EdSERT™

Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training

APERTURE EDUCATION

Special Edition

EDUCATOR GUIDE

OPTIMISTIC THINKING

EdSERT Educator Guides at a Glance

- Self-Awareness Guide
- Self-Management Guide
- Social-Awareness Guide
- Relationship Skills Guide
- Goal-Directed Behavior Guide
- Personal Responsibility Guide
- Decision Making Guide
- **Optimistic Thinking Guide**

Dear Colleague,
We are thrilled to share a special digital edition of the Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training (EdSERT) program. EdSERT is a new SEL-focused professional development program for K-12 teachers and out-of-school time staff. This Educator Guide focuses on one of eight key social-emotional competencies promoted by the EdSERT program: Optimistic Thinking.

EdSERT was developed in response to several national trends in our schools and communities including:

- National surveys in which educators report a need for guidance and training in SEL (Bridgeland et al., 2013; NAA, 2015)
- Reports indicating a lack of preservice training available in SEL (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Melnick & Martinez, 2019)
- Documented high rates of teacher stress, burnout, and turnover in the profession (AFT, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2014)
- The recognition of the importance of educators' own social-emotional competence as part of the delivery of successful SEL implementation (CASEL, 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)

To address these challenges and opportunities, EdSERT provides a comprehensive set of research-based and practical resources to enhance the social-emotional knowledge and skill set of educators and in turn, improve the efficacy of SEL instruction and ultimately student outcomes. At the same time, the program is designed to enhance the well-being of educators through the development of social-emotional practices that can be used inside and outside the classroom. EdSERT promotes eight key social-emotional competencies, the same eight competencies measured and promoted by the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA; https://apertureed.com/dessa-overview/) and aligned to the CASEL framework.

We invite you to learn more about EdSERT by visiting www.EdSERT.com or by contacting our team at EdSERT@ApertureEd.com.

Thank you,

Jennifer Robitaille and Paul LeBuffe
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www.ApertureEd.com

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Introduction to Optimistic Thinking

Optimistic Thinking refers to an individual's attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding themselves and their life situations in the past, present, and future.

What Is Optimistic Thinking?

The importance of having a sense of optimism and hope for the future is well established in the resilience literature as a key protective factor for individuals of all ages. These skills and mindsets help enable us to overcome the risk, adversity, or change we inevitably face throughout our lives. Students will demonstrate Optimistic Thinking by speaking positively about themselves and those around them, will look forward to future events and activities, and will believe in themselves and their ability to attain their future goals. For example, consider a student who receives a bad grade on a math test. Optimistic Thinking would help the student view the bad grade as an indication they did not understand the specific content on that test (rather than interpreting the poor grade as just being bad at math) and that they can improve their performance on the next math test by studying more and seeking help from their math teacher. The student will continue to believe in their abilities and will have confidence that they can achieve a better grade next time.

For us as adults, Optimistic Thinking also involves positive thinking and hopefulness despite experiencing challenges, setbacks, and negative outcomes. Importantly, this does not mean that we simply ignore the challenge to remain positive. Instead, it means that we reframe the challenge as an opportunity to learn and grow rather than perseverating solely on the negatives. It also means that we are spurred to action; we try to understand what happened and what we can maybe do better or try differently next time. We also remain hopeful that things will work out better next time. And as educators, we strive to support our students in doing the same. Optimistic Thinking also helps us to derive meaning and purpose from our work. It gives us pride for the differences we make in students' lives and can help keep us going when things are difficult. It gives us confidence that we can handle the inevitable challenges we all face. It also involves the high expectations we hold for ourselves and our students. It is reflected in our beliefs that all students can learn and be successful. Finally, Optimistic Thinking also involves our ability to show gratitude and appreciation for our experiences and the people in our lives. And as educators, it enables us to cultivate gratitude in our classrooms and programs.

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Why Is Optimistic Thinking Important for Educators?

