

May 21, 2019

Something (Unintentionally) Missing?



A mom's lessons in learning

By the time I graduated from high school, something was really puzzling me. I had been privileged to go to such wonderful schools. I'd had so many wonderful teachers—innovative approaches, rigorous curricula. Yet (aside from a guest speaker at a basketball camp telling us that *how* we practice our shots matters), it was really my mom who had taught me what little I knew about the *process* of learning.

My mom didn't have any special "credentials" or background for that kind of thing. What she did have was a common-sense way of making the most of things. (Here's a fun example: My birthday was in the middle of winter, so what's a real treat for kids in wintertime? A pool party! For a modest fee, she'd reserve the pool at a local Marriott and we'd have the whole class over. I was a scholarship kid at a private school in one of the wealthiest towns in America, and yet for years growing up I was known for having some of the best birthday parties around.)

My mom saw the annual public speaking competition at my school as an easy way to

distinguish yourself. In her mind, it was clear: All you had to do was practice your public speaking piece *as you would like to deliver it when it mattered* as much as possible. Because that's what we did, my sister and I were always public speaking finalists.

In her common-sense way, my mom explained to my sister and I that every time you practice you're "laying down a track." She helped us lay down just one track that included the expression and gestures we wanted to do when we performed it. We repeated our speeches that way until that one track felt "like second nature," even if we were nervous.

So it was a shock when, one day, my fifth grade teacher Mrs. Ferriss said there was some extra time and we could practice our public speaking in class. The other kids—without exception—pulled out the text of their speeches, closed their eyes, and mumbled the words as fast as they could. When they couldn't remember what came next, they would peek at the text, close their eyes again, and speed on.

By that time, I'd watch my older sister practice public speaking for the past five years. I was in my second year of preparing for the annual public speaking competition. I'd never seen anything like this. "What are they *doing*?" I wondered. Then it hit me: "They think they are actually practicing their public speaking!"

This happened with my writing, too. I had so many favorite English and history teachers, especially in high school. But they never helped me to look beyond the next assignment. We never talked about how all this writing practice might effectively add up. I don't even remember feeling like papers

were *practice* in the skill of writing. They were just assigned. They were just due in two weeks!

It was—again—my mom’s common sense that set me on a path to really improving my writing. She said it helped to look at a paper with “fresh eyes” before handing it in. By setting it aside when I thought it was good enough and coming back to it, I always found lots of ways to make it better. I did that for *at least six years* before I realized something. Those “fresh-eyes” edits didn’t just make that one paper better. They were when I discovered the next level of writing skills as if I were my own “editor.” Gradually those “editing” skills would seep into my writing itself.

Why was this something I just had to “stumble upon” with the help of my mom’s common-sense advice?

Ready to learn...learning

This “gap” in my education would have been easier to shrug off if I could find some clear deficiency in the schools I went to. But I couldn’t. Most of the teachers were passionate about teaching. My high school was especially innovative in matters of pedagogy. (That’s how I came to know the word “pedagogy”!)

It was only after I took up meditation (and later Tai Chi) that I began to see one, big, unintended consequence of all their efforts. In all their dedication to teach me so much, they had—quite unintentionally—taught me something that really didn’t serve me very well. I just needed to do the homework and the assignments. I just needed to study what would be on the tests and do well on them. That’s what was expected.

The unintended “take away” of their carefully laid plans for us was that we didn’t need to take ownership for the *process* of our own learning and improvement. It was basically okay for me to be on autopilot and just do what I was supposed to do.

I think it’s understandable that even the best schools work this way. Without something to guide us from the “inside-out,” we have to rely on external assignments, demands, and incentives. It was only the practice of Tai Chi and meditation that “woke me up” to a sense of how much needed to come “from the inside,” if I wanted to catch a glimpse of my full potential.

From the beginning, I’ve aspired to teach Tai Chi and mindfulness to kids as a way to “wake up” to ourselves and our lives. This year, though, I’m teaching kids who have been learning Tai Chi with me for nearly three years. Something seems to have shifted for our SuperKids.

They can introspect. They have the basic skill of looking inward and knowing what is in their experience right now. We’ve practiced that over and over in our SuperChallenges.

They can reflect. They have the basic skill of looking back on what they’ve just done and rating it on some specific criteria from within their own experience, which has become part of our SuperKid game, too.

In class, they have to be aware of what’s going on—inside and out. There’s no reassuring sense that, if they do as they’re told and do what others do, their learning will be “being taken care of.” There’s no being on autopilot as a student for them.

It got me thinking. Could we be ready to

discover how each one of us is fundamentally the “captain” of how we learn—of how we expand on and improve what we can do? Maybe this semester we could dive into the *process of how we are learning* Tai Chi and find out something about the process of learning itself.

Chess and Tai Chi

Josh Waitzkin learned to excel at two very different endeavors. In his youth, it was the game of chess. Growing up, he was an eight-time National Chess Champion. After the movie ***Searching for Bobby Fisher*** came out about his early chess career, the teenage Waitzkin was looking to reconnect with something that felt genuine again. He happened upon the ***Tao Te Ching*** by Laozi and became interested in Taoist philosophy. That led him to Tai Chi. Within two years, he was a Tai Chi Tuishou (or “Push-Hands”) champion.

Waitzkin saw so many parallels between optimal performance in chess and in Tai Chi that he wrote a book called ***The Art of Learning***, where he explains the underlying themes that he uncovered. He also began a foundation, which supports The Art of Learning Project with over 200 participating schools and organizations. Their website states: “When children explore how they learn they become empowered to take control of their learning, express themselves creatively, and develop a life-long love of learning.”

Yes!!!

When I first talked with Katy Wells, the director of The Art of Learning Project, she said she’d taken a look at my website and wasn’t too sure how they could help since we were doing so much of it already. I said, “I’m

not worried about that!”

The Art of Learning (TAOL) approach is theme-based. There are twenty themes in all, divided into 4 modules (Resilience, Peak Performance, Art of Introspection, Advanced Learning). It’s a lot. A person could read Waitzkin’s book many times over and still just get acquainted with all that’s there. I learned from Wells that other TAOL projects were usually oriented around the book for older students. Teachers of younger students typically used the themes to improve their teaching (and their student’s learning) without directly teaching the themes to the younger kids.

I wondered: Could it be possible to share the learning themes themselves with younger children? Three years ago, for example, we were reading stories from Book I of our Hero-Warrior Training series that were (on the surface) about fairies, trolls, and haunted houses but were really about the basic physics of motion in our action. It was fun enough that it didn’t really matter if the understanding was beyond them. They got used to the ideas gradually. There wasn’t any stress about how hard it was. Now the older kids can easily make the connections between the practical physics puzzles built into the stories. But if I had waited, might we still be years away from that level of easy understanding?

It seemed to me that the learning themes themselves were so helpful to the exploration of learning. Could there be some way to make these themes “fun enough” and “concrete enough”? That way, even if the children didn’t really understand, they would see them around. They’d gradually build connections around them. They could grow

up with them—and grow into them.

Towards that end, I gave the learning themes more immediately descriptive names with easier words for kids. (For example the theme of “Building your Trigger” became **Ready-Ease**. The theme of “Using Adversity” became **Problem-Discover**.) With Well’s permission, I also took the “icons” for each theme on their website and made them into cards—and even stickers!



With these descriptive words, icons, cards, and stickers, we have something we can say, see, and touch *as we explore how we learn*, which is an abstract thing to try to wrap our minds around even as grown-ups, let alone if we’re 8 - 12 years old.

“Meta”-learning

When SuperKid Anurag first heard that we were going to “learn how to learn” this semester, he wanted to know how that was possible. “To learn how to learn,” he reasoned, “you’d first have to learn how to

learn how to learn, so you’d have to learn how to learn how to learn....”

“Do *you* think it’s possible?” I asked.

Anurag thought for a few moments. “No.”

Ah, perfect start to our exploration! I asked more questions:

- “So, what if you were, say, cooking, and you wanted to learn more about *how* you were cooking? What might you do?”

- “How might you figure out what led to better or worse cooking?”

- “If we can do that with *cooking*, could we do that with *learning*?”

I told the students about Waitzkin and how he’d gotten curious about the connections he saw between his learning of chess and his learning of Tai Chi. That provided a role model for us, too. Could we become more curious about learning itself like Waitzkin?

I teach Tai Chi as my teacher, Master Wonchull Park, taught me. We emphasize 1) understanding generally, 2) practicing “better info for better action,” and 3) applying this in daily life. The kids have gotten used to this. What was once a strange idea to them—i.e., that Tai Chi could help them in anything they do—has gradually become more self-evident. Through years of stories and challenges, they are familiar with the “pieces” of understanding, such as how relaxation helps us do better. They are familiar with the “pieces” of practice, like being able to know *how* aware they are.

They’re ready to begin to “put the pieces together,” and the learning themes could literally help us see how it all fits together.



So for the first half of the semester, we used the 4 Guiding themes (**Responsible-Flow, Basics-for-Everything, Dig-in-Deep, Work-Together**) to make more connections in our general understanding. We used the 4 Discovering themes (**All-In, Slow-Repeat, Inner-Compass, Ever-New**) to get more clear on how we practice “better info for better action.”

We gradually began to build up our skills of independent learning/practice of Tai Chi with these themes. That has been a main focus for the second half of the semester. We are also using the 8 Applying themes (**Ready-Ease, Reach-Rest, Yet-Grow, “Worse”-for-Better, Okay-Rocky, Past-Past, Problem-Discover, No-Walls**) as a way to reflect on some common scenarios that come up again and again when learning and living.

I’ve been so thrilled with the experience so far. In the few weekly emails ahead, it will be my aim to share with you an overview of the learning themes and how our SuperKids learned with them.

As you all know, it’s my poorly-kept secret that I teach what I need myself and what I wish I had learned earlier. Yes, I had my mom’s common-sense advice about “laying a track” and “fresh eyes.” But what if I could

have grown-up with *learning themes* and with the sense of empowerment about my own learning process that came with them? What if I could have grown up with a role model showing how it was possible to develop oneself as a *learner* (of anything)? That would have been cool—and oh so helpful.

