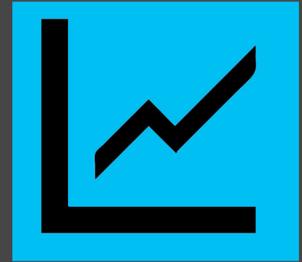
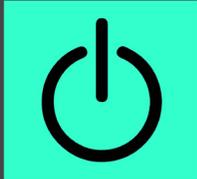


Yet - Grow



“Worse” -
for - Better

“Josh Stories” on the Art of Learning



Ready - Ease



Reach - Rest



Okay - Rocky



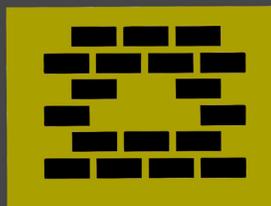
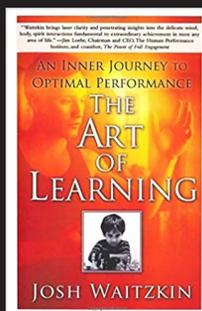
Past - Past



Problem -
Discover

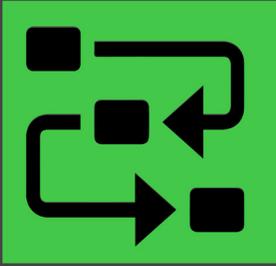


The Art of Learning project



No - Walls





Yet - Grow

Common Learning Scenario:

Whether or not we think something is possible for us

To be or not to be “good” at math

Value Process Before Results TAOL pp. 30 - 31

Something strange happens when we think of ourselves as “good” or “bad” at something in a fixed way. Here is the story that Josh tells in *The Art of Learning*. It comes from a researcher named Dr. Dweck, who studies how children learn and grow.

She talked with children about math to see if they said things like, “Math isn’t my thing,” or “I’m smart at math.” Those were children who had a fixed sense of themselves. Other children had a sense of how they could change. They said things like, “I can do it because I worked hard at it.”

All the children were given easy math problems. Because the problems were so easy, all the children got them right. Next, they were given problems that were way too difficult. None of the children got these math problems right.

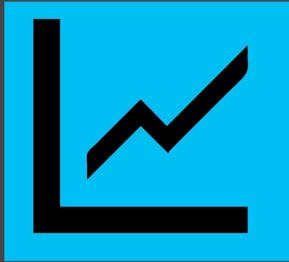
The hard problems were very stressful for the children who thought that they were either “good” or “bad” at math in a fixed way. If they thought that they were “good” before, then what does it mean that they can’t solve these problems? Because they could only think of themselves in a fixed way, they concluded that they must actually be “bad” at math.

All the children were then given easy math problems again. Those problems still felt easy to the children who had a “growth-mindset.” But it was a different story for the children who thought of themselves as a “fixed-me” (who could only be “good” or “bad” at something). They had lost all their confidence in themselves, so they struggled even with the kinds of problems that had been so easy for them before.

It’s been shown that grades go down for students who thought they were “good” at math but then had even just one experience of failure. It’s also been shown that grades go up when teachers help their students realize that they aren’t “good” or “bad” at math but can grow and get better by working on it.

I can’t do something.

Does this mean I’ll never be able to do it because I’m a “fixed-me”? Or does this mean I just can’t do it—yet?



**“Worse” -
for - Better**

Common Learning Scenario:

Whether or not to take on a harder challenge

The boy who hadn't lost in a year

Investment in Loss TAOL pp. 36 - 37

When Josh was a kid, his father always had him play opponents who were better than him. But that wasn't the case with a father and son that Josh met in Arizona.

Josh was there to talk to a big group of young chess players and to play them in a “simul.” (That's where Josh would play 20 - 50 other opponents all at the same time!) Josh was picked up at the airport by the man who was in charge of the event. All during the car ride, the man bragged about his son who “hadn't lost a chess game in over a year.”

