

CHILDREN'S STORY: PER-SE-VERE

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

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Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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ABSTRACT

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January 2009

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We constantly come across problems or challenges that have no predetermined answer or solution. Perseverance is a very important disposition that makes us persist in the search of something we have started. I believe that people who want to persevere not only need to be motivated but, more importantly, they need to understand what it takes to persevere or, in other words, know *how* to persevere. Developing strategies to face and overcome confusion, obstacles, and frustrations is needed for learning. The teaching of Intellectual Perseverance is frequently taken for granted or not taught appropriately. Attitudes, dispositions, and habits of mind needed to persevere, should be explored, discussed, experienced, and specifically taught in school and at home.

This synthesis presents a transition book called “PER-SE-VERE” for children between 5-8 years old. It focuses on the acquisition of tools for developing Intellectual Perseverance. The book, included in draft form here, is an essential toolbox designed to help parents, teachers and children reflect on their perceptions and beliefs about Intelligence, Learning, Success, Failure, Effort, and the way they face challenging situations. A printed copy of the book and an audio version are available on request.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer.
~Albert Einstein*

Problem-solving skills are among the most important kinds of skills students can acquire. Parents and teachers play an essential role in facilitating children with this type of learning skills. It is imperative that students are conducted to understand what is needed to solve a problem and at the same time guide discussion using questions that make them reflect on the way they face and solve their own problems. If children comprehend their process, and become aware of what their thoughts and feelings are when struggling to learn something or achieve an academic goal, then it will be easier to share ideas, reflect on them, and improve the thinking process. Parents and teachers can create spaces to dialogue with children about strategies and tools that can help them learn to problem solve, and at the same time, guide them as they put them in practice and incorporate those skills into their lives.

Perseverance is essential in the problem solving process. Perseverance is persistence in the process of pursuing something we have started. A perseverant person develops strategies to face and overcome confusion, obstacles, and frustrations. Some people say that perseverance has to do with strong will. I believe that a person who wants to persevere not only needs to be motivated but more importantly, he or she needs to understand what it takes to persevere or in other words, know *how* to persevere. Before I explain this point, let me introduce the connection between perseverance and critical and creative Thinking.

The concept of Perseverance can be confusing because while some videos, stories and

rhymes show characters succeeding by sticking to their goals, some others show characters who also stick to what they want, but fail. This synthesis presents examples of conflicting messages which can influence the way children understand and interpret the concept.

Perseverance and Critical Thinking

We constantly come across problems or challenges, which most of the times have no predetermined answer or solution. In order to explore them or solve them, critical and creative thinking are needed. Puccio and Murdock (2001) define Creative Thinking as a rational process that enable people to successfully produce novel and useful responses to open-ended challenges and opportunities. Paul, Elder, & Bartell (1997) define Critical Thinking as an intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.

Elder & Paul (2002), authorities on critical thinking who have made rich contributions to our understanding of critical thinking development, propose the following sequence of six stages that people go through as aspiring to critical thinkers. Elder & Paul (2002) describe each stage as follows: In stage 1, the Unreflective Thinker is unaware of significant problems in thinking; in stage 2, the Challenged Thinker becomes aware of problems in thinking (problem-finding: creative thinking); in stage 3, the Beginning Thinker tries to improve but without regular practice; in stage 4, the Practicing Thinker recognizes the necessity of regular practice; in stage 5, the Advanced Thinker proceeds in accordance with practice, and finally, in stage 6, the Master Thinker has become a skillful insightful thinker by nature.

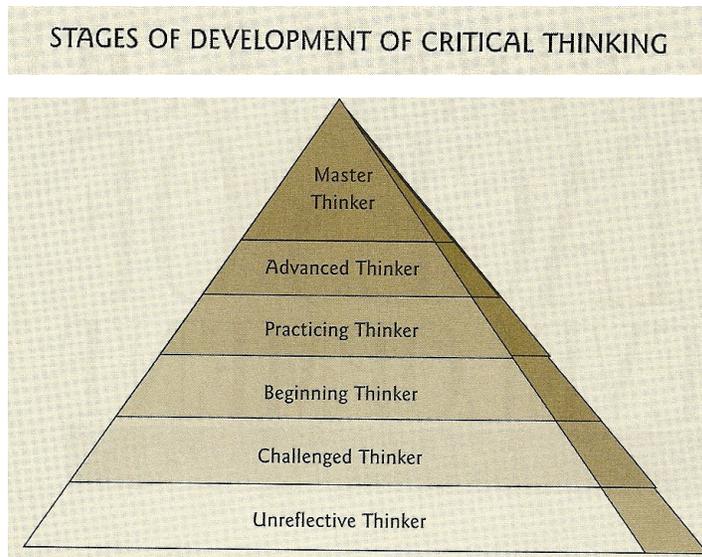


Figure 1: Stages of Development of Critical Thinking. Elder, L., & Paul, R.W. (2002). *Critical thinking: Tools for taking charge of your professional and personal life*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Elder and Paul also believe that critical thinkers strive to develop essential traits or characteristics of mind that will lead them to analyze, evaluate and improve their thinking. These interrelated habits enable one to open and be receptive to discipline, and improve mental functioning. (3) The following diagram shows these eight intellectual traits:

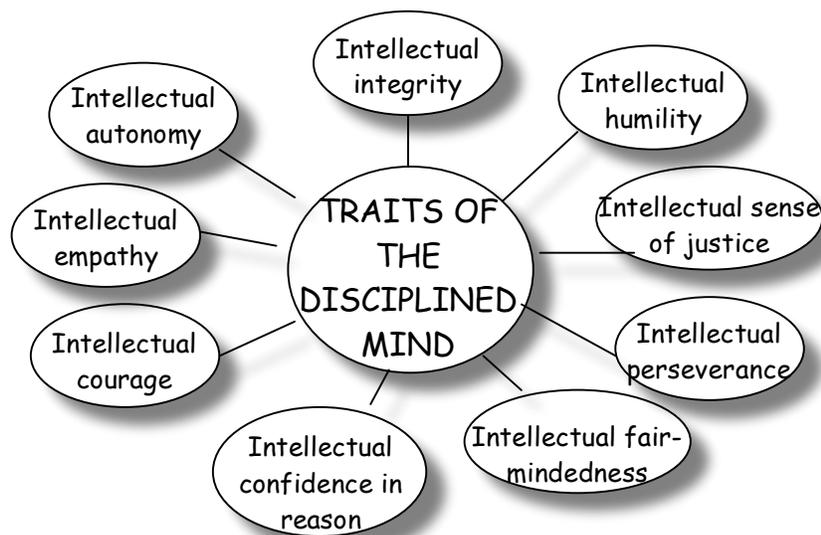


Figure 2: Trait of the Disciplined Mind. Elder, & Paul (2002).