Optimistic Thinking impacts many different aspects of our lives. Professionally, we will experience better work performance and higher productivity. These successes are tied to our greater sense of purpose for our work as well as our motivation. Optimistic Thinking skills also help to energize our behaviors towards the pursuit of long-term goals and to our ongoing persistence in reaching those goals. In other words, our optimism helps to initiate Goal-Directed Behavior, a social-emotional competency also linked to increased professional success. In addition, we will also be more likely to experience greater well-being and life satisfaction, even in the face of stressful life events. This is due in part to the actions we take as a result of our optimism; we will be much more likely to use active problem-solving strategies and effective coping mechanisms, such as seeking out additional information or support resources. Consequently, we will also experience better physical and psychological health.

How Does the Optimistic Thinking of Students Impact Educators?

Students with Optimistic Thinking skills will contribute to a much more positive and engaged classroom or program environment. These students will look forward to school activities, be more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, show high achievement motivation, and be more likely to plan for and explore potential careers. Just as discussed with adults, Optimistic Thinking skills help drive students to engage in more Goal-Directed Behaviors related to their future, which in turn is associated with better grades and a reduced likelihood of dropping out of school. In addition, students with strong Optimistic Thinking skills will demonstrate more positive affect and show fewer externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Consequently, they will experience greater peer acceptance while educators may spend less time on behavior or conflict management.

How Can We Support Our Own and Our Students' Optimistic Thinking?

EdSERT has been developed to support educators as they reflect on and enhance their use of practices related to eight essential social-emotional competencies, including Optimistic Thinking. Throughout this guide, you will learn about 10 key Optimistic Thinking practices specific to educators. You will reflect on your current use of these 10 practices, and then select one or more practices you'd like to focus on as an opportunity for growth. Once you've selected your focus area(s), you will find strategies that you can practice and integrate into your professional role.

Many of the strategies in this guide will also provide extension activities or suggestions for adapting the strategy to support the development of students' Optimistic Thinking. In addition, educators can intentionally develop Optimistic Thinking in their students by helping students become aware of their positive attributes and strengths and reinforce those characteristics when observed. We can also encourage students to draw on these strengths when facing challenges, thereby increasing their confidence. Educators can also support Optimistic Thinking by helping to foster a belief that skills, abilities, and intelligence can be developed through continued effort and learning, which is often referred to as a growth mindset. This can be done by providing specific praise related to effort and learning, as well as helping students to build their repertoire of learning strategies they can call upon throughout their lives.

To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please click here.

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Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training (EdSERT) Self-Assessment

Optimistic Thinking

Jennifer L. Robitaille & Paul A. LeBuffe

Date Completed: _____

Set aside time to reflect on each item below. For each item, indicate on the 5-point scale provided (1 = *Not at all like me* to 5 = *Very much like me*) how much each statement reflects your *current practice* and then indicate whether you'd like to enhance your use of this practice by putting a check mark in the column labeled "Focus Area." There are no right or wrong answers, and your responses will not be shared unless you choose to share them. This information will help you reflect on your current use of these social-emotional practices and identify areas for continued growth and learning.

	Not at all like me		Somewhat like me		Very much like me	Focus Area
Meaning and Purpose						
1. I can list specific ways in which my work as an educator adds pleasure and meaning to my life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I take great pride in knowing that my role as an educator makes a difference in the lives of my students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Positive Expectations						
3. I have high expectations for all of my students and consistently offer them support in reaching these expectations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I believe every student can be successful, and I frequently communicate this to each of my students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Confidence						
5. I am capable of handling the challenges I face as an educator.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Optimism and Hopefulness						
6. I end the day or class period in an optimistic way, reflecting with students about what went well, what was learned, or things to look forward to next time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I reframe negative events or outcomes as an opportunity to learn and grow, and I encourage my students to do the same.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. When things go wrong during the workday, I remain positive and put my focus on understanding what happened and how I can make it work next time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I am hopeful about the future and strive to model that attitude for my students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gratitude						
10. I create an environment for students that encourages the expression of gratitude, appreciation, and celebration for one another.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Personal Development Plan

Optimistic Thinking

Date Completed: _____

The Personal Development Plan facilitates reflection and planning to enhance your social-emotional competencies.

Step 1: Review Self-Assessment Ratings

Take some time to review the rating you gave to each of the 10 items on the self-assessment. Note Areas of Strength, Emerging Practices, and Growth Opportunities, as well as practices you selected as potential Focus Areas. It is okay if you don't have ratings that fall within each of these categories.

