

Developing Smart Risk Takers

Being Aware of How You Support this Development in Students

I was recently asked if I would run a workshop for supporting parents to encourage their children in becoming more courageous. It had me thinking about how we can do that in the classroom to build children's smart risk taking thinking.

Firstly, why do we need risk takers?

In a new, as yet, unpublished book by author Iain Fraser, an expert in programme and project management from different sectors such as finance, defence and engineering, he states, "In the 21st century, a new type of leadership skill is required. One that is flexible, that puts collaboration at the forefront, and yet one that requires individual courage to move at pace whilst embracing high levels of ambiguity." We know that growing courage and skills in managing ambiguity does not develop overnight as an adult. Supporting children's development of courage, managing through uncertainty and thriving in uncertain times needs to start as soon as we can.

So, teachers what can you do to support the development of risk taking in children?

Teachers are the leaders in the classroom so it is your behaviour they are watching.

1. Recognise that risk taking is a core developmental skill.

To become healthy individualised adults, children and adolescents need to find a way to begin to separate from their family of origin. As adults in children's worlds, we need to encourage the building of their capacity to manage risk. In our modern world children are having less and less opportunity to practise their own decision making and the real world consequences of those decisions.

2. Model risk taking behaviour.

Children learn from watching the adults around them. They want to mimic and follow their lead. Teachers are the leaders in the class room so it is your behaviour they are watching. Overtly demonstrate how you analyse situations, assess risk, create options, problem solve and make decisions before acting. Especially how you behave under stressful situations.

3. Talk about smart risks. Set and enforce limits in the classroom.

Where students have the opportunity to encounter uncertainty and unpredictability they can practise their skills. Push your own thinking and develop activities that take children beyond the usual creating opportunities for challenge emotionally, physically, socially and ethically. Sarah Johns described this when she talked about her winning the 2017 Prime Minister's Science Teacher's prize. I, "support them to be a little bit cheeky and grab opportunities that come their way." Sarah says she, "empowers her students by encouraging them to share her own philosophy of life—to be curious, open to possibilities and willing to take a risk." It is also essential that you ensure you follow through on enforcing the limits which will create safety for learning.

Courage is:

- Believing in yourself and building your potential
- Doing what you want and trusting yourself to make the right decision
- Sitting in the driver's seat and taking control of your life
- Making your own decisions and being honest with yourself and others
- Accepting changes and flowing with them
- Dealing with your problems and asking others
- Offering your opinions and communicating your fears and doubts
- Accepting abundance and allowing your-self to succeed
- Trying again and doing new things
- Loving yourself and others unconditionally

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4. Encourage the best risk takers in your classroom.

Notice what your best risk takers do and acknowledge their ability to cope in these situations. Name these behaviours and encourage the observation of their peers. Have someone observe your practise to help you be aware of the recognition that you provide to encourage or discourage risk. Notice the words you use and the facial expression you show along with the tone of your voice when you are encouraging or discouraging.

5. Create a safe environment and reward smart failures.

Think about how you support failures and efforts to take risks in a way that is not seen as punishing mistakes. What are your general feelings about failure? How do you view this in your life? Your attitudes will be apparent to your students, so think carefully about what you demonstrate when you fail in the classroom.

6. Support identification of hazards.

Build student's capacity to recognise danger as well as recognise their level of skill. Discuss with them how to see the gap and to judge when they are vulnerable and therefore, when to ask for help. Support their help seeking behaviour. 

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More information can be found at www.peopleskillsconsulting.co.nz