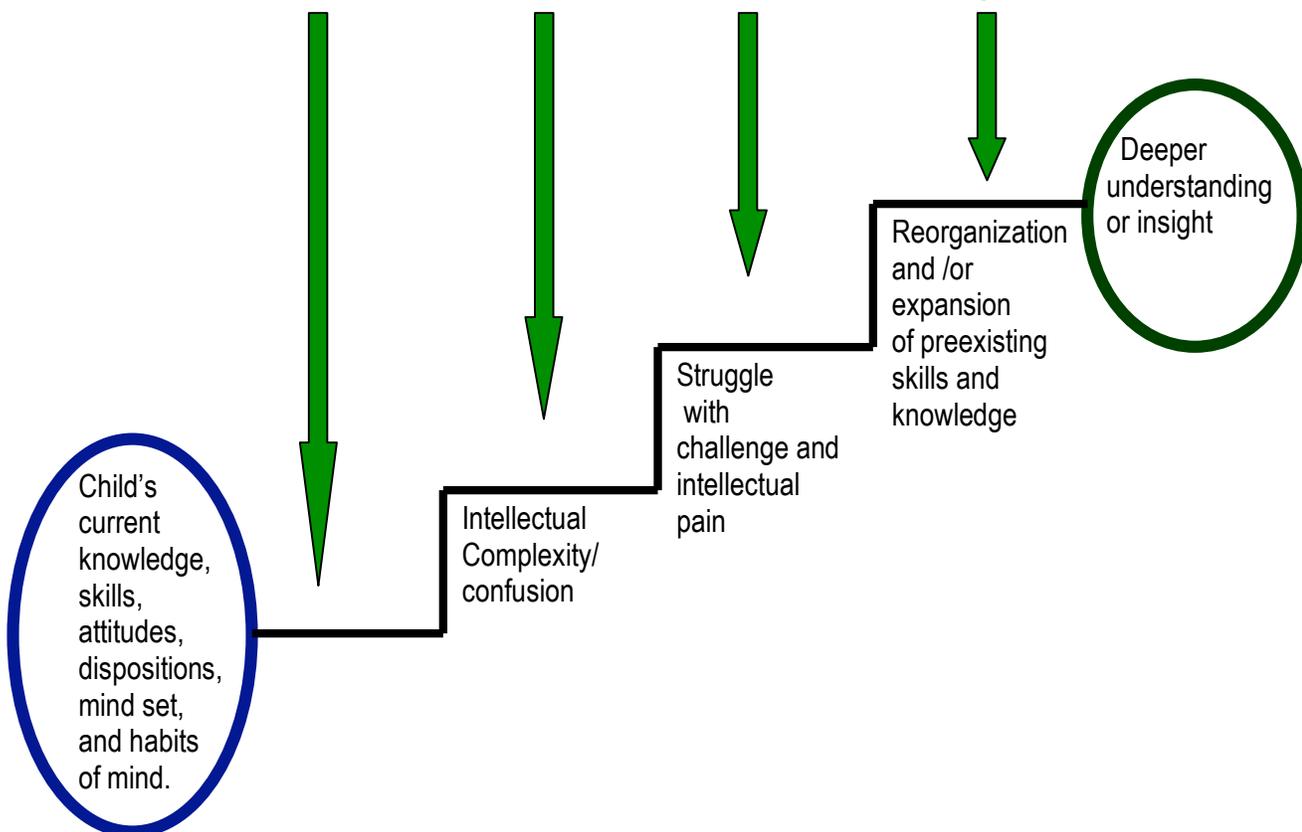
Effective critical and creative thinking is strongly related to Perseverance. This synthesis focuses on the acquisition of tools for developing Intellectual Perseverance as a key element in training students to become effective, high level critical and creative thinkers. Paul and Elder (2002) define Intellectual Perseverance as the disposition to work one's way through intellectual complexities despite frustration inherent in the task. In addition, they believe that some intellectual problems are complex and cannot be easily solved. However, when a person is intellectually perseverant they do not give up in the face of challenge, complexity or frustration. The authors claim that the intellectually perseverant person has a realistic sense of the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended time to achieve understanding or insight. Paul and Elder (2002) propose that the opposite of Intellectual Perseverance is Intellectual Laziness, which is the tendency to give up quickly when faced with an intellectually challenging task. Furthermore, such people are intellectually indolent, or lazy, and have a low tolerance for intellectual discomfort or frustration. This synthesis takes a different view of that contention.

Although perseverance, insistence, firmness, decisiveness, persistence, determination, and willpower are often related to motivation, from my perspective Intellectual Perseverance and Intellectual Laziness are not simply a matter of motivation or the lack of it. They are about knowing how to overcome obstacles that block learning and having the tools for learning, controlling learning, and making connections between content and real life situations. Significant learning often requires perseverance. On another important level, students' perceptions and beliefs about learning, effort, success, failure and intelligence, play an important role to the degree to which they will be intellectually perseverant. Certain mental processes, habits of mind, and patterns of thought are constantly being formed and reinforced and these block paths to

effective thinking. Effective critical thinkers are aware of this and can take steps to remove these barriers.

Elder and Paul (2002) equate Intellectual Perseverance with Intellectual Laziness. The dictionary defines “*Lazy*” as disinclined to activity or exertion; not energetic or vigorous; moving slowly; “*Indolent*” is defined as a person who suggests a love of ease and a dislike of movement or activity. A person who gives up when facing an intellectual obstacle is not necessary an intellectually lazy person. That person might face that situation in a motivated, energetic and ambitious way, but at the same time lack the mental tools and habits of mind that limit the achievement of the main objective. This is quite different from being “lazy.” Figure 1 proposes when to introduce strategies for intellectual perseverance in a learning process.

Tools for promoting Intellectual Perseverance should be introduced in the different phases of this learning process



A major outcome of this synthesis is to write and publish a book for children, parents, and teachers that provides some strategies for developing intellectually perseverant skills. The book, included in draft form here, is designed to help parents, teachers and students to reflect on ways they face obstacles and the strategies they use to do so. In addition, it offers a section with follow-up activities that help children to transfer thoughts and ideas to real world contexts. To help set the scene this synthesis explores various intellectual strategies that promote the development of skills, attitudes, dispositions, mindsets, and habits of mind necessary for becoming a skillful, insightful thinker who persists in moving forward when confronted with intellectual complexity. Three key questions underlie this exploration: 1) What makes a student able to be intellectually perseverant? 2) How can a student who is not intellectually perseverant be helped to do so? 3) In what ways does a student's awareness, perceptions, and beliefs toward intelligence, the learning process, learning goals, success, failure, effort, and metacognition, lead to or inhibit intellectual perseverance?