Reflect on the practices that are already **Areas of Strength** for you. These are the items you marked as "Very much like me" (item rating of 5). Consider the following questions and record your thoughts:

- Which competency theme(s) do these practices relate to?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- How do these practices positively impact you, your students, or your colleagues?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- How might you model these practices or assist students or colleagues in developing these practices?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- Even though these practices are already Areas of Strength for you, do you want to maintain, broaden, or continue to build one or more of them further?

  _____

  _____

  _____

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Reflect on the practices that are **Emerging Practices** for you. These are the items you marked as "Somewhat like me" (item ratings of 3 or 4). Consider the following questions and record your thoughts:

- Which competency theme(s) do these practices relate to?

- Are there any barriers that are preventing these practices from becoming Areas of Strength for you?

- Are you already engaged in a process to strengthen any of these practices?

- Are there any practices you'd like to focus on and develop further? How might enhancing these Emerging Practices make a difference to you, your students, or your colleagues?

Reflect on the practices that are **Growth Opportunities** for you. These are the items you marked as "Not at all like me" (item ratings of 1 or 2). Consider the following questions and record your thoughts:

- Which competency theme(s) do these practices relate to?

- Are there one or more practices that you would really like to focus on? Note that not every Growth Opportunity needs to become a Focus Area.

- Why is that practice (or those practices) important to you?

- How might further developing this practice(s) positively impact you, your students, and/or your colleagues?

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Finally, note any general observations about your ratings on this competency:

- How do you feel about your overall competency in this area?

- Do any of your responses surprise you? Do any of your responses confirm things you already were aware of about yourself?

- Are there additional observations you want to note?

Step 2: Select a Focus Area

After reflecting on your existing competencies and their impact on you and those you interact with during the workday, select one to three practices that you would like to focus on over the next month. First select practices from the Emerging Practices or Growth Opportunities categories. If you only have Areas of Strength in this competency, choose a practice that you would like to continue to broaden or maintain. This could also be a practice that you would like to support others in developing.

Focus Area #1: _____

Focus Area #2: _____

Focus Area #3: _____

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Step 3: Select a Strategy

Review the strategies provided in this guide for ideas to enhance the practice(s) you've chosen to focus on this month. The table below provides a list of the 10 practices and their aligned strategies.

Theme	Item/Practice #	Strategy	Page #
Meaning and Purpose	1	The Sense That Keeps Me Going	9
	2	The Sense That Keeps Me Going	9
Positive Expectations	3	Of Course My Students Will Achieve!	13
	4	Of Course My Students Will Achieve!	13
Confidence	5	Confidence Builders	18
		I Won't Quit	25
Optimism and Hopefulness	6	Our Future is Bright	20
	7	Confidence Builders	18
	8	Confidence Builders	18
	9	Our Future is Bright	20
Gratitude	10	Our Future is Bright	20

Step 4: Develop a Plan

After you've selected one or more strategies to implement, make a plan for how and when you will use them. As you do this, reflect on your past experiences trying to acquire a new habit of practice. Have you used specific tools or techniques in the past that were successful? Consider using those same successful approaches as you answer the questions below. To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please **click here.**

Strategy #1: _____

I will use or practice this strategy *(X times per week/per day; on specific date; time of day, etc.)*:

_____

_____

_____

I will remind myself to use this strategy by:

_____

_____

_____

I will track my use of this strategy by:

_____

_____

_____

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I will review my use of this strategy again on the following date:

Other considerations:

Strategy #2: _____

I will use or practice this strategy *(X times per week/per day; on specific date; time of day, etc.)*:

I will remind myself to use this strategy by:

I will track my use of this strategy by:

I will review my use of this strategy again on the following date:

Other considerations:

Step 5: Review Progress and Continue Competency Development

Remember to review your use of the strategies you selected. At any time, you can select new strategies for your focus areas or complete the process again by selecting a new focus area to enhance. You may also wish to complete the enclosed follow-up self-assessment for this competency, provided on page 27 in this competency guide, to document progress made in enhancing your competence over time.

You may also wish to discuss your focus areas and associated strategies with a trusted colleague or mentor for support and additional strategy suggestions.

