



TEACHING THAT CHANGES LIVES

12 MINDSET TOOLS
FOR IGNITING THE
LOVE OF LEARNING

**LEARNER
MINDSET**

Online Experience
Included

MARILEE ADAMS, PhD

Bestselling author of *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*

More Praise for *Teaching That Changes Lives*

“Marilee Adams is an engaging writer. Using the medium of storytelling, she clearly explains the importance of developing a Learner mindset and the necessity for educators to create inquiry-based learning environments infused with curiosity, creativity, and caring. Any educator in higher education and K–12 is sure to benefit from reading this valuable and practical book.”

—**Patrick Blessinger, founder and Executive Director, International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association**

“Offers a methodology for compassion...honors the power of the question and provides a gentle guide to a better kind of leadership. Great message. Very readable with tools and ideas that are easy to hold on to.”

—**Peter Block, bestselling author of *Stewardship and Community***

“Dr. Adams has created a fundamental framework that’s sure to lead educators, administrators, and students toward increased collaboration, problem solving, and greater success. This book is a must-read for anyone who cares about education and cares about the future. That means just about all of us.”

—**Naomi Drew, educational consultant and author of *No Kidding about Bullying***

“Every teacher can find himself or herself in this story. We all have days when self-doubt or frustration threatens to overtake our passion and commitment for teaching. *Teaching That Changes Lives* reveals the power of every teacher’s mindset to create a classroom climate that opens children’s minds, helping every student become engaged with and love deep learning. This is a must-read for everyone who touches the curious minds of children—a message that has powerful implications for changing schools and changing lives.”

—**Victoria Duff, President, Learning Forward New Jersey, and Senior Consultant, Center for Results, Learning Forward**

“What a joy it was to read your book! You are sharing numerous underlying messages about hope, the power of asking positive questions, the importance of knowing one’s students, learning styles, making mistakes and learning from them, and more. This exciting book will undoubtedly have a far-reaching and generative influence on teachers and students at all levels.”

—**Jenny Edwards, PhD, Professor, School of Educational Leadership and Change, Fielding Graduate University**

“Marilee’s work has changed the life of my campus.”

—**Verna Fitzsimmons, PhD, CEO, Kansas State University Salina, and Dean, College of Technology and Aviation**

“Best education book ever! Leverage the power of *choice* to ignite a passion for learning and change lives. Not only will you energize yourself as you read Marilee’s dynamic book, you will finally have the tools to enrich the lives of your students as you challenge them to claim their greatness.”

—**Vicki Halsey, PhD, Vice President, The Ken Blanchard Companies, and author of *Brilliance by Design***

“We have seen over and over again that our mindsets impact all aspects of our work, forming the very foundation of trust, growth, and collaboration essential for achieving a positive staff culture, strong school culture, and, ultimately, academic success with our scholars. This book gives individuals at all school levels the tools necessary for building positive Learner mindsets...provides the ‘missing link’ in how to have a strong staff culture.”

—**Camilla Lopez, Principal, and Kevin Lohela, Academic Dean, Achievement First Crown Heights Elementary School**

“This beautiful narrative, evoking the struggles and victories of real people and real situations, awakens our hopes and aspirations for igniting the love of learning, not just for our students but within the very heart of our own teaching...as useful for youth workers, camp counselors, and parents as it is for classroom teachers.”

—**John McAuley, President and CEO, The Leadership Studio at Muskoka Woods, Canada**

“This book is a beautiful and compelling illustration of the power of positive psychology and resilience theory in education!”

—**Caroline Adams Miller, Master of Applied Positive Psychology and bestselling coauthor of *Creating Your Best Life***

“This is truly an inspiring story of learning and change. I love that change and learning did not happen just to students but to teachers as well...illustrates the impact of emotional intelligence in action... The transformative process embedded in the storyline is deeply beneficial and enlightening.”