Chapter two provides a literature review that focuses on the relationship between the acquisition of tools for developing Intellectual Perseverance and the characters, plot, and messages of the story. Concepts and theories surrounding the different ways of perceiving intelligence will be explored: for example Rueben Feuerstein's (1980) modifiable way of perceiving intelligence and Carol Dweck's (1999) theory on "Fixed Vs. Dynamic Intelligence" are discussed. An analysis of how the different ways of perceiving intelligence can impact how students' judging personal success, failure and effort is also presented. In addition, Kamins and Dweck (1998) theories pertaining to "Praise" and the impact of this on students' thinking, beliefs and how this affects one's achievement goals is discussed. Finally, in section three, Costa's (2000) and Kallick's (2000) "Habits of Mind" and their role in teaching thinking are explored.

Chapter three, the heart of this synthesis, presents “**PER-SE-VERE**”, the story I have written for children, plus an accompanying activity book designed for children, parents and teachers. The story combines current views on intellectual perseverance, my analyses of factors that encourage or deter students from being intellectually perseverant, and habits of mind, attitudes, and skills that can help children, parents, and teachers cultivate intellectual perseverance.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THE STORY'S MESSAGES

Tato: Intelligence and Praising

Tato is the main character in the story PER-SE-VERE. He is a very creative, active and self-motivated young boy who loves to blow bubbles. He is a good synthetic thinker who finds relationships between things that other people don't recognize spontaneously. He is constantly exploring bubbles and doing experiments with them. He has grown up with the idea that he is very intelligent.

Dweck (1999) believes that different people have different views of intelligence. Some think of it as a fixed trait, with each person having a certain finite amount while others view intelligence as a potential that can be developed over time. Tato's parents and relatives have a fixed view of intelligence: it's an innate, fixed quality, something you are born with in greater or lesser amounts. In other words, they believe that people who are intelligent, will be intelligent all their life and people who are not, won't develop it. Tato's parents believe that he is a born "genius" and will always be one. Tato is used to hearing his family praising him by saying such things as, "A mathematician since birth!" "A genius in science!"

Kamins and Dweck (1999) have shown that praising the whole person (e.g., "You are a mathematician since birth") fosters helplessness when confronted with mistakes one has made. This is exactly what happens to Tato. The kind of praise he hears leads him to believe he has a fixed intelligence. However, this produces a conflict, which reveals itself in an internal monologue during which he believes he is intelligent, but also has doubts about this. His "fixed" way of perceiving intelligence defines the way he see challenges and his ability to face them.

Tato's constant exploration and questioning leads him to seek challenges. Although he seeks them, he also feels helpless when he can't achieve his goal. His parents praised the product and not the process; he didn't receive praise for the effort he used in his projects.

As a result, he is comfortable and motivated when applying thinking to circumstances that he can manage. He tends to more impulsive and enjoys "thinking outside the box"; when he realizes that the solution is not immediate and that different strategies are needed, he gets blocked and gives up. He doesn't know how to deal with something that he is not yet good at. He gives himself negative messages ("I can't, I can't!"), cries alone and never expresses his frustration or feeling with others.

The main thing that blocks him is his fixed view of intelligence. Tato believes that solutions should occur to him with little or no effort. Asking for help is not an option, because if he does, this would be an admission that he doesn't know something. He avoids revealing his lack of ability to demonstrate his skills and self-worth to peers and relatives. In other words, he doesn't know how to deal with something that he is not good at and he is afraid of what others think or say about him as well as disappointing his family.

Parents and teachers ought to let students know that they believe that they are capable of succeeding in school even when they do badly in a task or assignment. Students should understand that learning and getting things right needs time, practice, and understanding and that making mistakes is normal; everyone makes mistakes. This can make students gain confidence in their ability to generate lots of ideas even when those might be wrong.

Tato's Goal: Learning Goals and Performance Goals

Dweck & Elliott (1983) claim that a great amount of evidence suggests that much of achievement motivation can be understood considering the different goals individuals bring to the achievement context. In addition, Elliot & Dweck (1988) define learning goals as an active inclination toward development and growth of competence, focusing on the idea of learning new knowledge or skill.

Tato's goal arises from him wondering why all bubbles have to be round. At first, Tato's had a learning goal. He wanted to learn why bubbles were round and also wanted to know how to create a square one. His intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm led to thinking out of the box and looking for a way to create a "Square Bubble Maker". Then, when he realizes that the idea sounds quite interesting and unique, his goal changes from a learning goal, to a performance goal. Now he focuses on wanting to please others, on showing how special and smart he is. He ends up being preoccupied with his self-image and not about the pursuit of learning.

Perseverance Taught in School

Tato tried to create a Square Bubble Maker but felt blocked – he was "stuck". That same day, his teacher read them a story about a boy who perseveres. After reading the story, the teacher describes perseverance. "When you face a difficulty in reaching your goal you should do as much as you can to overcome it, no matter how hard it is, or how long it takes, or how many obstacles are in the way...all of you can do it. You have to work hard and persevere to get what you want."

The message of that story and the teacher's description of perseverance makes it look as if perseverance is related to will and motivation and not necessarily related to cognitive abilities or skills. It is commonly taught as the idea of sticking to the objective and never stopping until

succeeding but without saying how to do it. Cognitive objectives require time, going back or switching strategies.

Mmmuka: Cognitive Modifiability

Mmmuka is the supporting character. He comes from Zukitia a planet far from Tato's. This makes him a neutral being that causes Tato to feel confident and, for the first time, to share his fears and frustrations with him. Mmmuka has a different way of perceiving intelligence, effort, challenge, and learning. Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman, and Miller (1980) claim that intelligence is modifiable. Feuerstein believes that intelligence can be taught, and that intelligence can continue to develop throughout with time and that in a way, all of us are "gifted" and "retarded" simultaneously.

Mmmuka represents this view of intelligence. He questions Tato's idea of fixed intelligence and gives him examples of the opposite. In addition, Mmmuka believes that Perseverance is something that can be learned. He questions Tato's idea that Perseverance is something natural that we are all born with it.