We encourage you to submit your own ideas, strategies, and experiences using EdSERT to Aperture Education by emailing EdSERT@ApertureEd.com.

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The Sense That Keeps Me Going

This strategy will help raise your awareness of all the ways your work is useful and meaningful to you and your students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After using this strategy, I will have . . .

- A way to align my work activities with my sense of purpose
- A more positive and optimistic approach to my work
- Enhanced my work satisfaction, sense of autonomy, and self-efficacy

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Part 1

As optimistic educators, we try to see through present difficulties and trust that our work has meaning and that the instruction and support we are providing to students will help them learn and grow. Read the 12 sample statements below and reflect on the optimistic beliefs and behaviors that connect to your own work. As you are reading, highlight any statements that particularly resonate with you.

1. I am optimistic because I know that **my work matters**—it helps my students, which helps fulfill my sense of purpose.

2. I am optimistic because I know that **regularly making positive comments about the future** helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.

3. I am optimistic because I know that **making regular statements that are inspirational** helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.

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4. I am optimistic because I know that **mentioning possibilities and making them visible and simple** helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
5. I am optimistic because I know that **walking the talk** helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
6. I am optimistic because I know that **my colleagues and supervisors are connected to me in positive ways**, and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
7. I am optimistic because I know that **when I feel overwhelmed by my work and responsibilities, I can relieve my stress by asking for help from my colleagues and supervisors**, and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
8. I am optimistic because I know that **when I approach my regular, huge stack of work with focus and a calm, productive strategy**, it helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
9. I am optimistic because I know that **persevering through work problems helps me feel more capable and confident**, and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
10. I am optimistic because I know that **challenging bias and stereotypes** helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
11. I am optimistic because I know that **when I redirect misbehavior and focus on the desired behaviors**, this help my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
12. I am optimistic because I know that I **expect to continue to be a respected educator in my school or program**, and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.

Choose one statement above that either personally resonates with you or that you would like to incorporate more fully into your daily work. Reflect on the prompts below.

Statement:

_____

_____

List a few examples describing how and/or when you've displayed this optimistic behavior.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List a few ways you will demonstrate this optimistic behavior in the next week.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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How will this benefit my students?

How will this benefit me?

Part 2

Now, using the same model, consider and write five things on the blank lines that you do that regularly demonstrate your optimism and sense of purpose in your work.

1. I am optimistic because I know that _____ and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
2. I am optimistic because I know that _____ and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
3. I am optimistic because I know that _____ and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
4. I am optimistic because I know that _____ and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.
5. I am optimistic because I know that _____ and this helps my students and helps fulfill my sense of purpose.

Reflect on the statements you wrote above. Consider what approach you will take for the next steps of your work. How will you assure you will continue to achieve your work and link it to your sense of purpose in education?

EXTENSIONS

- Post your set of statements near your desk or in your workspace as a reminder for those times when your sense of purpose may seem more vague or cloudy. How can you explain that present feeling to yourself? What might you do to affirm your true sense of purpose and use it regularly in your practices?
- Notice in other educators the things they do that seem to link to an optimistic sense of purpose in their work. Which ones affirm what you do? Which ones might you add to your regular practices?

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REFLECTION AND ACTION

Consider whether the insight and/or skill learned from this strategy would be beneficial for your students. How might you share or adapt this strategy for students so that they continue to develop their own set of optimistic beliefs?

To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please ***click here.***

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Of Course My Students Will Achieve!

This strategy will help you reflect on your expectations for students and will provide suggestions for how to support students in reaching those expectations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After using this strategy, I will have . . .

- Reflected on the learning and achievement expectations I hold for each of my students
- Considered why I may hold lower expectations for some of my students' ability to achieve
- Strived to increase my expectations and beliefs that every student can be successful with appropriate support and opportunity
- Empowered all my students to be successful

MAKE IT HAPPEN

The expectations we hold about students can have a powerful impact on our behavior, and the subsequent behavior of our students. As part of this strategy, you will be asked to reflect on the expectations you hold for each of your students. The strategy works best when you regularly take time to do this, rather than reflecting at only one point in time. The instructions provided focus on a monthly reflection but can be adapted depending on when in the school year you first use this strategy.