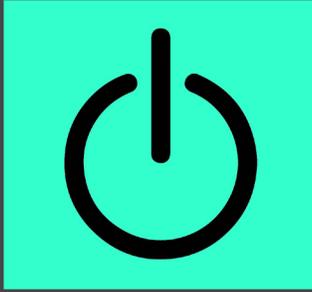
Josh knew right then that the boy would probably never grow into a really good chess player. He explains that it's like how a hermit crab has to grow. The crab is all safe in its shell that fits just right for it—for a while. Then for the crab to keep growing, it has to find a new shell. It's scary to get out of the shell we are in and try a new one. But it's what we must do to grow. Josh expected that the man's son would be like a “starved hermit crab,” stuck in a shell that was way too small for him.

Josh was right. The boy had been praised so much for his “genius” at chess that he was afraid to play anyone who might be better than him. He was known as the best in his school. He was like a “chess god” to his school buddies! But he had a lot to learn compared to the best young chess players in the country. He mostly just played with his father, who was no challenge at all, or a few friends and opponents that he knew he could beat.

The boy didn't want to play Josh at the “simul.” He didn't want to take instruction from Josh. He avoided chess all during Josh's visit, because he didn't want to lose in order to learn. The boy didn't want to get out of his shell of “being the best” so he could grow and become better.

When I take on a harder challenge, I do “worse.”

If I keep taking on the harder challenge, what will happen? If I back away from the harder challenge (because my “fixed” me doesn't want to be “bad” at something), what will happen?



Ready - Ease

Common Learning Scenario:

How to be ready to do our best before a challenge

On the importance of playing catch

Building Your Trigger TAOL pp. 187 - 191

A businessman came up to Josh after one of his talks on performance. He told Josh about how he wasn't doing as well as he could in important meetings. The businessman often felt distracted. He'd seen how some athletes would have something they always did right before an important game. They might always listen to a favorite song. They might do the same movements or stretches. They might even meditate.

The businessman had tried all of these things. It just didn't seem to work for him!

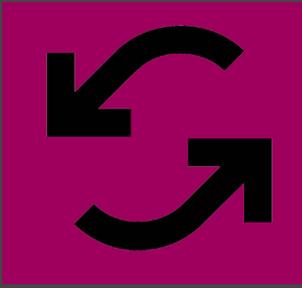
Josh asked him to think about when he felt at ease and focused in his everyday life. The businessman thought for a moment. Then he said it was when he was playing catch with his son. He loved doing that. When he was just throwing a ball back and forth with his son, it was like all the usual distraction and stress went away.

So Josh encouraged the businessman to play ball with his son and link that feeling with some other activities, like meditation, stretching, and listening to music, that he could do "on the go." (Because the man couldn't take his son with him to work and play ball before every big meeting!) The businessman began having meetings where he could feel totally present and handle things much better. He eventually could just do a few minutes of meditation, a few stretches, and just think of a song, and he was ready.

Before talking with Josh, the businessman had thought about playing catch as "taking a break" because it felt so easy. He didn't realize how important that feeling of ease really was! It was a feeling he could come to know. With practice, it was a feeling he could get in touch with right before any big challenge.

Sometimes I really want to do my best. I want to be ready.

Is there some activity where I already feel a sense of ease and being "in the moment"? Can I get to know that feeling better and link it to a routine? Right before the challenge, can I get in touch with that feeling of inner-ease?



Reach - Rest

Common Learning Scenario:

How to do our best over a long challenge or goal

Walking—or running—away from the board

Stress and Recovery TAOL pp. 175 - 180

When Josh was a teenager, he was playing a lot of chess games in long, hard tournaments that might last days or even weeks. Sometimes he would have a great game. But sometimes he would put so much into that one game that he would “burn out.” Then he’d play terribly the next day.

Josh went to the Human Performance Institute to find out what he could do better. There he met with a sports psychologist (which is like a coach for an athlete’s mind). The “mind coach” asked Josh if his thinking about chess was better after a time of rest. Josh was blown away by the power of this simple question!

Josh went back through all his chess notebooks, where he had written how long he had thought before making his move. He discovered that he played his best when he thought intensely for 2-10 minutes. If he thought more than 20 minutes, his move was usually not as good. And if he had a lot of long, 20-minute “thinks” in a row, his decisions about how to move became worse and worse.

Josh had so wanted to play his best, but he had always thought that meant holding his attention on the game for every single second of the match. Even while it was his opponent’s turn, he would keep thinking hard, trying to focus just on the chess. It was so freeing to realize he didn’t need to do this. In fact, it was getting in the way of his performance.