Mmmuka's Friends: Habits of Mind

In the story, Mmmuka refers to five of his Zukitian friends who represent examples of some important skills and Habits of Mind that can help Tato persevere.

TAP (Think-Ask-Practice) is a tree that is an example of growth. In order to grow he constantly Thinks, Asks and Practices. Every time he thinks, every time he asks and every time he practices he learns and grows a little more. His roots expand, his trunk enlarges and his branches stretch. He never stops learning because he knows that if he does so, he loses strength and his growth stops. TAP's goal is to learn every day regardless of what other people say or think.

Trail Hunter Owl lives in the highest tree of the planet. Owls usually fly at night following the same route to the lake but this owl is different. He likes to stand on the highest branch and he uses his binoculars to explore the horizon. He observes, observes, and observes. He looks north, south, east, and west in search of different paths. It is incredible, but he never repeats a previous track, he tries a different direction every night.

Antbuddy is a very curious and friendly ant. She is the president of the International Happy Ant Association. She is always looking for new ways to improve her colony by helping ants have a better life. She is always learning and traveling around the planet, visiting colonies, searching for opportunities to talk, listen, and work with others.

Ideabelle is a very clever and creative cat. She is in charge of teaching Zukitians to understand and to make good use of our mistakes. She believes that mistakes are opportunities to learn and have new ideas.

Mr. Corn takes time to think. He believes that it does not matter how quickly the answer is given because the first idea is not always the best one. He thinks that taking time to think lets ideas flow and that is why he always collects his ideas before sharing them.

Mmmuka's friends were used to express some Habits of Mind. Costa and Kallick (2000) claim that an essential characteristic of intelligence is knowing what to do with information. The authors researched the dispositions needed for learning and identified sixteen of them, which are fundamental for lifelong learning for adults and young learners. They call these dispositions, "Habits of Mind", noting that such behaviors require discipline and if practiced can become a consistent way of processing learning and thinking.

Ten out of the following 16 Habits of Mind were selected and embedded in the messages of the story. The following table indicates which character was selected to share each one of the

Habits of Mind.

16 Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick, 2000)

Habits of Mind applied in the story's messages/character who transmits the message.

Persisting

√Tato

Managing impulsivity

√Mmmuka and Mr. Corn

Listening with understanding and empathy

Thinking flexible

√Trail Hunter

Thinking about thinking (metacognition)

√Mmmuka and Mr. Corn

Striving for accuracy

Questioning and posing problems

√TAP and Tato

Applying past knowledge to new situations

Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision

√Antbuddy

Gathering data through all senses

Creating, imagining, innovating

√Tato

Responding with wonderment and

awe

Taking responsible risks √Tato

Finding humor

Thinking interdependently √Antbuddy

Remaining open to continuous √Mmmuka

learning

The story uses the characters and their dialogue to give clear examples about the Habits of Mind suggested by Costa and Kallick. I believe that it is important that parents and teachers understand each one of the Habits and be aware that these are imperative skills, which they can model, share, teach and even guide their children through their development. Consequently, they can help their children be thoughtful about what they are doing when learning. These skills can lead the learners to have a better approach when analyzing, evaluating, and improving their thinking every time they face a challenging task, problem, or question that does not have a simple instant solution. Let me end this chapter with a review of the ways perseverance tends to be mistaught.

The Mis-Teaching of Perseverance

TV, stories, and music have a tremendous influence on children's learning. Videos, stories, rhymes, and fables that show cases of children or adults with a very strong will who stick to their goals and persist, are often used to teach perseverance. The main character is usually challenged, most of the time in a physical way, and this drives him or her to do whatever is

needed in order to succeed. I believe that the concept of Perseverance can be confusing because while some videos, stories and rhymes show characters succeeding by sticking to their goals, on the contrary, others show characters who also stick to what they want and struggle to get it, but fail. The conflicting messages, identified and presented below, influence the way children understand and interpret the concept.

The first chapter of *The Children's Book of Virtues* (1995) is focused on Courage and Perseverance and shares a collection of six short stories and poems on the topic. I selected two rhymes and one fable that illustrate the importance of sticking to a goal or objective in order to succeed. The first rhyme is “Try, Try Again”.

TRY, TRY AGAIN

'Tis a lesson you should heed,
Try, try again;
If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try again;
Then your courage should appear,
For, if you will persevere,
You will conquer, never fear;
Try, try again.

The message of this rhyme is commitment. In other words, once you start something or you are trying to achieve something, you should continue trying until you succeed. It seems as if perseverance were magic or something that occurs automatically after insisting without stopping.

The second rhyme is called “Persevere”. The rhyme shares a message of how “stick-to-it-iveness”, taking time to do things, and patience can help people learn well.

PERSEVERE

Stick-to-it-iveness has a lot to do with getting the right answers in math, English, history, and life.

The fisher who draws in his net too soon,
Won't have any fish to sell;
The child who shuts up his book too soon,
Won't learn any lessons well.
If you would have your learning stay, Be patient –
don't learn too fast;
The man who travels a mile each day,
May get round the world at last.

One of the stories presented in the chapter is the fable “The Hare and the Tortoise”. The hare challenges the tortoise to a race and the tortoise wins by trusting herself and crawling slowly but steadily. This fable sends a message of the importance of believing in oneself and is a clear example of the stick- to –it characteristic of perseverance.

I believe that the messages communicated in the previous pieces of texts, such as believing in oneself, sticking to what someone wants, being patient and insisting until succeeding, are important and part of what is needed to persevere. But, I believe that the lack of flexibility and problem solving strategies, can block the learning process and create obsessive behaviors.

Children get many examples of unsuccessful perseverance too. In other words, characters that stick to their goal and do not succeed. For example cartoonist Charles Schulz created a character called Charlie Brown, who became a very famous cartoon. His stories communicated the message: “If you persevere you will succeed”. But Charlie brown fails in almost everything he does. Another example is Wiley Coyote. His goal is to get the Roadrunner and he never gives up. He runs off cliffs and is hit by trains in his hot pursuits. No matter how hard Mr. Coyote tries, he never succeeds, the Roadrunner always manages to slip away. Sylvester the cat is

another example of a character who shows much self-respect in himself, and never gives up when chasing Tweety bird. His character is similar to Wiley the Coyote. Likewise, Pinky and Brain are two laboratory mice that live in the research Acme Labs. In each episode, Brain develops a new plan for the two of them to take over the world. Every intent eventually ends in failure.

