Building a Culture of Grappling

The following list provides an overview of strategies teachers can use to create a class culture in which challenge or struggle is viewed as a way to learn, not as a barrier to learning. These strategies can be used during the “Grapple” portion of a Workshop 2.0 lesson, but they are certainly not limited to use with that lesson structure.

• Build common language in your classroom for “grappling”; you don’t have to call it grappling, but do label it for students.

• Give students tangible successes early in the year (e.g. with reading, writing, math): design tasks you know they can be successful with and support them in making it high quality; give them lots and lots of individual feedback to help them grow early in the year, then point out their growth.

• Make grappling (or whatever you call it) another class routine; explain what it is and why we do it. With students, identify the actions/strategies they can use during the grapple phase (e.g. exhibiting specific habits of scholarship).

• Remind students of other activities they already do that involve trying things first and doing things independently.

• Model grappling for your students with a task that is authentically difficult for you.

• Use Crew discussions to talk explicitly about the importance of taking on challenges in order to learn. When appropriate, read and discuss with students short pieces of research about having a growth mindset and its impact on learning.

• Use group initiatives (for example, in Crew) to practice grappling with a challenge, tenacity, and problem-solving; discuss application to classroom lessons when debriefing the initiative.

• Hold character trait discussions that link to the “grapple phase” of your lessons: what does perseverance look like? What are tips for helping yourself keep going when the going is hard?

• Create meaningful metaphors for instilling a growth mindset: the mind is a muscle that needs to be made strong, etc.

• Do a “zones of comfort” activity: draw concentric circles for the comfort, risk and danger zones. Have students identify types of experiences they have that fall in the different zones. Point out that the risk zone is our learning zone; we learn best when we are a little uncomfortable.

• Tell a personal story or find a short story about a time you (or a character) persevered.