

[00:00:01] Speaker A: Ruth, as we're starting this school year, I've been thinking a lot about identity and how we build identities in children to really position them to be learners, but also thinkers and problem solvers and what kinds of things we're doing to help them own the fact that they're in charge of their learning and the things that they're doing.

[00:00:30] Speaker B: We take some time to consider how to nourish the identity of a learner within students, and then what habits we can encourage.

We consider creative and tactile ways to help students accept the identity of a learner as part of a classroom vision or mission.

This is Sticky Hope.

[00:00:57] Speaker C: So we were at the NCTE NCTM joint conference this summer, and at the closing, you heard a reference to James Clear's book Atomic Habits, which I've, like, been talking about for about a year now.

[00:01:12] Speaker A: Yeah, one of there were three parts to the closing, but one of the closing speakers was Howie Hua, and he talked about how from the first day of his classes, now he teaches college level math, but even in, in his college level math, he works on building their identity as mathematicians and people who love math. And I sat there like, I probably need to work on that. Like, I have never identified as someone who loves math. And in fact, I say, like, I'm not a math person. I'm the literacy person. And Ryan, my husband, is the math person. And so sitting in his presentation in his closing, I was like realizing how important it is for me to start shifting my thinking around that, because just in saying I'm not a math person, it is shifting my whole my brain's focus and the openness I'm feeling towards trying something. And so if we step back from just math and look at the bigger picture of what kinds of identities we're promoting and allowing for kids to take on in our classrooms and our school communities, it is so important that we encourage them to see themselves as kind. Like, they're kind and they can do hard things and they are problem solvers and they're readers and writers and mathematicians and scientists and historians, right? Like, there are all of these things and they can be all of those things and it's going to look different for each of them.

[00:02:39] Speaker C: Well, and that's the thing, right? Like, when we know who we are. So when my identity is that of being a learner, then my actions follow that.

So if you're a person who loves math, then there's certain things that you do. Craig Groeschel on the leadership podcast, he talks about this and he calls it who before do so you have to decide who you are and then what you do.

So several years ago, I decided I wanted to be a hiker.

And since then, since I decided, like, that's who I want to be, there are things that I do because I'm a hiker. And I think, like, that was kind of that conversation for the closing keynote was, when we know who we are, then our habits are going to follow.

[00:03:30] Speaker A: And it's so important to think about that in two contexts as educators. First, in identifying for children what identities are helpful for them. Right. And so when you start to hear kids say, I'm not a math person, or, I don't love math, or I don't love reading. I can't read. I'm not a reader, how do you shift that narrative and build up their identities in a positive way so that they're more open to learning, but also for yourself as an educator, deciding who you are and who you're going to be, even in those trickiest of situations where you don't necessarily want to be a positive light because it's just really hard and you're exhausted and overwhelmed, when

we already know who we're going to be, we already have the habits to be that person, even when we're facing a hard moment. And so if we've decided we're going to be the positive and supporting person who keeps everyone safe, but also ensures that everyone feels a sense of belonging, we are able to do that even when we're feeling a little bit like this is a really hard situation and I'm not sure what the best next step is.

[00:04:38] Speaker C: Yeah, yeah, we've been talking about that. Like, who do I want to be? So in the book that we're writing and what this podcast is really about is, like, how do I navigate tricky or challenging behaviors with compassion? So if I know that I want to be the kind of person who shows compassion when a student is dysregulated, then that's going to change the way I limit. It really limits my choices for how I'm going to respond to that. And so now, right, like, this is a good time of year to think about who we want to be, but then also think about the identity that kids are taking on, not just in the academic realm, but also, like, socially. How are kids thinking of themselves? You know, am I the angry kid? If somebody. If I feel like I'm the angry kid, then my habits are going to follow that. And that, I think, is something for us to be aware of as educators.

[00:05:34] Speaker A: I think that you just hit on a really important point, and it was one that our family kind of came to realize the importance of. This past school year, one of my kids came home and had overheard another child saying, the Burke kids are mean. And I, as their mom, like, their foster mom. Right. So I identify as their mom now, but they came to us just about three years ago. And so to hear that, like, someone had considered my kids, who I love, and see, like, all of these amazing things about, but also know that there have been hard moments to hear that they identify our kids as mean made us all stop and think about how some of the things that they're struggling with are impacting the perception that people have of them, while also, like, kind of building identities for my kids. And I had never stopped to think about, like, I knew about all of the behaviors that were happening at school. Right. Like, I know all of the hard things, but I hadn't stopped to consider what every other kid in that room was thinking while those things were happening. And that gave me pause as a mom. But it also, as I stepped back into my classroom, where some of those hard behaviors happen with other kids, made me consider the language that I'm using and how I'm processing tricky situations with the other students. Because I don't want other kids going home talking about their classmates as the mean kids. And that is identity building, too. Right. Like, your peers and your colleagues can have a role in building identity, and there's power in shifting that. And so it's just really important to pay attention as educators to, like, what kinds of things you're. You're drawing attention to or how you're talking about things in building those identities related to academics. But you're right also, personally and socially.