Josh started to let his mind take a break during his opponent’s turn. Sometimes he might even walk away from the chess board and get a drink of water. A few times he even got up (after four or five hours of intense chess), went outside, and just ran as fast as he could! Afterwards, he’d come back and could think his very best again. His play improved right away.

I feel like I’m stuck. I’m not improving as much as I could.

Could I be stuck because I never really let myself rest? That would make it hard to be able to reach as much as I could. What if I really, really rest at times, so that I can really, really reach at times?



Okay - Rocky

Common Learning Scenario:

When it's not going your way on the inside

Thinking to Ghostbusters

The Internal Solution TAOL pp. 55 - 57

Josh was just ten years old when he began playing in grown-up chess tournaments. At these tournaments, he might need to play a game of chess for up to eight hours. It was hard for him to focus for that long. (After all, he was just ten years old.) But Josh really tried hard to focus. He put a lot of pressure on himself. That's when something strange began to happen. Sometimes a song would get stuck in his mind—really stuck.

Josh would be trying to make a complex chess calculation for his next move, and all he could think of was this song playing over and over again in his mind! He might be facing a very experienced, wily, old chess master, and he'd have to play with the theme song from *Ghostbusters* running through in his mind. Whenever this happened, he'd end up losing.

Josh would try to push the song away or block it out, but then it just became more stuck and louder, too. This was such an annoyingly difficult problem to have. If he happened to hear a song, it could get stuck with him for days. He felt haunted by the music. Soon his "sound problem" grew so that he was now bothered by other noises that he'd hardly even noticed before. He might feel as if the whispers of spectators were a roaring crowd or as if the ticking chess clock was pounding away like thunder.

What could he do? He couldn't get rid of all the noise around him. He couldn't even get rid of the songs in his own mind. One day, 11-year-old Josh was playing in a tournament with yet another song stuck in his mind when he realized that he could *think to the beat of the music*. He played a great game. That gave him an idea: Could he learn to be at peace with distractions?

Josh decided that, from then on, he would train himself to work with whatever noises or music there might be, whether it was happening on the "inside" or the "outside." For months, Josh practiced playing chess with music blasting. It could be any music, whether he liked it or not. With practice, he found that he didn't have to be bothered by it. He *could think to it*.

Sometimes things are calm on the inside and sometimes they aren't.

When things feel "rocky" on the inside, do I panic and try to get rid of what's bothering me? Or can I be okay with whatever is going on in me? Can I find ways to work with it instead of fight it?



Past - Past

Common Learning Scenario:

When you've made a mistake

Remember the woman and the taxicab

The Downward Spiral TAOL pp. 61 - 67

When Josh was 18, he began teaching chess to a group of second graders at Public School 116 in New York City. He tried to tell them about the “downward spiral.” This happens when a chess player makes a serious mistake. The mistake by itself might not be totally disastrous. But what if they try to act like they didn’t make such a big mistake? They might continue to play as if they still had the advantage on the chess board when they didn’t. That’s when the real disaster happens: they can no longer clearly see what is going on now and make good decisions based on that. This doesn’t just happen in games of chess. It happens in life, too.

One day, Josh was walking to Public School 116 when he saw a young woman who was listening to music through headphones. Josh watched as the young woman looked the wrong way down Broadway and then stepped right into oncoming traffic! A bicycle was the first to hit her. The biker swerved so she wasn’t seriously hurt, but the woman was very upset by it.

She could have used the “bump” from the bicyclist to realize what was going on around her. She could have just stepped out of the street and back onto the curb. But the young woman didn’t acknowledge her mistake. Instead, she turned her back to the oncoming traffic to yell after the biker. That’s when she was hit by a taxicab and was terribly injured. An ambulance had to come and take her to the hospital. Josh finally left, hoping that the young woman would survive. When he arrived at Public School 116, he told his young chess students what had happened. The students understood: the woman could have been fine if she had responded to her first mistake when it happened, instead of getting caught up in what *had happened*.

Three years later, Josh’s students were fifth-graders and were one of the strongest teams in the country. They were tied for first place in the final round of the National Championships. Afterwards, one of his young students came out and told Josh, “You know, I almost lost. I made a mistake and hung my bishop. My opponent laughed and I got really upset and reached for my queen. I was about to move but then I remembered the woman and the bike!”