Onward in the learning journey!
Mackenzie

P.S. - As always, please just reply to this email with any comments or questions.

By Mackenzie Hawkins

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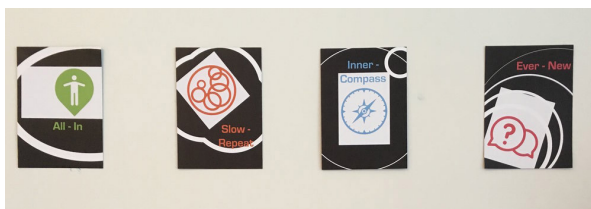
4 Discovering Themes



Aids to Discovery

For sure, this is not about trying to make the process of learning “all neat and tidy.” In fact, the use of themes seems to highlight the overlap, interconnectedness, and endless variations that are possible when it comes to the endeavor of getting better at what we do.

Our 4 Discovering themes this semester are **All-In**, **Slow-Repeat**, **Inner-Compass**, and **Ever-New**. Below we’ll give them a very brief summary—with some highlights of student work and comments.



All-In

Enthusiastic, alert, mindful.

I perceive my mind in and of itself.

If it is scattered and noisy, I perceive it is scattered and noisy.

If it is centered and quiet, I perceive it is centered and quiet.

- Buddha, Mindfulness Sutra

The Discovering theme of **All-In** has actually been part of our SuperChallenges for several years now. It’s really about mindfulness. Are we “with” what’s happening? Or are we “*not* with” what’s happening?

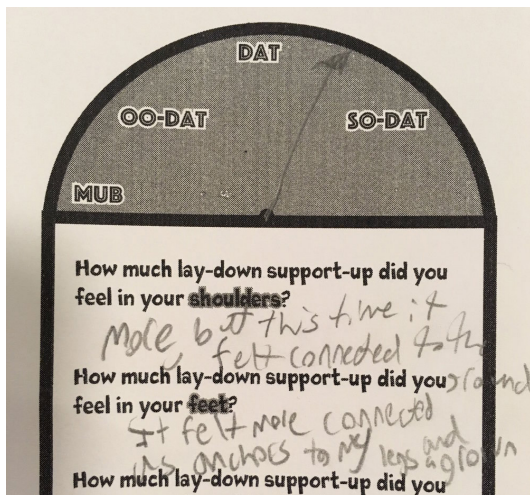
In our classes, we emphasize how it’s just very practical to be *with* what is going on—*whatever is going on*. For example, this is what we sing in a verse of our Tai Chi song (set to the music of “You are my sunshine”):
*If something happens, we want to know it.
We want to feel what’s going on.*

With better info, there’s better action.

*Jing [body], qi [emotion], shen [awareness]
Shen [awareness], yi [intention], qi [emotion],
jing [body].*

If we talk about mindfulness as “paying attention,” though, we might actually end up “paying” with our attention! That is, we might feel like it is *more work* to be more aware because we’re caught up in a kind of effortful, narrow concentration. Instead, we want to be able to feel how it’s actually easier to be openly aware to all that is going on in our experience. So that’s how our made-up words of DAT (“*with* what’s happening”) and MUB (“*not with* what’s happening”) came into regular use in our classes.

Below is an example of a “DATometer” that SuperKid Anurag used this semester to reflect on how DAT (“*with* what’s happening”) he was during his Tai Chi circle form practice.



When the kids were in their first few years of Tai Chi, we would only have short spurts of SuperChallenges (ranging from 3 to 10 minutes). Sometimes the children had to place a bet for whether they were going to risk 1, 2, or 3 coins, so these SuperChallenges were often an exciting moment in our SuperKid Game. They knew that *they would be the ones* who would assess themselves at the end on how DAT/MUB they were. After all, only they can *really* know how DAT they are on the inside (as I often remind them).

In these SuperChallenges, we also emphasized that being DAT was about being DAT with *anything*—even with feeling restless, wiggly, wanting to make a noise, bored, *anything*. I remember well how it used to be a real challenge for SuperKid Nived to get through a 5-minute guided meditation SuperChallenge when we first began. He’d say at the end of five minutes, “That was like *5 hours!!!*”

After our years of practice, though, the **All-In** theme was pretty much “old news” for the kids this semester. I actually didn’t teach SuperKid Nived the **All-In** theme when I introduced it. Instead, I tried to get

him to teach it to me! On the first day of the semester, he had this amazingly DAT practice of Tai Chi circle form. So I told him that I had been planning to give him a “big speech” about how important it was to be **All-In** during our practice of Tai Chi, but maybe he should make the speech instead. (Cue the fist as our make-believe microphone).

“How can you do that?” I asked. “How can you be so **All-In** in your practice? I mean, you’re just seven.”

SuperKid Nived shrugged, like it’s nothing. “I don’t know.”

“What does that feel like?” I pressed. “What’s going on in there that let’s you be **All-In** like that? Because a lot of people would want to know.”

“I don’t know,” he said, with another shrug and a smile. “Just focus.”

Slow-Repeat

In practicing the long forms, your body should move like the flowing water of a great river.

— *Tai Chi Classics*

When I ask beginning Princeton students what they associate with Tai Chi, I often get answers like, “Old people doing it in a park,” or “My grandfather would practice it every morning.” People usually think about the slow movements done repeatedly in Tai Chi forms. **Slow-Repeat** can seem to be just “what we do” in Tai Chi.

It’s also probably one of the reasons why Tai Chi is often considered “too hard” for kids. When starting out with our SuperKid Tai Chi classes, I’d be happy if we got through the opening six moves of the Chen-style barehands form just a few times—or even just once!—in an hour-long class. In other words, there wasn’t much **Slow-Repeat** in our classes. We were busy creating the

interest (and the sense of ownership) with stories, activities, games, and play.

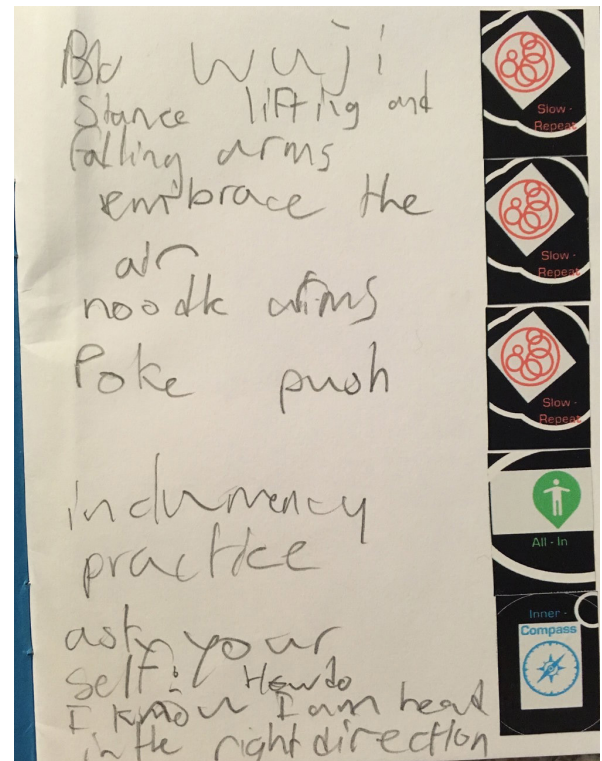
But in the past year, the “fun” of Tai Chi has shifted for the kids. They now feel how it is fun to get better at it. There’s motivation for going deeper into our practice. They’ve begun to notice how doing movements slowly, over and over again, helps them to feel more. It’s not just their form that improves, but also their martial art tests such as breaking grip and our Tuishou (Push-Hands) balancing game.

They are beginning to see how the long, slow forms of Tai Chi are not just about moving slowly for the sake of moving slowly! **Slow-Repeat** serves a practice purpose: helping us improve our physical coordination and action for power, speed, and responsiveness.

That’s not to say that it’s easy to be a young kid just shifting back and forth in “warrior stance” or doing “embrace the air” arm movements for several long minutes. So that’s why we drew inspiration this semester from Waitzkin’s description of his Tai Chi practice in ***The Art of Learning***. For example, he writes, “At times I *repeated segments of the form over and over* [my emphasis], honing certain techniques while refining my body mechanics and deepening my sense of relaxation. I focused on small movements, sometimes *spending hours* [my emphasis] moving my hand out a few inches, then releasing it back....” This helped put our more difficult **Slow-Repeat** SuperChallenges in perspective!

Below is one of SuperKid Theodore’s independent practice plans (with our learning

theme stickers) where **Slow-Repeat** was definitely a recurring theme:



I’d also hoped that the theme of **Slow-Repeat** would help the kids investigate the central role it plays in our Tai Chi practice. Despite my high hopes, I was the one who was taken aback by how the kids really insisted on figuring out why **Slow-Repeat** “worked.”

It started with Anurag’s comment after a **Slow-Repeat** SuperChallenge when he said, “I think I was sort of cheating because I was slow but I wasn’t smooth. Going slow like that would just be wasting my time. It’s got to be about being refined, too.”

Then I shared with them this provocative quote from Waitzkin and the Art of Learning Project website: “We have to be able to do something slowly before we can do it quickly.” We asked, “What makes sense about this? What questions does it raise? Do you agree? Disagree?” (In our classes, we emphasize that it doesn’t

matter who someone is or what they've done, we need to be able to think and understand for ourselves.)

Anushri took on the negative side to the debate: "There are some things you can only do fast," she argued. At first, jumping seemed like a good example of that, since moving slowly through the air isn't really an option for us. Then we considered how, in our Parkour/ Tai Chi collaboration over the winter, coach Jaimin had really encouraged us to practice a slow-mo preparation for a jump (while on the ground) as much as was feasible.