1. Use the chart provided on the worksheet on page 16 or create your own in Excel. List the names of your students in the first column. If you teach multiple classes or groups of students in a day, consider choosing one class to begin with and then adding more classes as you become familiar with this process.

2. Set aside time to carefully consider your expectations related to each student's ability to learn and be successful in your class or group. Place a checkmark in the column labeled "Month 1" next to any student you believe and trust can be successful.
    a. Note that you may need to destress, be kind to yourself, and reframe your mindset to have an optimistic and broadened worldview of each of your students, focusing on your ultimate goals of improving the success and/or achievement gains for each of your students.

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3. Review the checkmarks you've placed in this column. First, consider the students *with* checkmarks.
   a. What behaviors of these students cause you to believe in them? What other factors may account for these positive expectations? Are these beliefs based on evidence, experience, or less objective factors?
   b. What are the things you do in your classroom or program to help ensure students meet these expectations?
   c. How do you communicate these beliefs to students? How often?
4. Now consider the students *without* checkmarks. Consider the following:
   a. What behaviors of these students might be causing your low expectations? What other factors may account for these negative expectations?
   b. What is one thing you will do for each student that will increase your expectations and help the student succeed? Write your intentions in the Month 1 writing prompt found on page 17. For example: *If this student does poorly on an assignment or activity, we will meet one-on-one and together figure out a plan to ensure they do better next time.*
   c. Consult one or more of the following resources for simple ideas and suggestions for helping students who struggle with common challenges (such as disorganization or distractions) to succeed.
      - https://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-help-students-succeed
      - Naglieri, J.A. & Pickering, E.B. (2010). *Helping children learn: Intervention handouts for use in school and at home* (2nd ed.). Brookes Publishing.
5. Each month thereafter, complete the steps above to check in on your expectations and how you are supporting students in reaching those expectations. Periodically, think about the following questions:
   a. Have your expectations about students changed over time?
   b. Did you follow through on your plans to help students succeed?
   c. Did the students' behavior or achievement change in response to your follow-through?
   d. If there are students still without checkmarks, what other things could you do to change your expectations?

EXTENSIONS

- Add a fifth column to the chart to record instances of when you communicate your positive expectations to each student. Aim to communicate this message to every student within the next month.
- At the end of the school year, share with educators in the next-higher grade level about the high expectations you continue to have for all of your students. This will encourage their high expectations as well.

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REFLECTION AND ACTION

Consider whether the insight and/or skill learned from this strategy would be beneficial for your students. How might you share or adapt this strategy for students so that they continue to develop their own high expectations about their learning and success?

To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please ***click here.***

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Of Course My Students Will Achieve!

Students	My Expectations							
	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8

Of Course My Students Will Achieve!

Writing Prompts

Month 1: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 2: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 3: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 4: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 5: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 6: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 7: For the next month, I will . . .

Month 8: For the next month, I will . . .

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Confidence Builders

This strategy will provide simple ways to build your confidence to handle the challenges you face as an educator.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After using this strategy, I will have . . .

- A set of strategies to enhance my confidence as an educator
- Techniques for reframing negative events in a more productive and optimistic way
- Developed positive reflection habits about my educational practices and experiences
- Practiced positive self-talk

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Educators regularly face challenges in their work. By proactively adopting the practices in this strategy, you will have a variety of techniques you can call upon for handling challenges more optimistically. You will also at the same time build your confidence to take on these challenges.

- **Identify your strengths:** It may sound simple, but being aware of our strengths can help us build confidence, particularly when we face setbacks. You can use the EdSERT self-assessments to find specific strengths related to social-emotional competencies. You can also use the EdSERT Self-Awareness strategy called "Becoming Myself" to complete a careful reflection of your many strengths related to your work. Once you have a good understanding of your strengths, consider how you can use and apply them when you encounter challenges.
- **Work on your growth opportunities:** We build confidence when we actively work to address our limitations. Take time to identify your growth opportunities (the "Becoming Myself" strategy can help with this too) and then choose one or two to enhance. You will gain new knowledge and skills and increase your confidence to tackle any challenges that arise.
- **Periodically reflect on and document what's worked in the past:** Start by identifying three problems you've recently solved. Noting our accomplishments translates into empowerments ("I can!"). Then for each problem, describe the specific strategies you used to solve the problem. Being aware of these strategies will make it easier to use them again in the future, which increases the likelihood for future success.