Something happened that I didn’t want to have happen.

Do I get stuck in a “downward spiral”? Do I get caught up in what happened or how things were “in the past”? Or can I see that the “past” is past and all I can do is make my best decisions going forward?



Problem - Discover

Common Learning Scenario:

When we come across trouble

Fighting one-handed

Using Adversity TAOL pp. 127 - 131

Josh had just broken his right arm. This was a problem. The national Push Hands championships were just seven weeks away. The doctor said that there was no way Josh could compete.

The day after he got his cast on, Josh was back at training. For the first few days, he felt uneasy playing with just one hand. He was worried that someone might accidentally knock into the cast and hurt his injured arm, so he held his right arm behind him and did gentle Push Hands practice only with partners he trusted. After a couple of weeks, though, Josh was comfortable protecting his right arm behind him while playing with his left. He had also learned to fall and roll without the broken arm hitting the floor. That's when he began to play competitive Push Hands again.

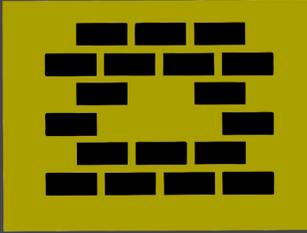
Because he had only one "good" arm, his Tai Chi teacher paired Josh with players who were less skilled than him. But these were also guys who really wanted to win. They had two hands. Josh just had one. They wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to beat Josh, who was one of the leading players at the school.

"One-handed" Josh lost a lot of rounds to these less-skilled players. But as Josh continued to practice, his left arm started doing more and more of the work of two arms. For example, his left *elbow* might block his opponent's right hand while his left *hand* controlled his opponent's left arm. After a few days of this training, Josh no longer thought about how he was at a disadvantage by playing with just one arm. This was an inspiring discovery.

Before this experience, Josh never would have guessed that he could control both hands of his opponent with just one of his. But after three or four weeks of practicing one-handed, he had discovered just how much one arm could do. It almost felt like it would be an unfair luxury to be able to play with two hands again!

I experience problems and difficulties.

If I give up because of a problem, what will I discover about myself? If I get curious about a problem, what will I discover about myself? What might I find is possible that I didn't realize before?



No - Walls

Common Learning Scenario:

Coming to know who's doing the learning

Being Josh playing "Tai Chi Chess"

Breaking Down Walls TAOL pp. xvi-xvii, 75-77, 107-108

Because Josh was the top young chess player in the nation for so long, he grew up where any weakness in his learning would have been used by others to win against him. Every high-level young chess player *and their coaches* were studying his every move. The competition was brutal. That was how Josh came to know hard-earned lessons about learning. He simply had to investigate and work on any weakness of his *before* others could, or he'd lose.

By the time he was 21 years old, Josh's love of chess was more than just the love of the game. He realized that he was discovering himself through chess. For example, Josh noticed that he didn't handle big changes in his chess games well. He also noticed that he often had a hard time transitioning to a new place and would feel homesick. Because of this discovery about himself, he began working on how to embrace change, in both life and chess.

Around this time, Josh was also beginning to study Tai Chi. He found that sometimes he was playing chess as if he were "in the flow" of Tai Chi. Or he might be in a Tai Chi Push Hands competition and feel as if he were in a chess game uncovering his opponent's weaknesses. It's was like he was playing "Tai Chi Chess" or "Chess Tai Chi"!

Josh also realized that he could avoid many sidetracks and pitfalls in his study of Tai Chi because he knew himself so well as a learner of chess. Other students repeated their mistakes over and over again because they were afraid of trying something new or facing their weaknesses. While they were locked-up as learners, Josh became a Push Hands champion in just two years of Tai Chi practice.

Josh didn't experience chess and Tai Chi as two separate activities with a wall in-between them. This made him realize that he didn't just excel as a chess player or a Push Hands player. Josh excelled at being a learner. Whatever we learn, there are common themes for how we can be better at learning anything. There is an "art of learning."

I learn lots of different subjects and do lots of different activities.

Do I learn them as lots of separate things? Or do I know that it's ultimately me who is doing all this learning? By discovering myself as a learner, can I become a better learner for everything in life?