—**Kenneth Rhee, PhD, Associate Professor and Director, Executive Leadership and Organizational Change Program, Northern Kentucky University**

“If every teacher in America read this book, I believe it would have an incredible impact on student learning. Dr. Adams helps the reader identify and manage two powerful mindsets that live behind all our actions—the Judger and the Learner. If you are looking for a clear path for improving the learning of your students through your professional learning communities, this book will be indispensable for making that happen!”

—**James L. Roussin, coauthor of *Guiding Professional Learning Communities and Implementing Change through Learning***

“*Teaching That Changes Lives* kick-starts the learning journey for teachers, students, and school communities. Appreciative Inquiry in education is a perfect fit with the insightful questions and choices presented in this highly readable, usable book. Dr. Adams has made a major contribution to the strengths-focused education community.”

—**Marge Schiller, PhD, founder, Positive Change Core, and coauthor of *Appreciative Leaders***

“An uplifting book with meaningful, appreciative strategies for teachers committed to making a positive difference in their students’ lives...a genuine contribution to teachers and learners in any setting.”

—**Jacqueline M. Stavros, DM, Professor, Lawrence Technological University, and coauthor of *The Appreciative Inquiry Handbook***

“Teaching That Changes Lives reminds us that at the heart of all good education are inquiry and a Learner mindset. This engaging and thoughtful book is filled with examples and simple, practical tools for creating a climate of learning where we can challenge our assumptions and change the questions we ask ourselves to build the education system of the future.”

—**Kathy Telban, MEd, CPT, SPHR, Director of Curriculum and Assessment, Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio**

“Teaching That Changes Lives wisely reminds us that authentic teaching requires that we must model the behavior we teach or we cannot hope to influence the behavior—or the future—of our students.”

—**Robert M. Tobias, JD, Director, Key Executive Leadership Programs, American University**

*“This book re-ignites the raison d’être for teaching—to change lives. Marilee gives teachers powerful and simple methods for getting on track for what *real teaching* and *real learning* are all about.”*

—**Dr. Henry Toi, founder and CEO, Nurture Craft Education Group, Singapore, and Publisher, *Brain Capital Magazine***



**TEACHING
THAT
CHANGES
LIVES**

Other books by Marilee Adams

Change Your Questions, Change Your Life, Berrett-Koehler

**The Art of the Question: A Guide to Short-Term
Question-Centered Therapy, Wiley**



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12 Mindset Tools for Igniting the Love of Learning

Marilee Adams, PhD



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
San Francisco
a BK Life book

Teaching that Changes Lives

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BK

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 650

San Francisco, California 94104-2916

Tel: (415) 288-0260, Fax: (415) 362-2512

www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions

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First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-60994-569-5

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-60994-570-1

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-60994-571-8

2013-1

Cover design: Irene Morris Design

Text design: Detta Penna

Proofreader: Katherine Lee

DEDICATION

*With respect and gratitude
for Dr. Bill Friedman and
every teacher who believes
that teaching changes lives*



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FOREWORD



We have devoted many years as educators to writing and teaching about the Habits of Mind—dispositions needed for productive thinking and problem-solving. Although many people refer to these dispositions as “soft skills” because their measurement does not yield “hard data,” we nonetheless believe that these are essential skills that students need in order to succeed in the increasingly complex, uncertain future that awaits them. Happily, we are part of a large and growing community of educational authors, thought leaders, and teachers who share this belief and whose work is making a solid difference in many countries around the world. With *Teaching that Changes Lives*, Dr. Marilee Adams joins this constellation, contributing her insightful work on mindsets and questioning for the benefit and satisfaction of students and teachers alike.

Through the rich traditions of teaching through storytelling, Dr. Adams demonstrates how our mindsets—the perceptions we hold of the world—impact our students, our colleagues, and ourselves. In this engaging educational story, Marilee has captured key emotional and intellectual challenges that teachers encounter in today’s classrooms, while weaving in practical, time-tested tools for meeting these challenges. The characters, drawn from real life, demonstrate how it is possible to literally *change the weather* in the classroom to gain optimal rapport, engagement, responsiveness, and learning.

The concept so artfully presented here is how a teacher’s mindset, cognitive processes, beliefs, and mental models affect their behaviors and their ability to connect with their students.