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- **Track your successes:** Create a "kudos file" to keep track of your successes. File any kudos you receive—such as recognitions, congratulatory emails, thank you letters from students or parents, awards, or any personal notes or photos you take when you complete an important project or milestone. In addition to being helpful during evaluations or performance reviews, this file can remind you of all you've accomplished when you need an emotional pick-me-up.
- **Engage in positive self-talk:** When we face negative events or setbacks, it can often be difficult to remain positive and reframe the event as an opportunity to learn and grow. Engaging in positive self-talk can help us do this. Choose one or more of the following self-talk statements as your personal mantra. Think carefully about the statement and identify specific examples from previous experience about how you've used it (for example: "*I can do this. I have done this before.*" Identify how you've done this before). Use the statement frequently, post it near your workspace, and importantly, be sure to call upon it in times of setback or challenge.
    - I have had many experiences of success in my work.
    - I've been here before. I can do it again.
    - I look for solutions, not problems. Challenges become my goals.
    - I take good care of myself. I get enough rest. I eat well and exercise.
    - I can do this. I have done this before.
    - It will get better.
    - I know this is important, so I will do it.
    - I expect good things to happen.
    - I try hard.
    - I ask for help when needed.
- **Consider the positives:** Try the "Even If" strategy for reframing negative events more positively. For example, *"Even if the parent meeting didn't go the way I had planned, I now have a better understanding of this parent's needs for their child."* By reframing our focus, it can help control our initial negative thoughts or feelings and help motivate more productive behavior.

EXTENSIONS

- Visit EdSERT Extras and download the "Even If" DESSA Growth Strategy and introduce it to your students.

REFLECTION AND ACTION

Consider whether the insight and/or skill learned from this strategy would be beneficial for your students. How might you share or adapt this strategy for students?

To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please ***click here.***

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Our Future Is Bright

This strategy will help you develop a habit of optimistic thinking and gratitude that can also be modeled for students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After using this strategy, I will have . . .

- Developed a routine of reflection and positive thinking that enhances my optimism, hopefulness, and gratitude about my experiences
- Incorporated a new practice encouraging optimism, hopefulness, and gratitude into my classroom or program
- Cultivated the Optimistic Thinking of my students

MAKE IT HAPPEN

We often think of ourselves as either a glass half empty or half full—meaning that we tend to see the world either pessimistically or optimistically. However, research shows that we can cultivate a more positive, hopeful view of ourselves and our experiences that can in turn enhance our health, well-being, and resilience. This requires developing and then regularly thinking about what's going well for us. Over time, this process will make us more likely to be able to stay upbeat and find solutions when hard times come our way.

This strategy focuses on one such practice called optimistic closure. This strategy has been adapted from a DESSA Growth Strategy (found in the DESSA Comprehensive SEL System) focused on building Optimistic Thinking in students. Part 1 of this strategy focuses on you. Part 2 of this strategy focuses on adopting this same practice in your classroom or program to help cultivate your students' Optimistic Thinking.

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Part 1: Develop an optimistic closure habit

1. Set aside a few minutes at the end of each day for the next two weeks. Choose a time that will consistently work for you, such as the end of the workday or in the evening before bed. It may be helpful to set yourself a reminder, either on your phone or in your calendar, or establishing a behavioral cue such as turning off the lights in your classroom or closing your lesson book at the end of the day.

2. During the time you have set aside, reflect and answer the prompt provided for that day. The chart on page 22 provides a list of 10 prompts, one for each workday for two weeks. Jot down a few words or sentences in the chart or in a journal or notebook.

3. At the end of the two weeks, review your written responses and reflect on the following:
    a. How has this process gone?
    b. Has identifying the positives become easier?
    c. Have you experienced any changes in your thinking or well-being over the last two weeks?
    d. Have you encountered any challenges where you've noticed yourself remaining positive as you worked toward a solution?