Anushri decided that going slow was good for feeling all the small movements that make up our bigger movement. (As I told her, she was already teaching the Guiding theme of **Dig-in-Deep** that we'd be exploring next week!) Still, she wondered if there would be some things where going slow would be pointless: "Like drawing," she said. "What would be the point?"

"Is your movement when drawing made up of lots of small movements?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah!"

Slow-Repeat is just one effective way we can have more information about what's going on—including what it feels like—and how we might go in the direction of improvement.

Inner-Compass

An ordinary cook hacks.

A good cook slices.

My blade moves ever so slightly—I find the ox already cut at my feet.

— Zhuangzi, *Inner Chapters*

How do we know that we're improving? How do we know if we're getting better?

A lot of the time, we might look to others to make that call for us. The teacher praises the student. Or the student watches for how much she is advancing compared to other students. We also might tend to accumulate more and more superficial "know-how" so that we can point to that and think to ourselves, "See, I am improving!"

That's one reason why people can get sidetracked by trying to accumulate lots of different forms in the martial arts. As Waitzkin wrote in ***The Art of Learning***, "Everyone races to learn more and more, but nothing is done deeply.... Nothing is learned at a high level and what results are form collectors with fancy kicks and twirls that have absolutely no martial value."

It's just very easy to get caught up in "signs" or "measurements" of improvement that actually don't indicate much deep improvement at all. That's why it's helpful to have simple, straight-forward tests of power, strength, and responsiveness in our action. It's not about what is "standard" or the "tricks to it" or "what the teacher says about it." Either you can do it—or you can't.

With the practice of Tai Chi, we can also link our externally-testable performance to an internal feeling. For example, Waitzkin mentions again and again "a feeling" in Tai Chi that he used to improve his martial art skills:

- "When through painstaking refinement of a small movement ***I had the improved feeling...***"

- "It was time to take ***my new feeling*** and put it to action."

- "Now I begin to slowly, incrementally, condense my movements ***while maintaining that feeling...***"

- “Each little refinement is **monitored by the feeling** of the punch, which I gained from months or years of training with the large, traditional motion.”

It would be quite handy to have a word for “the feeling” that Waitzkin keeps talking about in his Tai Chi practice. At Master Park’s Wuwei Tai Chi School, we use the word “comfort,” since it can have the original meaning of the word: “com” as in *together* and “fort” as in *strong*. In Book II of our Hero-Warrior Training series, this is what Zhuan—who is a giant centipede that can play saxophone, keyboard, and drums all at the same time—says about the feeling of comfort:

“Comfort is what makes music music.
Comfort is what makes action action.
Comfort isn’t no silly, sloppy, slushy, mushy thing.

Break it down. *Com* – fort.

Com-munity, *com*-pany, *com*-bine

Com be Together.

Com – *fort*. Break it down.

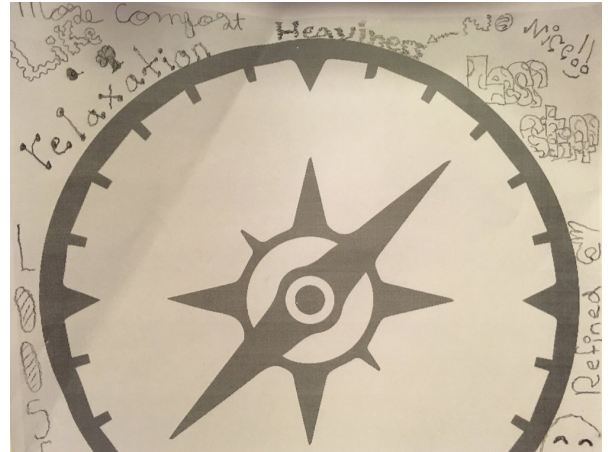
Fort – ified, *fort*-ress, *fort*-issimo

Fort be Strong.

“Comfort is the *Together-Strong* word,” Zhuan continued. “And it’s got to be the most practically useful word around. Working together, Together Strong, *Com-fort*. But what’s a word? It’s the feeling that counts. Comfort is ‘wow’ on the inside. It’s ‘wow’ on the outside. It’s how we do what we do when we do our very best.”

There’s a lot of different ways we can feel more comfort in our action, and we want to be on the lookout for them. During our **Inner-Compass** challenges, SuperKids get to “set” their own compass for their inner experience.

They are doing *the same move* (that’s a very important point), but something feels different. What’s the feeling that will let them know they are doing it better?



Above is SuperKid Anushri’s brainstorm about possible **Inner-Compass** directions. Afterwards, the kids picked just one feeling that would serve as their **Inner-Compass** for that practice. For example, Anushri chose “less heaviness,” especially in her arms, as the feeling she would monitor. SuperKid Anurag chose “refined.” SuperKid Nived chose “When it easier [sic] it good.” SuperKid Theodore chose “free.”

It can take some time for sure, but, when kids get the knack of having an **Inner-Compass**, it’s empowering far beyond the martial arts. After all, how much encouragement—from teachers, parents, and all the rest—have we’ve had to look inward in order to discern whether we are improving? But to truly learn the “internal martial art” of Tai Chi, we have to discover how our own internal feeling can be some of our very best feedback.

Ever-New

In the beginner’s mind, there are many possibilities.

In the “expert’s” mind, there are few.

Always be a beginner.
— Zen Master

“Right now,” I said, “on a scale from 1-10, how well do you think you know the moves of the first paragraph?” The first paragraph of the Chen-style barehands form is something that these kids have been practicing for three years. They’ve done it over and over again.

SuperKid Mateo said that he was an 8 out of 10 in terms of knowing the moves. SuperKid Nived said he was a 9 1/2.

Then I asked, “Still just thinking about the first paragraph, how well do you think you do it, where 10 is doing it at your full potential?”

Mateo said he was 7-8ish. Nived said he was 8-9ish, adding, “I was really bad at it when I started [at age 5].” After three years, SuperKid Nived probably feels like he’s been doing Tai Chi (and this first paragraph of the barehands form) practically “all his life”! From that perspective, he has many reasons to feel like he’s near the top of what he can do.

I just wrote down their numbers, and we kept practicing. It wasn’t long, though, before SuperKid Mateo said, “I think I want to change my answer.” He was thinking about the “covered punch” move in the form and said, “If someone practiced just that for hours and hours a day, they could be a lot more relaxed. There’s a lot more comfort that I could have. I’m a 1,” he said with decision.

At that point, I shared with them how, three years ago, I probably would have thought I was a 5 out of 10 in terms of doing the first paragraph at my potential. Then I told them how I’ve really improved the past three years, and, as a result, I now would say that I am no more than a 2 out of 10.

SuperKid Anushri was quite concerned by this: “You’re getting worse!” “There could be another reason for the lower number,” I explained. “It could be that the more I learn, the more I see how much more is possible, just by not getting in the way of my own action as much.”

Zen masters, for example, can just sit in meditation for years and years and still feel like there is so much potential to uncover in themselves. That’s one reason why the attitude of “*shoshin*,” or beginner’s mind, is emphasized in that tradition.

There’s just so much going that gives us our experience. While sitting quietly in meditation, for instance, it can be easier to feel the inner-workings of our mind and emotion than if we are bustling about with our everyday activities. It can even be easier to feel our core and the movement around our *dantian*, if our arms aren’t waving about in big motions. That’s why we sometimes practice “arm-less” Tai Chi, where we do the first paragraph of the form without the arm movements. When we “take away” the arms, we can discover lots of subtle, but crucially important, movements that we can coordinate in ways that feel more refined, more free, and easier.

The importance of the theme **Ever-New** became clear when we discussed what might happen to our practice if we thought we were an 8 or 9 already in terms of our potential for relaxation and comfort. It’s really hard to discover and learn a lot more when you think there isn’t a lot more to discover and learn!

What new and deeper experiences of perception, relaxation, and comfort-in-action might we discover when we set our **Inner-Compass** and do **Slow-Repeat** with **All-In**?

We want to open to that sense of possibilities in our practice—and that's what the theme of **Ever-New** can help us to do.

June 6, 2019

Here's the thing: There is *everything* that makes up our action to discover in the moving meditation of Tai Chi. That's a lot to discover! As my teacher, Master Park, often says, "There is no end." But discovery and progress can come to a premature close if we think that there's not much more of an adventure ahead for us. When we stay open, we can find an endless adventure is waiting for us.

Onward in the learning journey!

Mackenzie

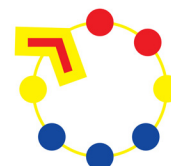
P.S. - Welcome any comments — love hearing from you all.

By Mackenzie Hawkins

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Practice of Practice



10,000 hours of...

The formula is wonderfully simple: Just put in the time. Spend 10,000 hours practicing something over about 10 years and you can be an expert. That's according to the "10,000 hour rule," popularized by Malcolm Gladwell in his book ***Outliers***. It was based on a study by a cognitive psychologist that tried to find patterns to how people get really, *really* good at doing something, such as becoming an Olympic athlete, a chess grandmaster, a renowned concert pianist, prima ballerina, or PGA golfer (to list a few of the expert types who were part of the study). Yet that study went further than just saying how much time they spent practicing in order to reach that level of excellence. It tried to also uncover patterns in *how* they practiced.

The study said that a lot of performance could be accounted for by what the researcher called "deliberate practice." Below is a diagram from Angela Duckworth's book, ***Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance***, that lays out what this kind "deliberate practice" is like:

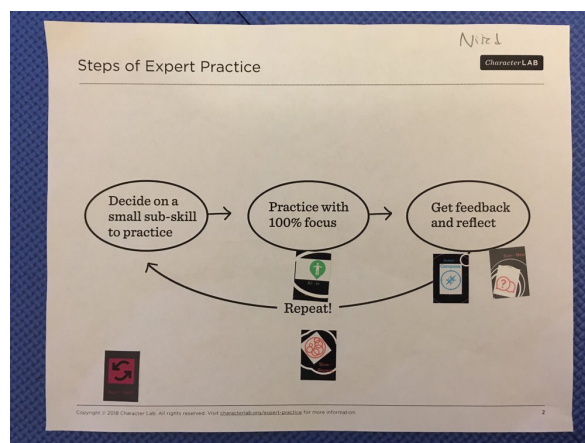


In an worksheet exercise from Duckworth’s CharacterLab program, we are told that Maya needs to get better at free throws in order to make varsity basketball: “I’ve been practicing after school with my friends and at home on the weekends,” Maya says. “I even force my older brother to play against me almost every day. But my free throw percentage seems to be staying the same, despite all the time I’m spending on basketball right now. I don’t know...maybe free throws aren’t my thing and I’ll just never be good enough to make the varsity team.” The worksheet asks us what advice we would give to Maya so that she could improve her free throws and make the varsity team.