[00:07:28] Speaker C: So one way that we do this in classrooms is we create, like, a class vision or a mission. Sometimes we call it a classroom charter of how we're going to be in the room.

[00:07:40] Speaker A: Yeah. So we have a friend, Mandy Robeck, who creates a classroom. I think they call it a classroom charter. And they all collaborate together to decide who they're going to be. And then this. She takes it this next step, which I think is such a beautiful way to tie it together. They work together to weave fabric and ribbons through. I think it was just chicken wire, but to create this beautiful woven mural art piece that represents how they were going to weave all of these things, all of their identities, and how they've chosen to be together as a class into this visible, tangible thing that hangs in their classroom for the whole year. And that was such a beautiful representation. We're going to link that article. She wrote an article about it, and we'll link that in the show notes. And so doing that together, just the act of deciding who we are as a class and creating that piece of art together really can.

It just works wonders in giving you a tangible thing to refer back to. When things get hard in my

classroom, we create a classroom vision, and they read it together every morning. But they also have a song that they sing together every morning and that they can other moments in the day when they feel like they need a reminder of who they are or sometimes to remind each other of who we are, to really encourage just that community that we're intentionally building together.

[00:09:09] Speaker C: I think, like, there's a lot of power in that creation process. So, like, yes, creating the vision or the charter or who we're gonna be in the classroom, but then also creating something tangible, something that everybody's worked on together in order to just remind ourselves of. Of that we belong and that we all are working together for it. I've sometimes seen people you like use thumbprints, and then the thumbprints, you know, the kids make them into bugs or the thumbprints all grouped together in, like, this big balloon bouquet that can come down. There's lots of things that you can do. The weaving, thumbprints, lots of different ways to create around that. Years ago, I heard on NPR's Life Kit that they were talking about the power of art and how art helps the brain. So when we're creating these identity statements and then we're pairing it with a collective art project, we're actually nourishing the brain in some different ways. And so it just helps us be more hopeful. It helps us.

We feel good about creating. We have lower stress.

It lets us focus deeply. And so I think it'd be really great, like, as you're thinking about this identity and a class identity, like a class project, but also who do you want to be? And maybe like just kind of a messy journal entry, like kind of an artsy journal entry about who you want to be. And yes, it takes longer than just typing up a list on your computer. But there. There's other benefits that we get when we ling and we really think deeply about who do we want to be when we're facing tricky behaviors, because we're going to face them.

Nobody's immune. If you haven't faced them yet, you will. You'll get your turn because that's just what's happening. And it's Not a sign of I failed as a teacher or I've done something wrong. It just is. The landscape of where we, where we teach is there's. There's going to be some tricky behaviors, right?

[00:11:20] Speaker A: The tricky behaviors that you're navigating don't define your identity right? And so you get to choose who you're going to be and who you will remain through those tricky behaviors. And depicting that or creating a piece of art that will represent that can really give you something to go back to.

It's almost a grounding tool in that, like in the face of those tricky moments, your brain will remember better the piece of art that you created. You'll be able to visualize it. You might even like, be able to think about the sounds you were hearing or the smells you were smelling because of how that works in the brain and how art connects different parts of your brain to communicate differently.

And it will ground you in remembering the identity that you hold that who you are, and navigating these behaviors with compassion. And the end goal, which is positioning that child who's having a hard time so that they can learn and engage while they belong the whole time.

[00:12:27] Speaker B: Takeaway number one.

James Clear wrote in his book Atomic Habits. Your habits are how you embody a particular identity.

Consider the identity you have for your students as learners and what kinds of habits connect to this identity.

Build your classroom vision, mission or charter around the identity you plan to help nurture in your students as learners.

Takeaway number two.

Consider a collective art project to help make the vision come to life in your classroom.

Read the article Mandy Robeck wrote for Choice Literacy about the way her class created a fabric weaving as a means of acceptance of the class charter.

The link is in the show notes.

Takeaway number three.

Now is a good time to consider who you want to be when facing tricky behaviors.

We all will experience tricky behaviors in our classrooms. This doesn't mean you've done something wrong.

It just is the nature of our work with children.

Decide now how you will remain compassionate and grounded as you navigate tricky behaviors.

If you haven't downloaded the Sticky Hope notes for this series of episodes, make sure to do so now. Just follow the episode link in the show notes so you can have easy access to helpful resources.

You can also sign up at Sticky Hope, just go to [www.stickyhope.com](http://www.stickyhope.com).