4. Commit to continuing this practice for another next two weeks. You can repeat the same prompts provided below.

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Optimistic Closure

Day 1	Something I did well today was . . .
Day 2	Something I appreciated about someone at work today was . . .
Day 3	Something I especially enjoyed doing today was . . .
Day 4	Something I learned today was . . .
Day 5	Something I'm especially looking forward to this weekend and why . . .
Day 6	Something I saw someone else do today that impressed me and why . . .
Day 7	Something I'm looking forward to about work tomorrow and why . . .
Day 8	Something that went well today was . . .
Day 9	Something that I experienced today that filled me with gratitude . . .
Day 10	Something I will do over the weekend that others will see as kind or helpful . . .

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Part 2: Incorporate an optimistic closure into your classroom or program

1. Introduce the strategy of an optimistic closure to your students. You can find guiding language and tips for introducing this practice by visiting the DESSA Growth strategy called "Optimistic Closure" under the Optimistic Thinking tab in EdSERT Extras.

2. Set aside 2 to 5 minutes at the end of each day (or once a week) to do an optimistic closure reflection with students. Elementary school and OST educators may be able to do this activity at the end of each day during the week. Middle and high school educators may want to first try it with every class once a week (such as a Friday).

3. Each day focus on a new prompt (like you did in Part 1). It may be helpful for students to repeat the same five prompts each week initially so that students become comfortable with the process. Over time, you can vary the prompts and how students share their responses. For example, students may write their response, share it with you as they are walking out the door, or share as a small or large group. The "Optimistic Thinking" DESSA Growth Strategy provides some ideas for varying the activity.

   Suggested prompts (similar to those found in Part 1) include:

   - Something I did well today was . . .
   - Something I saw someone else do today that impressed me and why . . .
   - Something I appreciate about someone in my school/program community . . .
   - Something I appreciate about someone outside of school . . .
   - Something I will do over the weekend that others will see as kind or helpful . . .
   - Something I especially enjoyed doing today at school . . .
   - Something I'm looking forward to about school tomorrow and why . . .
   - Something I'm looking forward to outside of school tomorrow and why . . .
   - Something I learned today . . .
   - Something I can do better now than when I got here this morning . . .
   - Something I will do over the weekend that will make me happier or healthier . . .
   - Something I am grateful for today . . .
   - Something that made me smile today . . .

   Over time, you may also want to have students create their own prompts to share with the class.

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EXTENSIONS

- Look for opportunities to bring awareness to and model an eye for the positives during the day.
- Tell students their potentials are real and expansive.
- Share why you personally think the future is promising. Be specific.
- Optimistically share your own visions for the future with peers, students, and other colleagues.

REFLECTION AND ACTION

What are some other ways you can cultivate a sense of optimism, hope, and gratitude for students? Are there ways you can tie these mindsets into the academic curriculum or program activities?

To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please ***click here.***

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I Won't Quit

This strategy will help you reflect on your work as an educator and your motivation to stay the course when faced with challenges.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After using this strategy, I will have . . .

- Engaged in thoughtful self-reflection
- Developed a personal set of skills for self-talk that motivates
- Used poetry as an intrinsically motivating resource

MAKE IT HAPPEN

1. Find a quiet time to read the poem "Don't Quit" by Edgar A. Guest. You can find the poem by Google searching the title and author or try the link below. http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/additional-self-care-resources/inspirational-materials/dont-quit.html

2. Consider how this poem relates to your work as an educator. You may feel that you are constantly being asked to do more with less. In addition to your academic lessons or activities, you may be asked to teach social and emotional learning (SEL) lessons to your students. You may think, "I need more support, more time, more guidance, more confidence, more funding to do this well." What we really need is encouragement and willpower. Edgar Guest's poem provides inspiration that can encourage and generate willpower. Through his words and messages, we are reminded of how change occurs over time and is rarely linear. The big picture is brought more to light; that vision of all students graduating with effective social and emotional skills is clear. We are reminded of what might be and how awesome it would be. Guest tells us that the time when the going gets rough is also when we are near the destination. Whatever you do in your work and life, stay focused; don't quit!

3. You may want to print this poem and post it near your computer or desk. It will encourage and give you energy to continue your important work and other efforts. Don't quit!

