

A natural human phenomenon exists where “bad is stronger than good.” In an effort to prove this phenomenon false, a recent study conducted an exhaustive search of related research and could not find one single example of a study proving that “good is stronger than bad.” One study analyzed the use of 558 emotion words and found that 62 percent were negative and only 32 percent were positive. Other studies have shown that people spend longer looking at pictures of bad events than good, and consistently pay closer attention when told bad things about people (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 46).



Recognizing that, as humans, we lean towards thinking and talking about the negative, we believe there needs to be intentional effort made by educators to balance the conversation. There are so many amazing things happening in schools every day, and those need to be shared with the public!

We propose the following steps toward creating more balanced conversations:

Step 1: Recognize human tendency to focus on the negative.

Step 2: Make thoughtful, deliberate efforts to increase positive conversations about education.

Step 3: Keep Step 1 in mind and repeat Step 2 over and over again!

More balanced conversations that highlight what is going well in schools has the power to positively impact public perception and support for schools, and also has a positive impact on school culture. Chip and Dan Heath (2010) write about identifying and intentionally focusing on “bright spots” instead of consistently focusing on everything that has gone wrong. This is an excellent strategy to consider when seeking a more balanced conversation. “To pursue bright spots is to ask the question, ‘What’s working, and how can we do more of it?’ Sounds simple, right? Yet, in the real world, this obvious question is rarely asked. Instead, the question raised is typically problem centered: ‘What’s broken, and how do we fix it?’” (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 45).

We recognize that there are many challenges in education in desperate need of improvement, and we are not suggesting that those be sugarcoated or disregarded. In a truly balanced conversation, both “What’s working?” and “What’s broken?” should be asked, and indeed serve to compliment one another—replicating bright spots and fixing what is broken. It is important to address areas in need of improvement with a growth mindset—the belief that a situation is not fixed, but that growth and improvement can happen (Dweck, 2006). When bringing attention to a problem, make it a habit to also offer potential solutions. Do not get stuck admiring a problem; rather, consistently commit to being part of the resolution!

Balanced conversations include both bright spots and areas for improvement, are solution-oriented, and are always focused on continually improving the learning experience for students. Someone will tell the story of school—we are hopeful that teacher voices will be at the heart of telling the story.

References:

- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.
Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*.
New York, NY: Broadway Books.



Identify three bright spots in your district, school, or classroom, and determine how you will share with others and learn from these things that are going well. Think about the influence you have when you engage in conversations about education with family and friends. Consider sharing your story in a local newspaper, at a school board meeting, or with education policy makers.

Bright Spot:

Plan for Sharing and Learning:

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