Older kids also learn these messages through movies. I remember getting this message from the movie “Rudy” filmed on 1993. Rudy is a college student who has always been told that he was too small to play college football, becomes determined to overcome the odds and reach his dream of playing for Notre Dame. After a lot of insisting, the coach gives him the chance to observe the practices and to be the water boy. At the end of the movie the coach says “You're 5 foot nothin', 100 and nothin', and you have barely a speck of athletic ability but you hung in there with the best college football players in the land for 2 years, I am proud of you.”

This is another illustration of “stick-to-it” perseverance. In this example, Rudy concentrated on adhering to his goal and asking for a chance to be part of the team. The coach noticed that he was really interested due to the time he spend around the team without giving up, and that gave him the opportunity to play once. Rudy achieved the goal of playing once but he didn't get the chance to practice or learn how to play better.

Considering that Perseverance is an essential to success in learning, it should not be taught in a superficial way. The teaching of this very important disposition shouldn't be taken for granted. Attitudes, dispositions, and habits of mind, needed to persevere, should be explored, discussed, experienced, and taught in school and at home.

CHAPTER 3

PER-SE-VERE

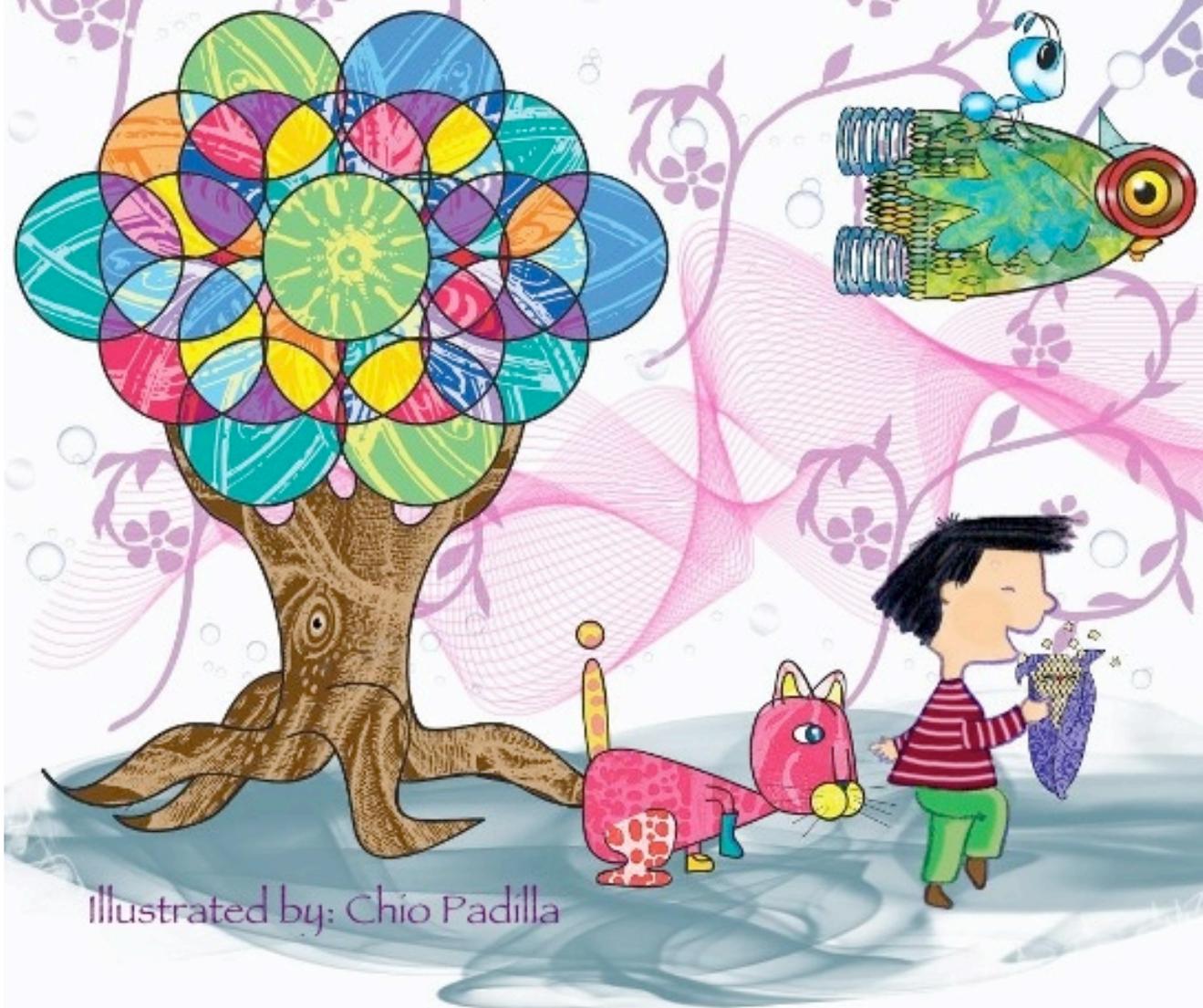
PER-SE-VERE is a children's transition book, 3,200 words in length, comprised of 4 chapters with color illustrations on each page. The story is told mainly through action and dialogue, in grammatically simple sentences.

The text is intended for ages 5-8, to be read by teachers, parents or children. At the beginning of the book, there is a section for parents and teachers that briefly explore the story's main objective: teaching for intellectual perseverance. The intent of the book is to create awareness in parents, teachers, and children of the importance of developing this essential thinking behavior in children. The aim is to have them recognize that this book is not only a story that entertains, but also an essential toolbox for helping children become better thinkers and problem solvers in school and in life.

The follow-up activities at the end of the story are intended as further opportunities for children to express how they feel when faced with a challenging situation and what strategies they use to find solutions. These activities can help parents and teachers get to know their children better; their way of studying, learning, the way they produce knowledge, their thinking blocks, fears, strengths and passions.

PER-SE-VERE

By: VIRGINIA DE LA GARZA



Illustrated by: Chio Padilla

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A NOTE FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

***It's not that I'm so smart, it's just
that I stay with problems longer.
~Albert Einstein***



Perseverance makes us constant in the search of something we have started. A perseverant person develops strategies to face and overcome confusion, obstacles, and frustrations.

Some people say that perseverance has to do with strong will, but more importantly, perseverant people need to know **how** to persevere.

Learning often requires perseverance. The teaching of this very important disposition is frequently taken for granted. Attitudes, dispositions, and habits of mind, needed to persevere, should be explored, discussed, experienced, and specifically taught and modeled in school and at home.

This story and activity book is not only for children; it is intended to make you and your children and students reflect on learning, teaching, thinking, and how you face challenging situations. It gives you a chance to talk about the way you perceive school, your learning processes, your fears, and your passions.