SuperKid Anushri advised Maya to “just focus on free throws! At least spend an hour every day just practicing free throws.” SuperKid Theodore said that Maya should even focus on things like how she holds the ball during free throws. SuperKid Anurag encouraged Maya to practice with “100% focus, being **All-In**.”

The children were able to see how the Discovering themes that we’ve been exploring could “map” onto the deliberate practice model. For example, below is how SuperKid Nived chose to “wield” his Discovering theme stickers of **All-In**, **Slow-Repeat**, **Inner-Compass**, and **Ever-New** onto CharacterLab’s “Steps of Expert

Practice” handout. (He also included the Applying theme of **Reach-Rest** in between rounds of practice because, as he says, it’s his favorite.)



Yet the Discovering themes have also helped us to see how learning—and getting better at what we do—can encompass so much more than what we might typically consider as “practice.” We might use the “deliberate practice” map, if we wanted, but it certainly wasn’t “the only way to practice.”

For example, deliberate practice seems relatively effective for excelling at sports, games, and music in the meta-analysis of studies on it. Yet, as seen in the chart below, the impact of deliberate practice is almost non-existent for excelling at professions in the “real world” or in the field education.

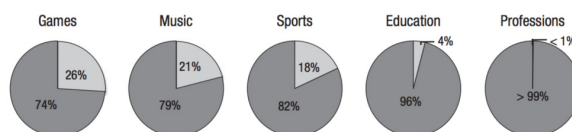


Fig. 3. Percentage of variance in performance explained (light gray) and not explained (dark gray) by deliberate practice within each domain studied. Percentage of variance explained is equal to $r^2 \times 100$.

Because of the limitations of the deliberate practice model, some people are recommending that we replace the “10,000 hour rule” with the “10,000 experiments rule,” in order to capture more of what it takes to excel creatively in a changing field.

I must admit that I like the sound of “10,000 experiments” (just as I was also vaguely inspired by the idea of “10,000 hours” when I first read about it, too). But I can’t say I’m exactly rushing to put it into application. After all, it would be nice to have more guidance than just being on “experiment number 2,342”!

How can we go about investigating, exploring, experimenting, discovering, and improving—in a word, *learning*? How can we have guidance that aids us without limiting the learning experience in all its diversity?

For instance, the author of ***The Practice of Practice*** dug into the research on the practice of music for three years and found that all such studies were about Western classical musicians. Was there anything on how Jazz or Indian classical musicians—punk rock artists or singer-songwriters—become really, really great at what they do? “Nothing. Zip. Zilch. Nada,” he reports.

This just means that we will need to be able to make our own learning “map” so that it actually makes sense for us and what we are aiming to get better at. That’s why The Art of Learning Project supports “educators, parents, coaches, and students in *carving their own paths to excellence*.” There’s no assumption that a “one-size-fits-all” approach would work when it comes to the learning process. Instead, the learning themes are there to help us explore learning itself and find our way. That message from The Art of Learning Project comes through loud and clear: “It is up to you to map your unique path to learning.”

There is no mold

Every spring, we have a Being Your Best

Summit, where we invite a special guest to engage in Q&A with the children. Last year, the children discussed performance, Heart Rate Variability (HRV) biofeedback-based meditation, and mental preparation with Olympic rower Sarah Trowbridge.

Our special guest for this year’s Being Your Best Summit is Rudresh Mahanthappa, an artist who’s “definitely one of the strongest voices on the jazz scene” and “widely known as one of the premier voices in jazz in the 21st century.” Mahanthappa has been named alto saxophonist of the year for seven of eight years running in ***Downbeat Magazine’s*** International Critics’ Polls (and eight other similar honors), as well as being a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award.

In the weeks leading up to our Being Your Best Summit, we’ve been digging into how Mahanthappa gets better at what he does. What are his practices like? What has been his unique path to learning?

Here are some of his very quotable quotes that give a flavor of the perspective he can offer us:

- “So I’m always trying to figure out how to embrace a really high level of rigor with a high level of creativity and integrity. If we understand how **what we’re doing actually, really relates to who we are**, that kind of integrity and honesty always prevails.”

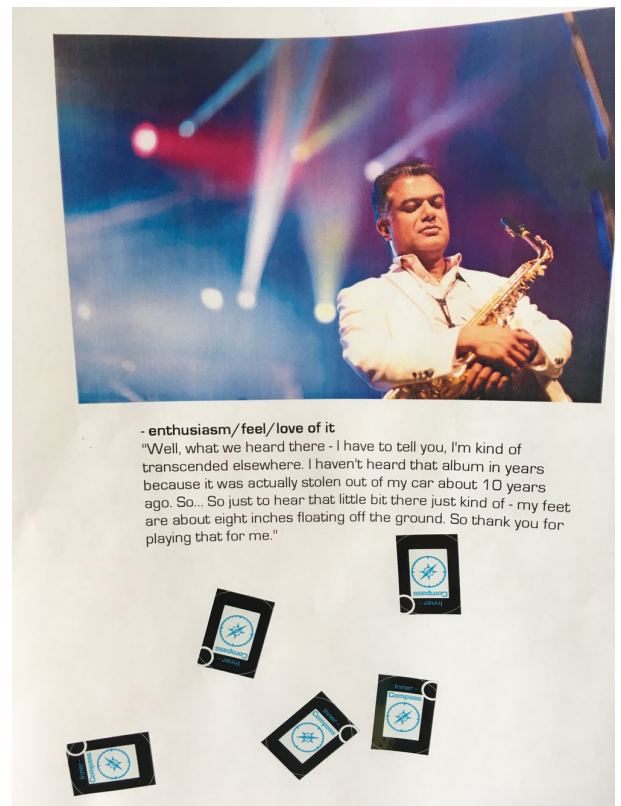
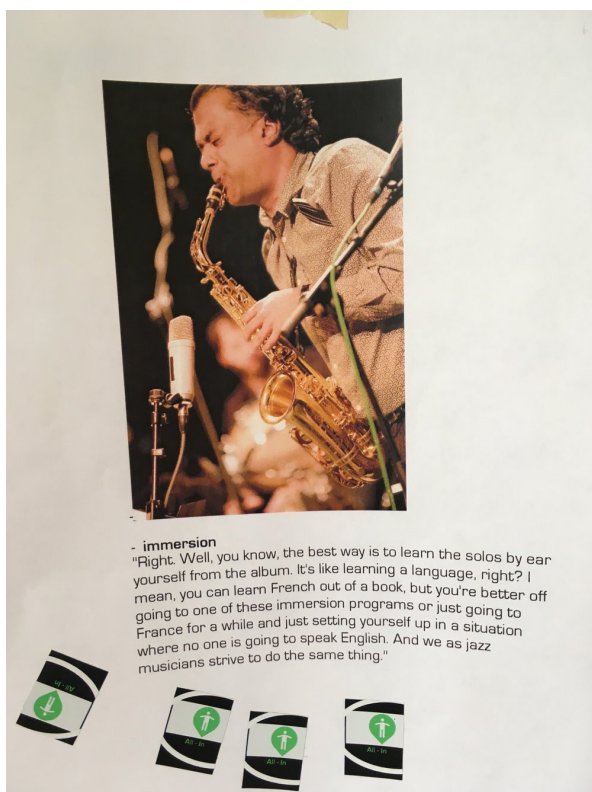
- “I think **awareness is everything**. If you’re aware of the fact that each individual has the ability to express themselves uniquely—if you’re aware that you have that in you—it will eventually come out.”

- “You are much better off **breaking**

something down and figuring out why it works and making those building blocks yours than just kind of imitating that thing that worked.”

- “I think it’s really, really important to look outside of what you do and see how other people approach what they do. It’s worth looking at how **any innovator** came across what it is they do and how they got there. All these things end up being applicable because it’s really not about the medium or the end product. It’s about the thought process that got the person from point A to point B, and what happened along the way.”

Pondering quotes from Mahanthappa has helped us to explore the variety and uniqueness of all the ways we can learn, even as we find the underlying themes at work over and over again. Below are examples of how the SuperKids chose to “wield” their Discovering theme stickers on Mahanthappa’s quotes from NPR interviews.



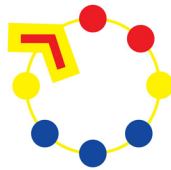
But would all this exploration of learning actually empower the children in their *own* learning? That was the \$64,000 question! As The Art of Learning website says, “When children *explore* how they learn, they become *empowered* to take control of their learning....”

After all, we’re not just “arm-chair” scholars curious about the topic of learning. We want to be able to put it into action. Would the kids be able to use the learning themes to direct their own independent practices? By week three of the semester, we were just beginning to test that out. At week six, the pieces began to come together. It was time for me to “step back” as the teacher and see just what our SuperKids could do.

Onward on the learning journey!
Mackenzie

June 13, 2019

Explore to Empower



What if...?

What if we only made the same mistake once? Josh Waitzkin wrote in *The Art of Learning*, “If a student of virtually any discipline could avoid ever repeating the same mistake twice...he or she would skyrocket to the top of their field.” He adds, “Of course, such a feat is impossible—we are bound to repeat thematic errors....”

This didn’t just inspire us. We practically turned it into a game!

