXAMPLES!
LEARNED HELPLESSNESS...

-can begin very early in life
-well-documented among institutionalized infants and children
-inadequate mothering, lack of appropriate adult responses while growing up
-may have a genetic component
SYMPTOMS OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS...

- Passivity
- Easily giving up
- Procrastination
- Decreased problem-solving ability
- Frustration
- Low self-esteem

From: VeryWell Psychology
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

ABILITY

MOTIVATION

TASK VALUE

SELF-EFFICACY

OPTIMISTIC EXPECTATION

Ulosoy & Duc (2013); Cloninger (2013)
Learned Helplessness: The Failure Cycle

Students with a history of school failure are at particular risk of falling into the learned helplessness cycle:

1. The student experiences repeated academic failures...
2. ...which undermine self-confidence in their intellectual abilities.
3. The student begins to doubt that their efforts will overcome their learning difficulties...
4. ...causing that student to reduce efforts toward academic achievement...
5. ...resulting in continued failure...
6. ...and reinforcing the student’s belief that they lack the ability to learn.

Learned helplessness → Self-Defeating Behaviors

- Actions that enable people to maintain a particular view about themselves, but which lead to certain consequences the individuals would have preferred to avoid.
- Examples: procrastination, choosing to suffer, work avoidance
THE ROLE OF POVERTY

• Poor individuals play lotteries in great numbers: “It is the only way to get ahead.”
• Generational poverty passes on learned helplessness
• 50-70% of thinking → behavior is influenced by the environment
• Poverty → higher risks for trauma
WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE NOT POOR?

Possibilities…

• Lack of purpose and drive
• Perfectionism
• Deficits in recognizing values of perseverance and perspective
• Parenting may emphasize instant gratification or protection from failure
• Failure to recognize that learning and performance is NOT the same.
ACTIVITY 2: STUDENT BEHAVIOR SCALE

• Think about a student in your class with “potential” LH
• Check the Student Behavior Scale (some are reverse scored items)
• With a partner, identify 5 behaviors that may apply to this child.
Learned helplessness is related to a person’s explanatory style (Cherry, 2017).

- Explanatory style describes an individual's characteristic style of explaining events.
- Explanatory style is part self-talk and part self-perception (Scott, 2017).
- A pessimistic ES is linked to increased LH risks.
PESSIMISTIC VS. OPTIMISTIC

How do you explain bad events? Good events?

PERSONALIZATION
- INTERNAL
- EXTERNAL

PERMANENCE
- TEMPORARY
- ALL THE TIME

PERVASIVENESS
- GLOBAL
- SPECIFIC
ATTRIBUTION THEORY: 3 DIMENSIONS

1. Locus: Internal or External
2. Stability (Duration): Stable, fixed trait or unstable, variable
3. Controllability: Uncontrollable or controllable
ATTRIBUTION THEORY

• Humans intrinsically look for causes, or ways to explain events.
• Perceived cause is more important than actual cause. Perceived cause influences future behavior.
• After an event: Feel, Think, Feel, Act

I have been getting bad grades in French…I am just not good at languages. I am not going to study much for the next test – it is pointless!

I did really well on that Math quiz. As long as I study the notes and do the practice problems, I’m sure I can succeed in that class. I think I am going to major in a course that involves Math…
"I have always gotten good grades in Math. I am really good at it."
'I didn’t do well on that Biology test because I studied parts that weren’t on the test! I was just unlucky that the questions were not what I studied…'
FEEL, THINK, FEEL, ACT

### CAUSAL DIMENSION
- **LOCUS**
  - Pride
  - Self-Esteem
- **STABILITY**
  - Helplessness
  - Hopefulness
- **CONTROLLABILITY**
  - Personal Reactions
    - Shame
    - Guilt
  - Other’s Reactions
    - Anger
    - Pity, sympathy

### AFFECT
- Pride
- Self-Esteem
- Helplessness
- Hopefulness
- Personal Reactions
  - Shame
  - Guilt
- Other’s Reactions
  - Anger
  - Pity, sympathy

### BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES
- Individual’s behavior
  - Choice of behavior
  - Level of effort
  - Persistence
- Other’s behavior
  - Willingness to help
  - Rewards or Sanctions

*Adapted from Weiner (1994, as presented by Jones, 2014)*
PART II: WHAT CAN EDUCATORS DO?
MASTERY-ORIENTED MINDSET

Twelve- to 19-month-olds averaged 2,368 steps and 17 falls per hour! Do we average and include the falls?
WHAT CAN EDUCATORS DO?

