



Summit SPOTLIGHT

AT MGS

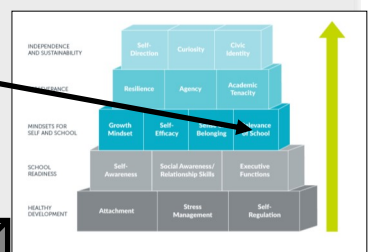
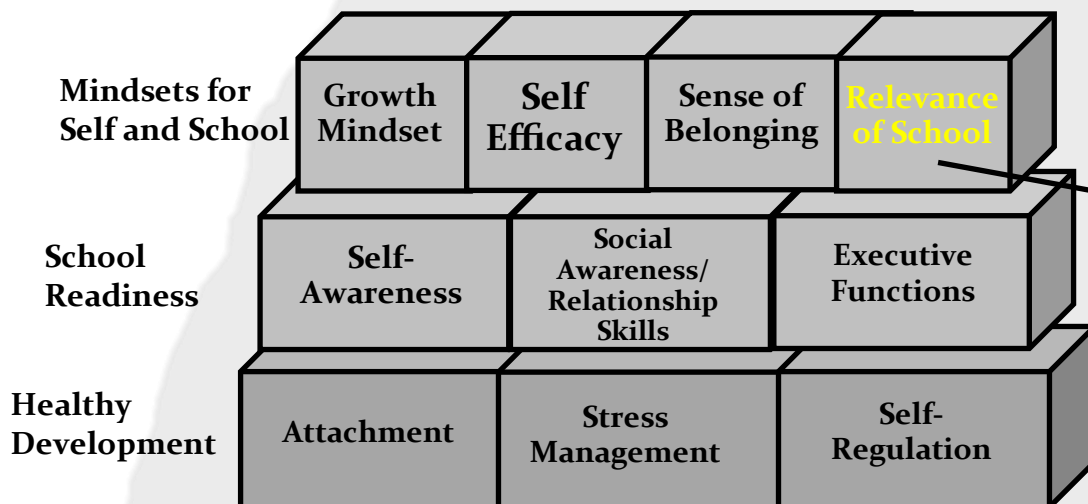
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Habits of Success for **Mindsets for Self and School: #4 Relevance of School**

Studies have shown that making content relevant is one of the most important aspects of teaching and learning. When students decide the content is interesting, worth knowing and relevant to them, they will be engaged in learning the material being taught (Briggs).

Teachers can establish relevance by engaging students emotionally or by connecting new information with what they already know. The first step begins with teachers getting to really know the students they teach and making connections with them. Mentoring sessions in *Summit* help teachers gain an understanding of what affects each student, what interests, goals and skills they have, what experiences they have had, or what is relevant to their current age level. There are many ways teachers can engage students and make real-life connections to what they're doing in the classroom. Some examples are:

- Make lessons student-directed and allow choices.
- Use suspense to keep student interest piqued.
- Incorporate hands-on-learning (use objects and artifacts)
- Provide utility value (how the content relates to and is important to the student's future goals).
- Connect content to the students' lives and what they already know.
- Use guest speakers to show how the information you're teaching relates to the real world (Bernard).



Bernard, Sara. "Science Shows Making Lessons Relevant Really Matters." *Edutopia*, 1 Dec. 2010, www.edutopia.org/neuroscience-brain-based-learning-relevance-improves-engagement.

Briggs, Saga, and Saga Briggs. "How To Make Learning Relevant To Your Students (And Why It's Crucial To Their Success)." *InformED*, 24 Mar. 2017, www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/how-to-make-learning-relevant.

cdn.summitlearning.org/assets/marketing/The-Science-of-Summit-by-Summit-Public-Schools_03052019.pdf.



Helping Students find Relevance in School

Sixth grade teacher, McKenna Schardt, uses several strategies to help students find relevance in the lessons she teaches. Giving students a choice of assignments on a particular topic, connecting lessons to the students' lives and what they would like to learn about a topic, using a *Hooks and Bridges* strategy to connect the lesson are only a few of the strategies she uses. Ms. Shardt shared that every Social Studies unit starts with a big, compelling question about how events from the past often affect [our] lives today.

A specific example she shared was a unit on agriculture, which started with the question, "Was the development of agriculture good for humans?" Lessons covered the beginnings of agriculture and the inventions and techniques that had been used throughout history. This led to discussion about farming in the local community and how it is very different than in the past and how, without developments and progression, we wouldn't be where we are today in the field of agricultural. Sometimes the lessons stimulate debate or invite speculation, which helps students realize that the content is not just interesting, but also worth knowing.

Fifth grade teacher, Sarah Weis, shared an example of a recent project which helped students recognize patterns and put new information in context with information they already knew—from personal experiences or from information in a story they had read in the classroom. Ms. Weis stated that after reading the book, *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, students gathered information from research in the classroom and also real-world situations. They took a nature walk to Markley Grove Park, where they sampled dandelion greens and wild honeysuckle; foraged for wild onions, garlic, acorns and walnuts; and listened and looked for signs of wildlife. Based on their prior and new-found knowledge from independent and field research, the students wrote essays on wilderness survival.



MGS Teacher writes article for eSCHOOL NEWS

Innovations in Educational Transformation

Curtis Noon, fifth grade teacher at Minneapolis Grade School, wrote and submitted the following article in eSchool News, a monthly print and digital newspaper that provides news and information on how the use of technology and the internet is helping America's schools successfully achieve the educational goals.

How classroom journaling engages and empowers students

Curtis Noon, Fifth Grade Teacher, Minneapolis Elementary School
May 4, 2021

One teacher shares how he uses classroom journaling to help students work through COVID experiences and discover their own voice.

It's been a hard year for young people. COVID has upended their usual schooling and routines. For many, the pandemic impacted their families financially or through the loss of a loved one. In a year punctuated by upheaval and uncertainty, my students at Minneapolis Elementary School in Kansas were left feeling powerless. When students are dealing with feelings of grief and loss, it can be difficult to focus on learning. Classroom journaling turned out to be the antidote for my students. The benefits of journaling in school are numerous – from improving mental health to heightening academic performance. It seems tailor-made to counteract some of the most devastating consequences of the pandemic on students, such as learning loss and social-emotional trauma.

Classroom journaling has given my students the time and space to tune into themselves and sit with their own thoughts and feelings. We spend so much time teaching our students to analyze the thoughts and feelings of characters they come across in our readings, but this important skill has broader implications. Journaling centers each child as the protagonist of their own story, with thoughts and feelings worthy of reflection.

Students have also looked to classroom journaling as a tool for empowerment. By allowing students to share honest feedback about lessons, classroom procedures, and even my teaching, it's given them a safe space to practice advocating for themselves. When one student offered a new approach to a classroom routine in her journal entry, we discussed it as a class and the change was implemented. I want my students to know their ideas are powerful, and their voice matters.

Taking time to attend to the social-emotional development of my students throughout the school day may be one of the most valuable changes brought on by the pandemic. If we are to prepare our children for the pressing challenges that await them in adulthood, we must teach them the value of setting goals, building strong relationships, having empathy for others, and managing their own emotions. Classroom journaling is just one approach, but it's a practice I'll continue into the future.