As a Tai Chi teacher, I always want to make sure that kids don’t get the impression that doing Tai Chi well is just a matter of getting down the details of where your arms and legs are supposed to go in the Tai Chi forms. But now that we had made our “deep Tai Chi” practice so much more concrete with our Discovering themes, we could focus more on our “surface Tai Chi” practice, too.

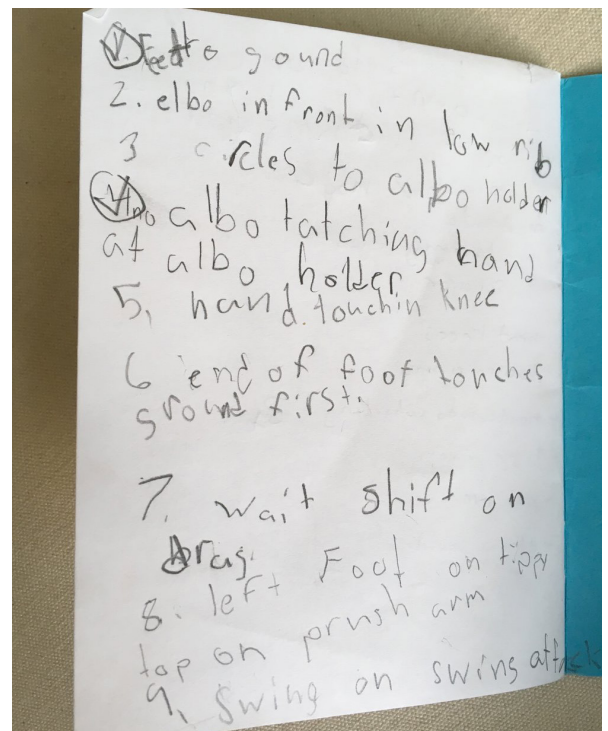
Over this spring semester, we were more than tripling the number of moves in the barehands Chen-style long form that the children could do on their own. There’s a standard way to do the form, and we don’t

want to get into small bad habits that will be harder to break later on. So I began challenging the SuperKids to learn one “surface mistake” each class—and to see if they could never, ever do it again.

They’d write down the “surface mistake” in their practice journals, and then I wouldn’t say anything about it again. (Though, I might pause and “clear my throat” as a hint to check if they were doing it again, or, if needed, I might say, “Look in your journal.”)

It was their own notes in their journals that told them what they needed to do—not me. *It was up to them.* After I taught them how to avoid the “surface mistake” once, it really was up to them to never do it again.

I found it rather remarkable how quickly they learned under these conditions of “it being up to them.” Eight-year-old SuperKid Nived even got quite excited by this kind of practice and began adding “surface mistakes” to his book *before* I could give them to him. Below is his growing list of “surface mistakes”:



1. feet to ground
2. elbow in front in low rib
3. circles to "elbow holder"
4. no elbow touching hand at "elbow holder"
5. hand touching knee
6. end of foot touches ground first
7. weight shift on "drag"
8. left foot on tippy top on "brush arm"
9. swing on "swing attack"

Trying out independence

This semester we also began having serious, independent practice sessions during class that were more than just reviewing the moves of the form on our own. The SuperKids had to write-out a 10-minute independent practice plan and then do it.

It was "anything goes." They could practice any part of Tai Chi they wanted to. They could do it any way they wanted to. At first, I would just specify what Discovering themes they needed to use to inspire their plan and practice for that day. Later on, they were free to use any of the learning themes they wanted.

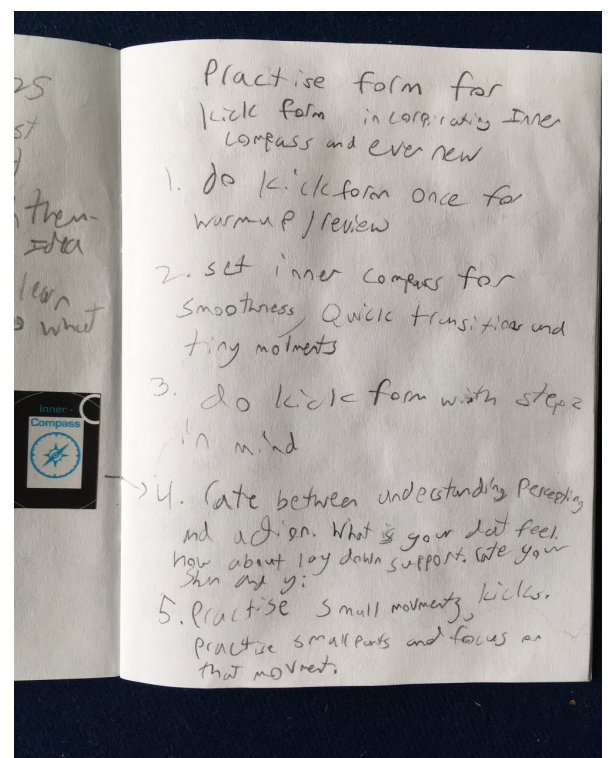
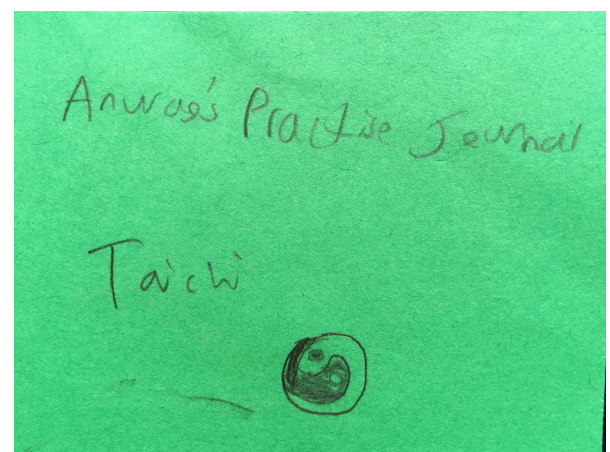
It was fascinating to watch these SuperKids industriously going about the design and execution of their practice plans. Because children feel empowered in their play (and they take their play seriously!), I almost felt like I was witnessing them playing—yet it was some of the most serious learning, too.

SuperKid Mateo said later that independent practice "mentally made us happy." I asked him about that because I had wondered if it felt like more responsibility and more work. He said it helped them to "relax mentally" and that they "physically weren't tight" because "we were doing it for ourselves." SuperKid

Anushri came bounding up to me after one of our early independent practice sessions of the semester, asking, "Can we do more of that?"

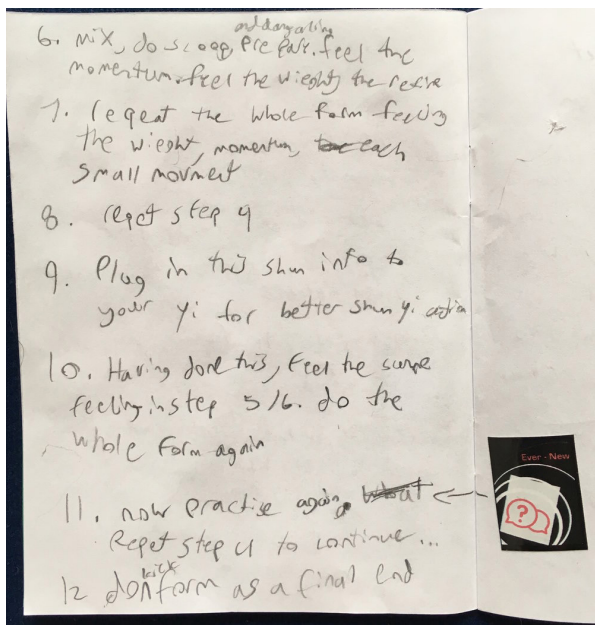
I assured her that independent practice would be the main focus of the whole second half of our semester!

Below is an example of just how much thought students put into their practice plans. This is a practice plan and journal entry that 12-year-old Anurag did on Thursday, May 19, 2019.



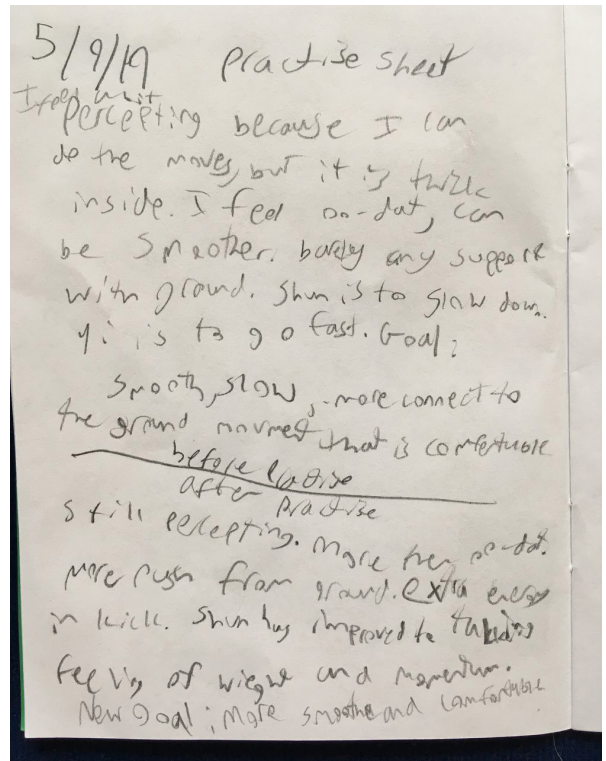
Practice form for kick form incorporating
Inner-Compass and **Ever-New**

1. Do kick form once for warmup/review
2. **set inner compass for smoothness, quick transitions, and tiny movements**
3. Do kick form with step 2 in mind
4. Rate between understanding, perceiving [sic], and action. What is your DAT feel. How about lay down support. Rate your shen [awareness] and yi [intention]
5. Practice small movements, kicks. Practice small parts and focus on that movement.