1. Consistently set high expectations but with “remakes and redo’s.” 2nd chances to mastery communicates “I believe you have control over your performance.”

Don’t we get retakes for SAT, ACT, GRE, CSET, Bar Exam, Driver’s License Test…? 

Handout: Student Request Form for a Re-Do/Retake
2. Eliminate spoon-feeding and allow for productive struggle.

a. Increase wait time → struggle time.
   - Wait time 1 & wait time 2
a. Do not accept “just so” answers.
b. Do not give a pass for “I don’t know’s”
c. Do not make excuses for students.

The human mind prefers to be spoon-fed with the thoughts of others, but deprived of such nourishment it will, reluctantly, begin to think for itself - and such thinking, remember, is original thinking and may have valuable results.

— Agatha Christie —
Where are you in the ‘Hierarchy of Prompting’?

Start at the middle!
LESSEN PROMPTING BY PROVIDING AN EXEMPLAR

• Provide an exemplar.
• Analyze an exemplar before you set students to work. Assess it together on a rubric or compare “good” and “great” so students can aim for “great” from the start.
• Make sure they know what “good” looks like!
3. Monitor students’ attribution style.

**Teachers should focus here**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Controllable</td>
<td>Uncontrollable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Long-term effort</td>
<td>Aptitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>Skills/knowledge</td>
<td>Health on day of exam</td>
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Reflection Exit Tickets

“How did I perform today and why?”

Jones (2014)
4. “Unlearn” learned helplessness by providing situations where failure is impossible.

Open-ended questions…abundant resources…many possible answers…

Event → Feel → Think → Act
PARALLELS TO TREATING PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION...

• Encourage depressed people to get back into life. Ex: not willing to leave home.
• Small steps. (Go out to park, then movie, then mall.)
• Increase difficulty.
• Show them they do have control over their lives.
• Motivational, learning and emotional gains.
5. **Use questions for learning.**

What else could you try?
Have you experimented with another idea?
Why do you think this is true?
How could we break this task so it becomes easier?

Offer “mastery” experiences → unlearn helplessness.
4 THINGS BEFORE I HELP...

Did you ask anyone else?
Did you Google it?
Did you look for a tutorial on YouTube?
Can you make an intelligent guess?
5. USE COLD CALL!

But before you do:

– Turn and talk
– Stop and jot
– Write and reflect
– K, W, Q

Say: “There are multiple correct answers to this…”
6. Increase predictability.

Whenever possible, students should know the “content, duration, and/or consequences of future tasks or events.”

Predictability $\rightarrow$ Sense of control
Does this board inspire confidence or anxiety?
Do I know what is expected of me?
How can we make our boards better?
7. Address cognitive distortions.

Cognitive distortions — where your mind puts a ‘spin’ on the events you see and attaches a not-so-objective interpretation to what you experience — happen all the time. -common among people with learned helplessness.
ACTIVITY...

• Review the 8 cognitive distortions (handout) or unhelpful thinking styles.
• Circle the kind of thinking you engage the most.
• Box the kind of thinking you think your student engage the most.
• At the signal, connect with two other people and compare/contrast what you circled and boxed.
8. PRACTICE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY.

• Emotional check ins.
• Practice and model gratitude.
• Do nothing → literally.
• Practice and model positive self-talk.
• Self-affirmation
WAYS TO CONNECT – FOUR AT THE DOOR!

1. Mouth: Say student’s name
2. Eyes: Eye contact, smile
3. Hand: handshake, fist bump, high five
4. Heart: *How is your dad doing? How was the game yesterday?*

9. MAKE GOAL SETTING PART OF YOUR LESSON ROUTINE.

- Explicit communication of goal
- Explicit mention of success criteria (model or exemplar)
- Aggressive “selling” of task value
- Self-monitoring scales

Just the act of setting goals will help you overcome the feeling that you have no control over your future. The energy and thought process required to set goals will get your mind thinking in a whole new way.
10. PRACTICE REALISTIC OPTIMISM.

From “What if” thinking to “So what…”

Attitude is a choice. One of the most important choices you make each day is the attitude you’ll have.
Thank You!