This story can be a tool to create discussion around the following topics:

- *Learning goals
- *Intelligence
- *Academic fears and frustrations
- *Positive and negative aspects of praising
- *Academic success and failure
- *Challenge and effort
- *Curiosity, questioning, and expressing ideas as the fuel of learning
- *Mistakes and their importance in the learning process
- *Managing impulsivity and the importance of taking "Thinking Time"
- *Persisting
- *Thinking flexible
- *Thinking about thinking
- *Creating, imagining, innovating
- *Taking responsible risks
- *Thinking interdependently
- *Remaining open to continuous learning

I encourage you to create opportunities for children explore their feelings and thoughts when facing difficulties, confusion, and uncertainty in order to help them achieve their goals, value challenges and enjoy learning in the deepest, fullest sense.

Cheers,
Virginia



Tato goes to school

“Have a good day! Think about all the things you will learn!” Those were my mom’s words as she waved goodbye to me from the house doorsteps. While I got on the school bus, I was still sleepy.

The night before, my Mom spoke to the neighbor on the phone. I heard her say, “Tato is a brilliant, sweet, and curious kid.”

Yes, that’s me!

“A mathematician since birth!” according to my Dad.

“A genius in science!” says my uncle John.

“The most dedicated student!” so thinks grandma.

That is what they think, but the truth is that I don’t always like school. It is not easy for me. Sometimes I feel bored and not always a good student.

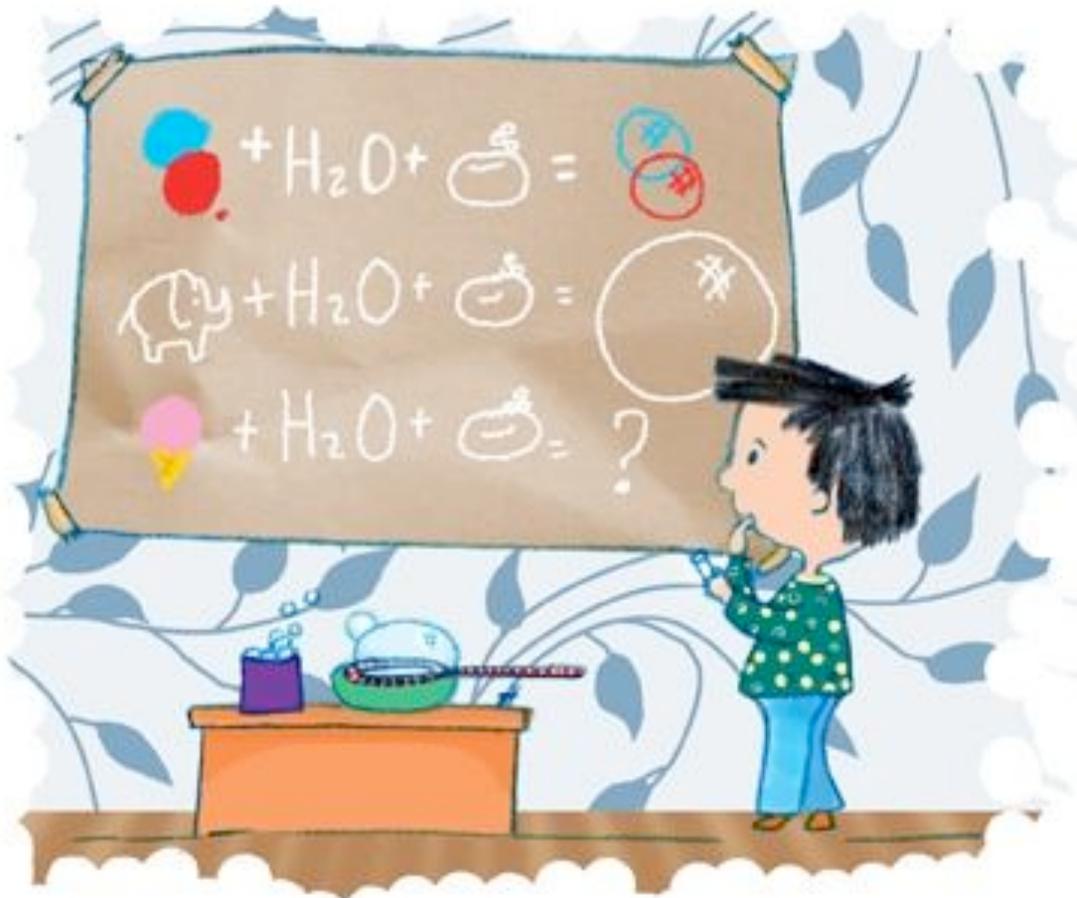
I frequently ask my mother why I have to go to school. She smiles and says, “Because you need to get an education. You have to learn new things, so when you grow up, you can be a trustworthy man.”



That morning, my teacher was very happy. "Good morning dear students!" She continued, "We have a lot of work today. There are only two days left for the big day – *the Science Fair!*!"

I loved working on my science project! I have a passion for blowing bubbles, little ones and big ones! Ever since the first time I saw one, I thought that bubbles were veeeeeeeery cool and fun. They are my favorite things in the whole world.

My Mom got me various bubble solutions. I was interested in knowing why bubbles have color and why they burst. I wanted to find a way to create different color mixtures that make bigger and bubbles that would be harder to pop. I also thought about inventing an edible bubble formula, but my Mom thought this was a dangerous experiment and she didn't give me permission to do it.



While I was working in the classroom, I kept wondering why bubbles are round. So I decided to look for a way to make a square bubble. *Yes!— a square bubble!*

“Wow! What a great idea!” I said to myself. “I’ve been playing with bubbles for a long time but never thought of this!”