Through the story we become aware of how our external, observable human behaviors are a result of our inner thoughts, decisions, and perceptions. The author leads us to the practical consideration of how a teacher can manage his or her mindset even in challenging circumstances.

Teaching that Changes Lives offers insights and tools to help teachers recognize and choose their own mindsets, building consciousness and skills for leading their classrooms and enhancing their students' learning. This mindset work holds real promise for contributing to the intellectual and emotional development of students. At the end of the book, Dr. Adams has included a comprehensive workbook with 12 practical, easy to apply tools for thinking about our own thinking and gaining new awareness of options and interventions that are congruent with our intentions. This material is an invaluable contribution to the body of work available for professional development for educators.

The implications of this work are not just for educators, however, but are for all of us to become more metacognitive in life—becoming more aware and skillful with our choices and decision-making processes, and more mindful of our actions and their effects on others, both in our schools and in our lives in general. *Teaching that Changes Lives* is a valuable contribution to our field. And it is an important reminder of the cognitive and collaborative skills required for encouraging more thoughtful students, classrooms and schools—as well as for building the next generations of thoughtful leaders who believe in their power to change themselves and thereby change the world.

Arthur L. Costa, Ed.D., Granite Bay, CA

Bena Kallick, Ph.D., Westport, CT

Co-authors, *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind:*

16 Characteristics of Success

Co-founders, The International Institute for Habits of Mind

INTRODUCTION



MINDSETS FOR LEARNING

The hidden curriculum . . . is the teacher's own integrity and lived conviction . . . It is the message which is written in a teacher's eyes throughout the course of his or her career. It is the lesson which endures a lifetime.

Jonathan Kozol

You wouldn't be reading this book today had it not been for the teacher who changed my life. As a youngster I was never a star student, though I always had a book in hand, often reading at night with a flashlight under the covers or hiding in the closet to finish a story long after my parents thought I was asleep. While I loved to read, school was often a struggle for me and I had little confidence in my own abilities. It was in graduate school that a single teacher, Dr. Bill Friedman, provided that magical combination of caring, connection, and intellectual conscientiousness wherein I was able to flourish. While Bill was demanding, he was also kind and patient, always letting me know he believed I could live up to the high standards he set for me. Over the years he helped me hone my natural curiosity into the kind of

disciplined question asking that is the foundation of critical and creative thinking—and thereby contributed to the path that has become my life’s work.

Through Bill’s tutelage I made some of the most significant changes of my life—in my mindset and in the beliefs I held about myself as a learner, thinker, and as a person. The evidence for those changes showed up in sometimes unexpected ways. Once, when another professor deeply critiqued one of my papers, I surprised myself by easily responding, “Okay. What do I need to learn to fix it?” If, instead, my old mindset had been in charge, I would have drowned in a familiar downward spiral of self-reprisal. Of course, that would have prevented me from learning from that professor and going on eventually to turn in an excellent paper. Now I remember that incident fondly as my matriculation into “mindset school,” where we are all perennial students.

Almost everyone agrees that the overarching purpose of education is to prepare students for the future, yet never before has the future been more difficult to predict or prepare for. To borrow Neil Postman’s metaphor, students who “enter school as question marks and leave as periods” will certainly be ill-prepared to face the uncertainty of a future where there are no easy answers. Consequently, being a teacher today is more challenging and potentially more exciting than ever before. The key is helping students develop excellent thinking skills¹ and the capacity to engage in vigorous problem-solving to tackle the novel situations that the future has yet to reveal. While it is essential that we teach the core skills of literacy, numeracy, and technology, students will need to be more curious and creative than ever before. They will need to be resilient and have effective skills for interacting and collaborating with others in positive and constructive ways.

This is why our schools and classrooms must provide environments that encourage students to develop a lifelong love

of learning. These proficiencies are so important to businesses and organizations that many emphasize “continuous improvement,” providing training focused on communication, decision-making, critical and creative thinking, building collaborative relationships, and general people skills.