6. Mix, do scoop prepare. **Feel the dangling and momentum. Feel the weight, the refine**
7. Repeat the whole form feeling the weight, momentum, each small movement
8. Repeat step 4
9. **Plug in this shen [awareness] info to your yi [intention] for better shen-yi action**

10. Having done this, feel the same feeling in step 5/6. Do the whole form again.
11. Now practice again. Repeat step 4 to continue...
12. Do kick form as a final end



Before practice:

A bit perceiving because I **can do the moves, but it is thick inside**. I feel oo-DAT, can be smoother. Barely any support with ground. Shen [awareness] is to slow down. Yi [intention] is to go fast. Goal: smooth, slow, more connect to ground movement that is comfortable.

After practice:

Still perceiving. More than oo-DAT. **More push from ground. Extra energy in kick.** Shen [awareness] has improved to taking feeling of weight and momentum. New goal: more smooth and comfortable.

I find this totally thrilling *because I can't teach* SuperKid Anurag—or any other kid—this “from the outside.” I can never teach my students at the level that SuperKid Anurag was teaching himself in that practice session. I can only have secondhand clues about what he might be feeling—the “input” of sensation he’s aware of. I can only guess at the “intention messages” he is sending to do his movements. Only when SuperKids are empowered as “captains” of their own learning experience can they learn at this level.

But would they think about this as just a “Tai Chi” thing? As much as we had talked about how the learning themes could help with all different kinds of learning, I knew only too well from my own experience that it’s one thing to “talk the talk” about how applicable something is. It’s another thing to “walk the walk”!

Sometimes it even seems to me as if “transferring skills” is itself a skill that we need to practice before it can come more naturally to us. I wanted to encourage our SuperKids to get that practice in before the end of the semester so that they could begin to see opportunities for using these learning themes everywhere.

“Up to them” time

Here is their challenge: It can be anything that they want to get better at. They have one month. They need to do 12 practice sessions. They need to design at least 6 practices and journal for another 6 practices. That’s the Declaration of Independent Learner Badge challenge that SuperKids can go for this semester.

All through the semester, we’ve had an ongoing discussion about what’s the role of a *teacher*, what’s the role of a *student*—and what’s the role of a *learner*. This was inspired by yet another quote from Josh Waitzkin: “And when there is no one to look in; no one to give feedback or cheer us on, a keen but relaxed focus will enable us to motivate and monitor ourselves.” That made a big impression on our SuperKids. They talked about how it was like you had to be your own teacher. One even responded to that quote by just saying, “Whoa.”

There’s been a lot of moments this semester, when I’ve felt like saying, “Whoa—and wow!” I hope to highlight more student work in the final emails of the semester. SuperKid Anushri tells me that her practice journal for the Independent Learner Badge has a lot more insights. SuperKid Mateo reports that, by applying what he’s learned this semester in Tai Chi, his team had a comeback in the final baseball game and won the championship!

Onwards on the learning journey!
Mackenzie

P.S. - As always, love hearing your thoughts—just reply to this email.

By Mackenzie Hawkins

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www.learningthemind.org

June 18, 2019

What would RFM do?



Guiding themes

Just this past weekend, we had a student come to Master Park's class who had studied Tai Chi for many years under one of the best Dajia ("large frame") Chen-style Tai Chi masters in China. By the end of Master Park's class, the new student was just shaking his head, saying, "How does he do it?"

I said, "He told you." The man shrugged it off. "You don't believe it," I observed.

"No, I believe it," he said. "I experienced it!"

"But you don't think it's really a matter of getting out of your own way in such simple ways as Master Park teaches. You don't see it as possible *for you*."

As Laozi wrote in the ***Tao Te Ching***, "My words are easy to understand and easy to practice, but in all the world there is no one who understands and puts it into practice." Right at the beginning of class that day, Master Park had said, "Very, very simple thing: the fact that everything is interaction. It is not alone. Everything we do—every phenomenon—is all interaction. It's *both* directions. It's even equal interaction: action-reaction. That simple rational thing—if you

start to really feel that, it's a way to do well in all the things you do. There is almost no end." The new student had heard those words, but he couldn't yet see how something so simple and so general could result in being able to do specific, seemingly extraordinary things.

I'm still surprised by it, too. Last month, for instance, I was talking to a Kung Fu teacher, who's also a student of Master Park, about how I have trouble considering myself a "martial arts" person. It's kind of strange, after all, since I just do Tai Chi to help myself—and others—be happier and healthier. I'm not interested in beating up on anybody!

When I shared this, the Kung Fu martial artist chuckled and said, "I wouldn't want to fight you." He said he's known for having an amazing "root" at the school where he teaches, but, when he tested me out, I could unbalance him—and he couldn't push me over. (By the way, 8-year-old SuperKid Nived may already be better than me at this: one day we tested out our stances and 13-year-old Mateo pushed one-handed as hard as he could on Nived's hip. Nived just stood there—completely solid—like it was nothing!)

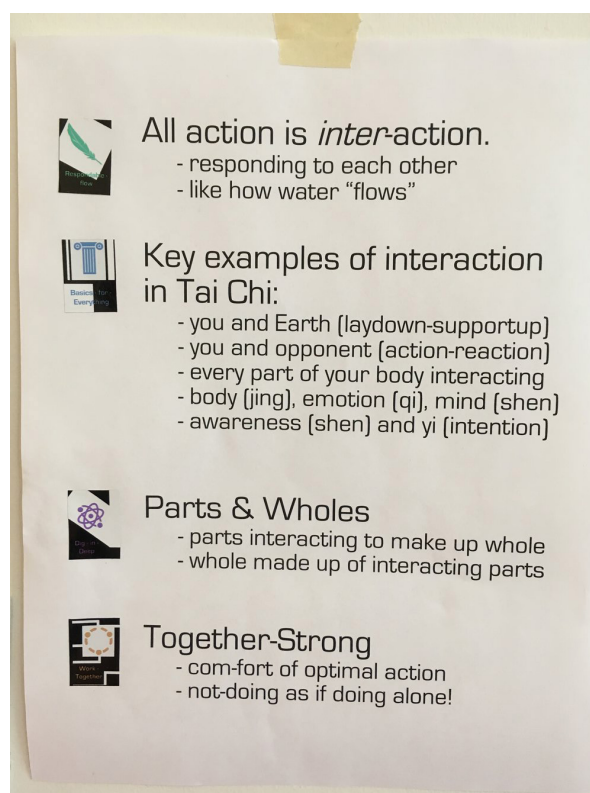
This just happens to any serious student of Master Park. To pick one example, we had a very dedicated Princeton grad student take classes 5 days a week with Master Park for almost two years. He's graduating from Princeton with a Ph.D. in comparative literature—and the ability to do *cun jin*.


Cun jin, or "inch power," is the almost legendary ability to deliver a knock-out punch with one's hand already just one inch (or less) away from the target. There's no room for a "wind-up," which means the power has to come from totally efficient, well-informed action as *inter*-action, especially


with the ground. It looks effortless—it even feels relatively effortless when you do it. A boxer who joined our Tai Chi classes about two months ago was having trouble seeing how our relaxed, “comfortable” punches (as practiced in the Tai Chi form) could really be powerful. So Master Park told the boxer to punch as hard as he could with two 9-inch kick shields in-between him and another student. With that much padding, the force of the boxer’s punch was easy to take. Then Master Park asked Michael, who is one of his more advanced students, to stand on one leg and do *cun jin* through the two kick shields at 50% power, then 75% power. That’s when the boxer said, “No more!” (For the record, the boxer is now a dedicated student.)


One day I was telling 12-year-old SuperKid Theodore some of these stories about *cun jin* in order to impress upon him that he will have to stop treating *martial arts*—that is, the art of battle and fighting—as if it were a game (or as a way of expanding his repertoire of rough-housing moves to try on his dad). So, of course, Theodore immediately wanted to learn how to do *cun jin* himself. I told him that he was already learning it because—even with the games, the stories, and the fun—I was teaching him Tai Chi just as Master Park had taught me.


I guess it’s probably hard to imagine anything more different than my kids’ Tai Chi classes and typical “external martial art” classes. We don’t “drill” at punches with some “tough” authority telling us what to do and how to do it. We spend our time *figuring out* and *finding* what is really at work in our action.



 All action is *interaction*.
- responding to each other
- like how water “flows”

 Key examples of interaction in Tai Chi:
- you and Earth (laydown-supportup)
- you and opponent (action-reaction)
- every part of your body interacting
- body (jing), emotion (qi), mind (shen)
- awareness (shen) and yi (intention)

 Parts & Wholes
- parts interacting to make up whole
- whole made up of interacting parts

 Together-Strong
- com-fort of optimal action
- not-doing as if doing alone!

That’s what our Guiding themes (shown above as they relate to Tai Chi) help us to do. **Responsible-Flow**, **Basics-for-Everything**, **Dig-in-Deep**, and **Work-Together** help to guide our discovery of action *as interaction*. That’s why what happened next might seem surprising—but isn’t really.

When SuperKid Theodore said that he couldn’t believe that so much power was possible at such short range, I said, “Good! People say all kinds of things. You should be skeptical until you are ready to experience it for yourself.” Then Theodore came into class the next week and told me of his experiment with some pillows: a long punch from his external martial art practice went only halfway to compressing the pillows but his relaxed, short punch (as we do in the Tai Chi form) went three-quarters of the way to compressing them. After his experiment, SuperKid Theodore could see this as possible *for himself*.

For Master Park and me, this is the role that the martial arts really play in our classes and in our own lives. Yes, I'm glad that, if caught in a situation *absolutely* calling for self-defense, I'd probably do better than I think I would—and so would my students. But I hope that will never, ever happen! The real, day-to-day benefit is having an objective test (such as power, strength, balance, or speed) that allows us to experience how *what is very simple* can help us uncover *what is our full human potential*. It lets us realize how it all comes down to clearer *understanding* and clearer *perception* for better informed *action*.

Caution: may impact lives

During class one day, we read a story. We discussed it. Then we did a “breaking grip” martial art test. This exercise provides good feedback about our relative stress or comfort levels, because it really doesn't take much force to get out of someone's grip that's holding you if you keep a refined sense of all the interaction that is making up your action.