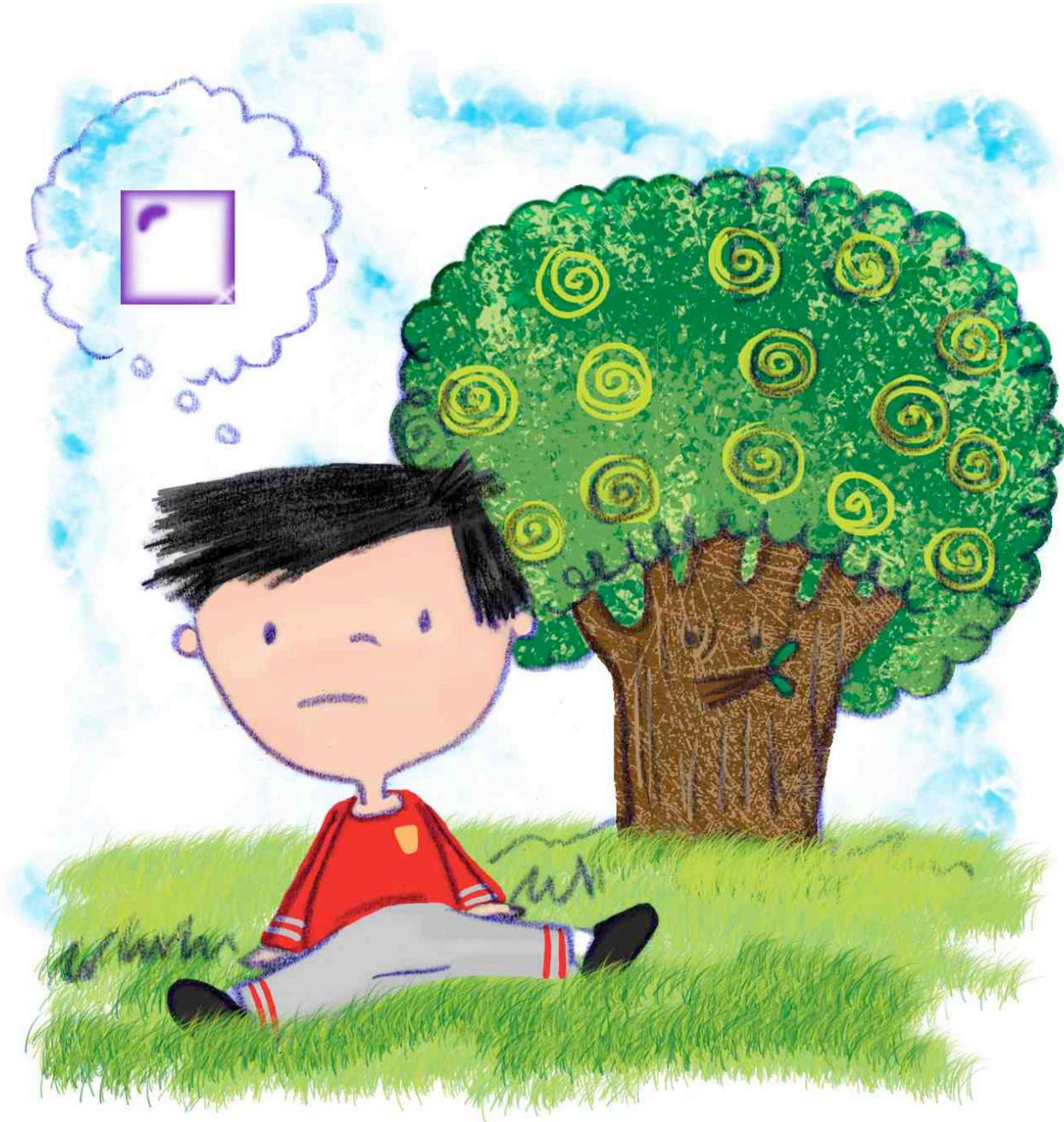
I had never seen a square bubble, which made it exciting to imagine that my invention could be the winner at the Science Fair! I could become known as the one and only inventor of “The Square Bubble.” I felt thrilled and started to create a plan.

I imagined the bubble and drew it in many sizes and colors. I listed and collected all the materials that would be needed. I started creating my “Square Bubble Maker.” First, I tried with paper and tape, but this didn’t work. Then I tried with a metallic cord; it didn’t work. I tried with straws, with a milk carton, but nothing worked. Every bubble I blew ended up being round.



“Aaaaaahhh!” I thought in despair. “I am so stupid! I will never be able to invent a square bubble! I can’t! I can’t! I caaaaaaan’t!”

I spent recess lying in the grass, looking at the clouds, thinking. I tried to let my mind drift but the words “*I can’t, I can’t, I can’t*” swam in my mind like small yellow fish.



Perseve... what?

"Ring!" It was time to go back to the classroom. My classmates were still playing on their way to their seats. The teacher said loudly, "Attention everyone! This is the last class of the day. It's reading time!"

"Great, no more bubbles!" I thought, feeling relieved.

We all went to the reading corner and sat on the red carpet covered with colorful pillows. The teacher had a big book and read us the story of Chucho "the struggler," a boy who wanted to be the best soccer player in his school. After a lot of effort, he succeeded and became Chucho "the winner."

When she finished reading the story, she looked at us and asked, "What is the story's message?"

I responded promptly, "The message of the story is that we need to be winners!"

Everyone looked at me.

The teacher continued, "Mmhhh...no."

"The message of this story is **perseverance**."

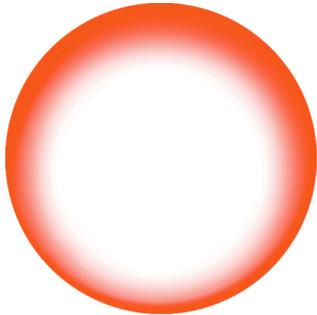
I felt confused and asked, "Persev... -- what?"

"Per-se-ver-ance," she said. "When you face a difficulty in reaching your goal you should do as much as you can to overcome it, no matter how hard it is, or how long it takes, or how many obstacles are in the way.

"Just like Chucho, all of you can do it. You have to work hard and persevere to get what you want. Do you understand?"

Everybody seemed to understand, but I didn't.

"Now let us all sing the song of perseverance," she said, as she began clapping. "Let's sing it together."

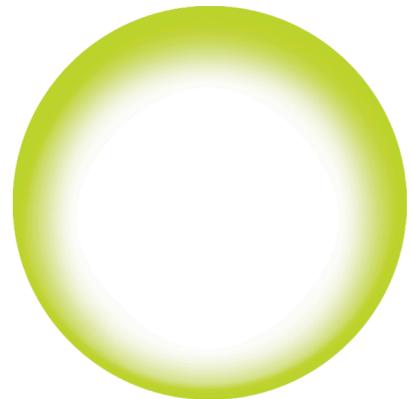


If the answer isn't clear,
PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE.
Never stop and please don't fear,
PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE.

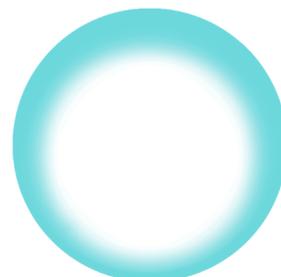
The answer will be near,
PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE.

If the answer isn't clear,
PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE.
Never stop and please don't fear,
PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE.