Teaching interpersonal communication and thinking competencies is of a different order than teaching the ABCs or math, where “correct” answers are more easily tested. Even when students get all the right answers on subject area tests, it is no guarantee of their preparedness to pass the tests of life. Most of us recognize that answers typically *close* thinking while questions typically *open* it. Lest we forget, answers are only the *end point* of a process—they can be only as useful as the questions and thinking that *precede* them. In *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind*, Doctors Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick write that we must be “. . . interested in not only how many answers students know, but also how students behave when they don’t know an answer. We are interested in observing how students produce knowledge, rather than how they merely reproduce it. A critical attribute of intelligent human beings is not only having information but also knowing how to act on it.”²

As fundamental as questions are for attaining knowledge and living our lives, it is easy to overlook the importance of the mindset from which a question is launched. One’s mindset will have a huge impact on any answers or results that might follow. In the words of Stanford University researcher Carol S. Dweck, “When you enter a mindset you enter a new world.”³ She cites compelling evidence for the impact of mindset in multiple areas, especially in learning and intelligence, and discusses how mindset interventions can even help resolve conflicts between longstanding adversaries.⁴

Dr. Dweck’s formidable research on the distinctions between what she calls the “growth mindset” and the “fixed

mindset” is conceptually aligned with the Learner and Judger mindsets described in this book and in my two previous books, *The Art of the Question: A Guide to Short-Term Question-Centered Therapy*⁵ and *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 10 Powerful Tools for Life and Work*.⁶ An international bestseller, *Change Your Questions* was originally intended for a business and organizational audience but has acquired a wide readership among educators. These books illustrate how skillful “mindset management” can be strengthened through developing greater facility with the quantity and quality of the questions we ask ourselves and others.

Teaching that Changes Lives focuses first on the teacher’s mindset and the impact of that mindset—Learner or Judger—on their students, and on their own satisfaction with the experience of teaching. As you read the pages ahead, you’ll also see how these same skills increase teachers’ job satisfaction, which according to reliable studies has hit the lowest point in a quarter of a century.⁷

The skills outlined in these pages help us stay calm and present in order to think clearly and strategically from moment to moment, including when leading a classroom. These skills also help us successfully manage difficult situations that are a part of everyday life in many classrooms. The focus is on cultivating the Learner mindset for professional development, enriching the climate of learning, whether it’s with whole classrooms, individual students and colleagues, parents, or professional learning communities.

In writing *Teaching That Changes Lives*, I chose to employ the same allegorical form as I used with *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*. According to the *Wikipedia*, allegory is “a device in which characters or events in a story, poem, or picture

represent or symbolize ideas and concepts.” Successful allegory takes us deeper into our own lives, empowering us with new thinking, skills, and possibilities. My readers often share how much they have personally benefited from the mixture of story and practical application that the allegorical form provides “lessons embedded in a page turner.”

The narrator of the story is Emma Shepherd, a sixth grade teacher who is a composite of many people I have known and worked with. Hopefully you’ll find the story of Emma’s struggles, insights, and breakthroughs to be engaging and enjoyable to read, while keeping in mind that her character is a vehicle for illustrating the Learner Mindset System at the heart of this book. Another main character is Dr. Sophie Goodwin, a university professor in a school of education. Dr. Goodwin’s early work developing the mindset system of tools had a powerful impact on Emma, when she had Sophie as her sixth grade teacher.

The mindset and questioning lessons woven throughout Emma’s story are rendered into 12 practical, easy to apply tools presented in a workbook at the back of the book. Throughout the story there are instructive graphics, pull quotes, and tables that augment the text. At the end of the book there is also a link to free digital tools for reinforcing the lessons of the book.

Much of Emma’s story takes place in her sixth grade classroom. I had very specific goals in choosing this grade as the setting for the story. First and foremost, this age group constitutes an important milestone, when students often develop their own intellectual interests and passions, sometimes independent of what they’re being taught at school. Many educators and brain scientists believe that if we can deeply engage students in learning and thinking by sixth grade, we can not only keep them in school longer but encourage their continuing intellectual, social, and emotional development. Almost everyone understands that