After the story, three of the SuperKids did their best breaking grip ever. *What was the story? What made the difference?*

It was one of eight “Josh Stories” where we got to see Josh Waitzkin as a role model for each of our eight Applying themes. The story I read that day was just about a boy who was very proud about the fact that he “hadn't lost a chess match in a year.” The boy wanted to continue to seem like a “chess god” to his few school buddies, so he wouldn't play opponents who might beat him. He cared more about *not losing* than about actually learning. This demonstrated the importance of the Applying theme “**Worse**”-for-Better.

There was an immediate change in their

attitude towards the breaking grip challenge. If their first attempt failed, they didn't start flailing around trying to use their force like usual. They didn't have to be “the one who was successful.” They could be “the one who was *learning* successfully.” Their stress and narrow striving went down. Their awareness and feeling of comfort (together-strong) went up. There was *significant* improvement for three of the students that day in the effectiveness of their action—just from a “story.”

One way to see these eight Applying themes is that they help us “walk through” common scenarios where we tend to have a more unhelpfully *stressed* or *fixed* perspective. For example, the world-renowned psychology researcher Carol Dweck has shown how children who have a “fixed” mindset about whether they are “good” at something are much less resilient in the face of failure. By contrast, grades go up for students who are encouraged to have a “growth mindset” about themselves and their abilities.

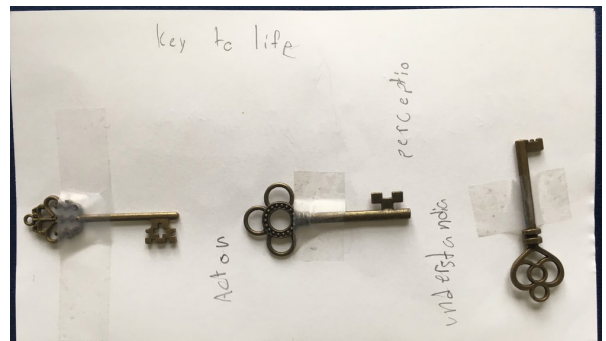
Earlier in the semester, I had asked the children, “In all that we've discovered about ourselves in Tai Chi, have we found anything that's not interacting/flowing/part of ongoing change?” We saw how the practice of Tai Chi and meditation helps us to discover a more “**Responsible-Flow**” perspective about ourselves and our actions. (This is what we sometimes call “responsible-flow-me” or “comfort-I.”) The Applying themes—and their accompanying “Josh Stories”—became a chance for us to see the kind of impact that a more “**Responsible-Flow**” perspective could have for us in daily life.

For example, below are a few common—and often critical—scenarios that tend to come up

- When I take on a harder challenge, I do
"worse."

Our SuperKids began making all kinds of connections with these themes. For instance, they saw the **“Worse”-for-Better** theme when they asked a question in class (instead of being afraid to show that they didn’t understand) or when they showed their smarts and interests (instead of hiding them in front of friends who might not share their enthusiasm for a subject). One SuperKid even commented, “I surprised myself,” about how the **“Worse”-for-Better** theme had impacted him in his own unique way.

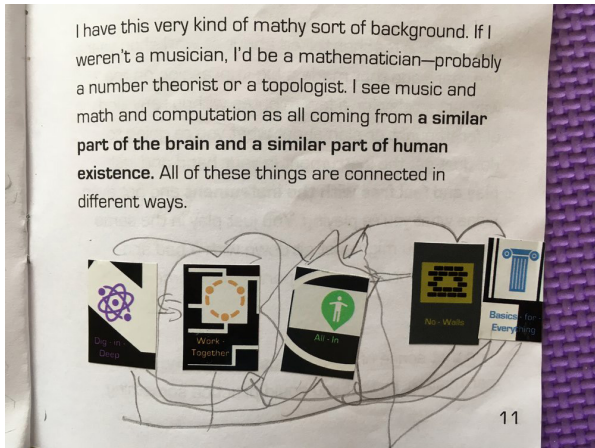
What I have loved so much about the learning themes is that they've been a way for us to connect the very specific to the very general—and everything in-between. For example, we have “three keys” that represent (1) *understanding*, (2) *perception*, and (3) *action*. Below shows how SuperKid Nived labeled them as “key to life”:



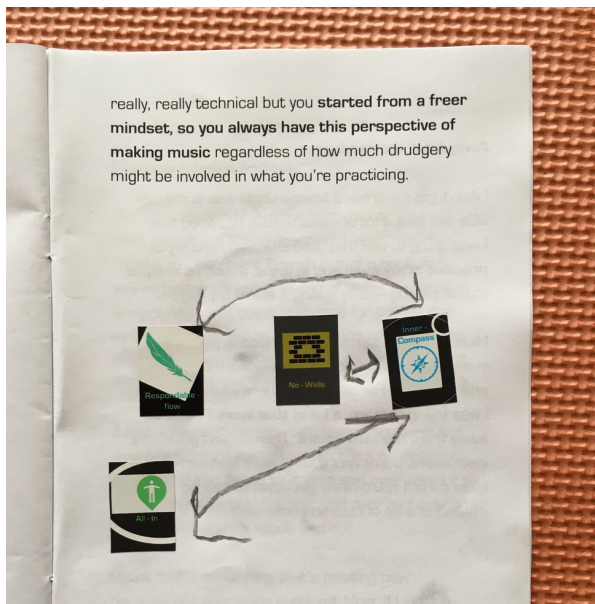
The diagram illustrates a learning process with three concentric circles. The innermost circle is labeled 'Guiding' and features a key. The middle circle is labeled 'Discovering' and also features a key. The outermost circle is labeled 'Applying' and features a key. Various small cards with icons and text are placed around the circles, representing different aspects of the learning process.

In our last few classes, the SuperKids have been reading about jazz saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa in preparation for their Q&A with him at our Being Your Best Summit. In their notes, the children

literally started making webs of connections between the learning themes that they saw in Mahanthappa's insights—and they would eagerly tell you their thinking behind their markings!

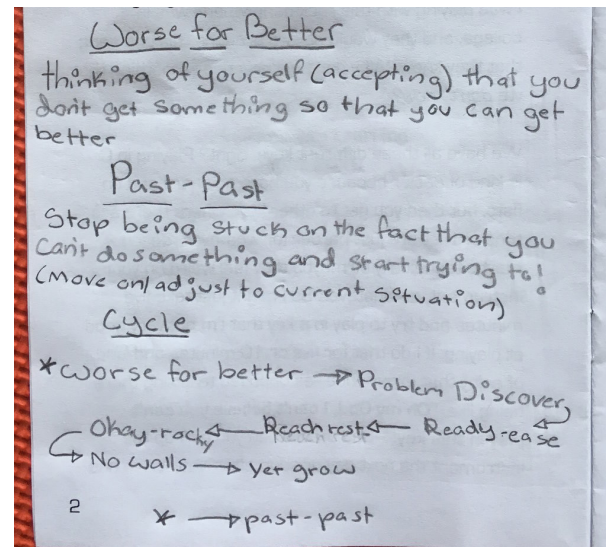


Anurag's "learning web," inspired by Mahanthappa's insights into learning from others "outside of what you do."



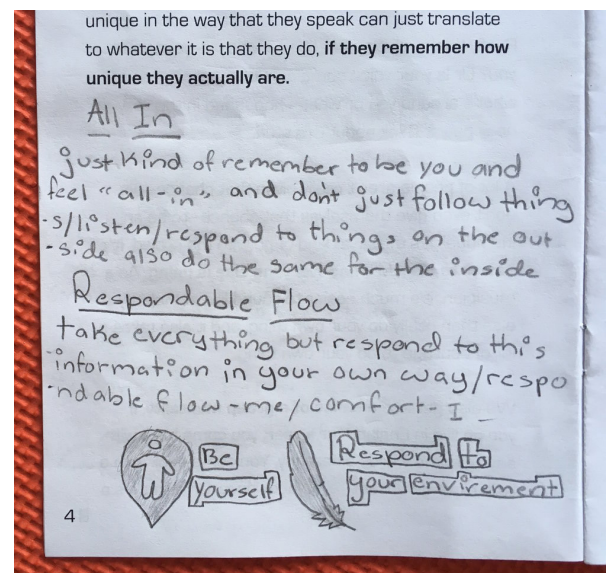
SuperKid Mateo's "learning web" that he made while thinking about all the themes that could relate to Mahanthappa's advice on creativity.

Below are 12-year-old Anushri's notes in response to Mahanthappa's encouragement to be honest with yourself and to practice things that you don't know how to do well.



In the "Cycle," SuperKid Anushri linked all eight Applying themes in a sequence, starting with **Past-Past**: "Stop being stuck on the fact that you can't do something and start trying to! (Move on/adjust to current situation)."

Here are more of SuperKid Anushri's notes, which make for inspirational reading in themselves!



All-In

Just kind of remember to be you and feel "all-in" and don't just follow things/listen/respond to things on the outside also do the same for the inside.

Responsible-Flow

Take everything but respond to this information in your own way/responsible-flow-me/comfort-I

We can ask ourselves: *What would Josh Waitzkin do? What would Rudresh Mahanthappa do?* We can be inspired by the specifics and the stories that help demonstrate how we can apply this in our lives. We can also simply ask, "What would 'RFM' (responsible-flow-me) do?" Something so simple and universal really can guide us as we go about discovering ourselves and living and learning as best we can.

So excited for our Being Your Best Summit this week! Onwards!
Mackenzie

P.S. - Below are some more of SuperKid Anushri's notes that she made in response to Mahanthappa's insights into learning. Her commentary is well worth studying!

of where these things come from. Breaking things down to their fundamental building blocks is what allows us to **actually build something new out of what's familiar.**

Basics for everything

"Breaking things down to their fundamental building blocks"
"Composition" "template"

Ever New

building something NEW out of something familiar

8

I have this very kind of mathy sort of background. If I weren't a musician, I'd be a mathematician—probably a number theorist or a topologist. I see music and math and computation as all coming from a **similar part of the brain and a similar part of human existence.** All of these things are connected in different ways.