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EXTENSIONS

- Read the poem each day until you have memorized it over the next marking period. Make it a morning ritual.
- Say the poem out loud every day for the next 90 days (half the school year).
- Post the poem as a support for students and the work they are trying to achieve.
- Make the poem a class-wide or program-wide mantra.
- Collect colleagues' favorite motivating poems. Develop and distribute them as a resource of poems.

REFLECTION AND ACTION

Consider whether the insight and/or skill learned from this strategy would be beneficial for your students. How might you share or adapt this strategy for students?

To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please ***click here.***

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Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training (EdSERT) Self-Assessment

Optimistic Thinking Posttest*

Jennifer L. Robitaille & Paul A. LeBuffe

Date Completed: _____

Set aside time to reflect on each item below. For each item, indicate on the 5-point scale provided (1 = *Not at all like me* to 5 = *Very much like me*) how much each statement reflects your *current practice* and then indicate whether you'd like to enhance your use of this practice by putting a check mark in the column labeled "Focus Area." There are no right or wrong answers, and your responses will not be shared unless you choose to share them. This information will help you reflect on your current use of these social-emotional practices and identify areas for continued growth and learning.

	Not at all like me		Somewhat like me		Very much like me	Focus Area
Meaning and Purpose						
1. I can list specific ways in which my work as an educator adds pleasure and meaning to my life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I take great pride in knowing that my role as an educator makes a difference in the lives of my students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Positive Expectations						
3. I have high expectations for all of my students and consistently offer them support in reaching these expectations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I believe every student can be successful, and I frequently communicate this to each of my students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Confidence						
5. I am capable of handling the challenges I face as an educator.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Optimism and Hopefulness						
6. I end the day or class period in an optimistic way, reflecting with students about what went well, what was learned, or things to look forward to next time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I reframe negative events or outcomes as an opportunity to learn and grow, and I encourage my students to do the same.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. When things go wrong during the workday, I remain positive and put my focus on understanding what happened and how I can make it work next time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I am hopeful about the future and strive to model that attitude for my students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gratitude						
10. I create an environment for students that encourages the expression of gratitude, appreciation, and celebration for one another.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Notes

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Optimistic Thinking Recommended Resources

Edutopia

- The Necessity of Having High Expectations
  https://www.edutopia.org/article/necessity-having-high-expectations
- The Pygmalion Effect: Communicating High Expectations
  https://www.edutopia.org/blog/pygmalion-effect-communicating-higher-expectations-ben-solomon
- Resources for Teaching Growth Mindset
  https://www.edutopia.org/article/growth-mindset-resources
- Young Adult Novels That Teach a Growth Mindset
  https://www.edutopia.org/article/young-adult-novels-teach-growth-mindset-robert-ward

We Are Teachers

- 12 Powerful Statistics That Prove Why Teachers Matter
  https://www.weareteachers.com/teacher-impact-statistics/
- 18 Perfect Read-Alouds for Teaching Growth Mindset
  https://www.weareteachers.com/perfect-read-alouds-for-teaching-growth-mindset/

Greater Good Science Center

- Four Great Gratitude Strategies
  https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/four_great_gratitude_strategies
- How to Help Students Develop Hope
  https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_help_students_develop_hope

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- To learn more about Optimistic Thinking and view professional development, please **click here.**
- Growth Mindset Poster
  www.EdSERT.com/extras

APERTURE EDUCATION

About Aperture Education

The mission of Aperture Education is to ensure that all members of school and out-of-school time communities, both children and adults, have the social and emotional skills to be successful, productive, and happy.

We achieve this by providing teachers, out-of-school time staff, parents, and students with accurate and actionable data about their social and emotional strengths and needs. We pair this data with research-informed strategies and resources leading to improved outcomes.

Aperture Education provides The DESSA Comprehensive SEL System, allowing educators to measure, strengthen, and support social-emotional competence in youth, grades K–12. The DESSA System includes a suite of strength-based social-emotional learning (SEL) assessments, a universal screener that can be administered in 1 minute, foundational practices, and growth strategies to strengthen social and emotional competence.

For more information, please visit: www.ApertureEd.com.