No Walls

He was connecting math and music he also seems to talk about other things like architects planning out the -ir work to help us understand music.

Yet Grow not limiting yourself¹¹

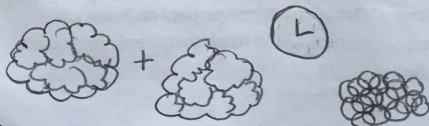
because they're actively trying to remember what's happening while it's happening but also still be in the moment, and so they're actually seeing possibilities in real-time.

Work together

together strong - being individual while being individual, being more aware -re in a group / not just relying on someone

Dig in Deep

part to whole - fixing tiny parts - stopping time, being more aware fixing many tiny errors in small amounts of time



6

Ready Ease

feeling free and flowy while doing anything, relaxing at ease to do better

Reach Rest

not just always straining and stressing to do good/reach also resting and taking a break at times



13

July 11, 2019

Being Our Best Summit 2019



Being Your Best 2019!

SuperKid Mateo: "Hello and welcome to the Being Your Best Summit of 2019. I would like to welcome our special guest and world famous saxophone player, Rudresh Mahanthappa."



The SuperKids asked questions...





Some SuperKid Questions

8-year-old SuperKid Nived

Q: What are you trying to build in your music?

12-year-old SuperKid Anushri

Q: What helps you come up with music on the spot?

12-year-old SuperKid Theodore

Q: I also play alto sax. I have trouble starting but, once I get into it, I love it and can't stop. Do you have any advice?

12-year-old SuperKid Anurag

Q: How do you use the awareness of listening in playing your instrument to everyday life? Does practicing one thing improve awareness everywhere?

13-year-old SuperKid Mateo

Q: Does being able to understand flexibility in music such as improvisation help you relate to life/things outside of music or help with being able to solve problems?

And they got answers!





We have video highlights of the event with Rudresh Mahanthappa:

<https://vimeo.com/347639039/7f23fe5470>

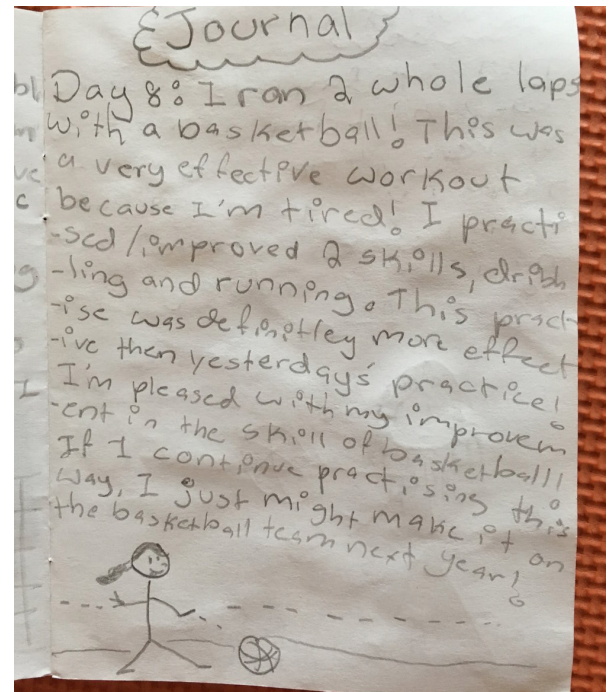
(Thanks to my sister, Whit Hawkins!)



Independent Learner Badge

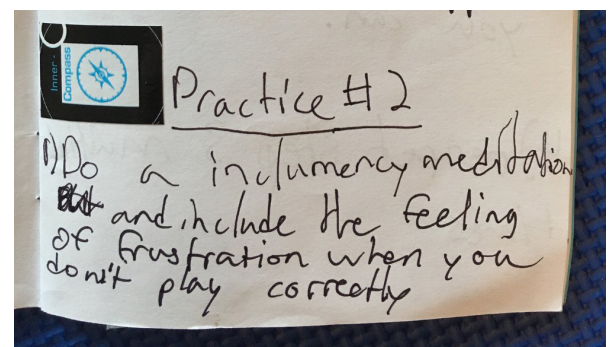
As this was the final day of the semester for us, it also was the deadline for completing the requirements for the Independent Learner Badge, which included 12 independent practice sessions, 6 practice designs, and 6 journal entries.

Below are highlights from SuperKid Anushri's practice book about how she used what we learned this semester to practice basketball:



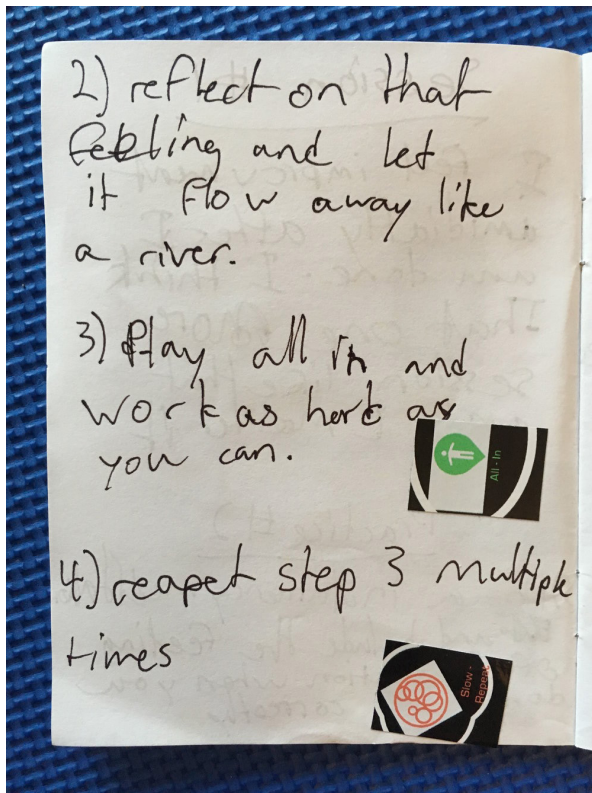
Journal, Day 8: I ran 2 whole laps with a basketball! This was a very effective workout because I'm tired! I practiced/improved 2 skills, dribbling and running. This practice was definitely more effective than yesterday's practice! I'm pleased with my improvement in the skill of basketball! If I continue practicing this way, I just might make it on the basketball team next year!

Here is a practice session—practice #2—that SuperKid Theodore designed for improving at playing the saxophone:



Practice #2

1) Do a *inclumency* meditation and include the feeling of frustration when you don't play correctly.



2) Reflect on that feeling and let it flow away like a river.

3) Play all in and work as hard as you can.

4) Repeat step 3 multiple times.

Congratulations to the four SuperKids who completed the badge challenge for independently improving their skills at basketball, baseball, and saxophone!

BestX SuperKid Speeches

At the Summit, the children also discussed their independent practice experience during their BestX Talks (which are our “SuperKid version” of TEDx Talks).



Nived's BestX Talk excerpt—

*At home I had to do some Tai Chi so I set my **Inner-Compass** for “ahh,” but not for “AHH!!” [screaming it], because it's more relaxing if you say “ahh,” instead of “AHH!!” And that was my **Inner-Compass**.*

Anushri's BestX Talk excerpt —

I worked a lot on my practice journal and actually got a lot done. The themes really helped me. I was pleased with my progress.

Theodore's BestX Talk excerpt —
So what I really liked over the course of this session was reading the [booklet](#) of Mahanthappa and all of his stories—and making some practice sessions based off them but then also improvising some things. [This is a link to the [PDF of Mahanthappa's](#) insights into learning that the children studied in the weeks before our Summit.]

Mateo's BestX Talk excerpt —
I realized that these skills can be used in Tai Chi and real life. There was a baseball game, and it was the finals. We were down by 6 runs. But then I'm able to relax my muscles and just use the skills that I'd practiced before, and I was able to hit a double. Then our whole team turned around the game, and we won 7 to 6 in the end.

Anurag's BestX Talk excerpt —
I understood my practice more by not just doing it but by also using the Guiding, Discovering, and Applying themes I learned in class. With the themes I expanded, connected, and found ways to improve the quality of my practice.

*My favorite themes by far were the Guiding theme **Work-Together** and the Applying theme **No-Walls**. **Work-Together** is everything. It is comfort. It is the parts of the whole and the whole of the parts. It is working **All-In** and the **Basics-for-Everything**. It is **Ever-New** and **Responsible-Flow**, and **Slow-Repeat** and **Dig-in-Deep**. It is all the themes in one. And **No-Walls** connects to it. **No-Walls** is connecting everything you learn, which, in a way, is **Work-Together**.*

This semester we were taught the themes by learning the stories of a man named Josh Waitzkin, a chess champion and Tai Chi Push-Hands winner and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu blackbelt. But what inspired me

most about Josh Waitzkin was his ability—his skill—of mastering how to learn. By learning about learning, he mastered three sports and is working hard on another. In a way, he is a real learner.

"But what is a real learner?" one might ask. "What is a student and what is a teacher?" A learner is a student who learns from himself and is a teacher who teaches himself. Also the best teacher and student is a learner.

All in all, I learned a lot about learning about learning that can help improve my learning. Next year I am planning to do this to try to work on other skills.

What more is there to be said than that?

We opened our minds, we explored, and we empowered ourselves about the learning process itself and ourselves as learners.

Ever-onward in the learning journey!
Mackenzie



P.S. - So much thanks to Rudresh Mahanthappa for making this event so special—and impactful—for our SuperKids. He said that he loved being a part of it. Mahanthappa gave us a glimpse of what it is like to follow a unique learning path with integrity and creativity. We were honored to have him here, sharing his insights.

Our thanks, too, to Katy Wells, Director of the Art of Learning Project, for her behind-the-scenes support and encouragement as we integrated the learning themes into our Tai Chi curriculum this semester. And I'm so glad we did!

By Mackenzie Hawkins

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