New ideas will appear,
PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE.

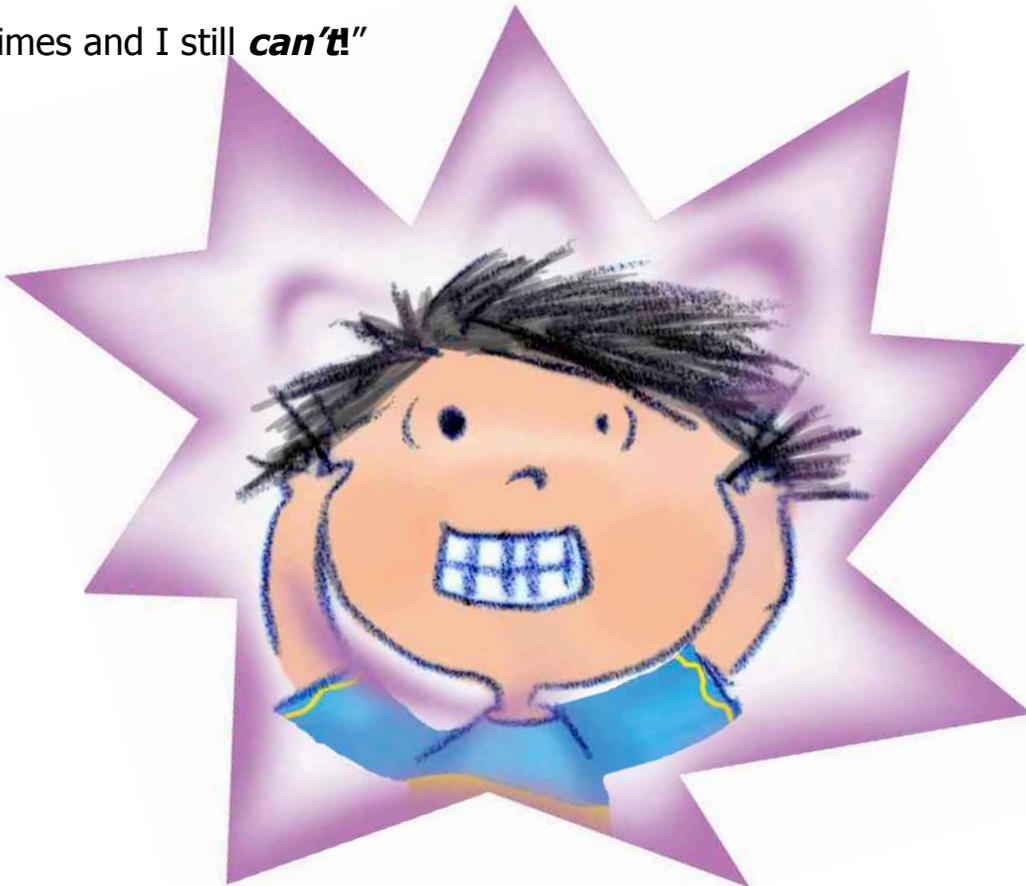


So you can reach your goal and cheeeeeeeeeeeeer!



The school day came to an end. My classmates were getting their backpacks ready to go home. But I was still sitting on the carpet, thinking about my square bubble.

From the other side of the classroom, I could hear a girl singing, "Never stop and please don't fear, PER-SE-VERE...PER-SE-VERE." I felt very upset and thought, "I can't, I can't, and I can't! I have tried very hard! I have tried to make my square bubble one, two, three, and twenty-three times and I still **can't!**"



On the way home from school I decided to forget the "great idea" of the square bubble. I said to myself, "I give up. I don't feel like trying again. This is a waste of time. I am not going to make that bubble. I can't and I don't want to do it anymore!"

While I was having dinner, I felt surrounded by squares: my sandwich, my napkin, the table, the carpet, the squares in my father's shirt, even grandma's picture. It was hard not to think about the bubble because everything reminded me of the "invention of the year" - the square bubble. Then, suddenly, a great idea came to mind. I felt like my brain had lit up like a flashlight! I decided to try one more time.

I ran over to my desk and pulled out all my tools and materials. I sat next to the window and worked for one whole hour without stopping once. I tried very hard. Inventing the square bubble maker was not easy. It was very hard.

While I was working, I repeated over and over again: "PER-SE-VERE...PER-SE-VERE... PER-SE-VERE...PER-SE-VERE. Never fear!"

I felt blocked again. "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGHHH!! I caaaaaaan't!!!!!!!!!" I broke into tears.



A Purple Bubble

In that moment, something incredible happened and everything changed. Suddenly, very slowly, a purple bubble surrounded me. Yes, it surrounded me! I was inside a bubble bigger than me!

I touched the bubble from the inside and it didn't burst. I was truly amazed. I flew inside the bubble to the top of a very green mountain. I couldn't believe what was happening. I felt excited and a little scared. All of a sudden, when the bubble touched the ground, it burst and there was

a boy in front of me. He had blue skin and the biggest smile I had ever seen. The boy looked at

me and said in a

funny voice:

"Hiya Icant, my name is

Mmmuka."



“Mmmuka?” What a weird and funny name.

“I have come from Zukitia, my planet, to help you. I have this information about you.” Mmmuka projected some images of me crying when trying to do my square bubble. I was astounded to see myself in those images.

“ Everyone, even this strange kid, knew that I am soooooo stupid.” I thought. I felt veery embarrassed.

Mmmuka asked, “What is going on, Icant? I would like to help you.

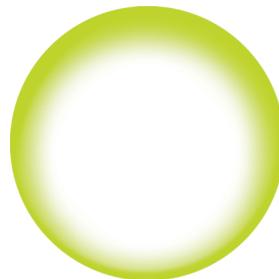
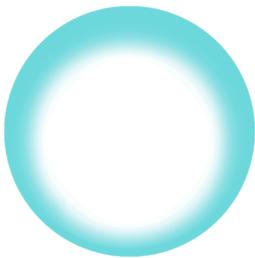
“That is not my name, my name is Tato.”

“What makes you act this way?” Mmmuka asked.

Maybe he could help me. I answered, “I wish I could make a square bubble.”

“Awesome!” replied Mmmuka.

“Yep, sounds cool but it is not easy.” I continued, “My problem is veeeeeeery serious. There is something that all people do, that we all should be able to do but I – I can’t. I don’t know how. I don’t know how to... ***persevere.***



Mmmuka replied, "Aaaahh! **Persevere**. Do you think that all children know how to persevere? Not everybody knows how to persevere. Only those who have learned to persevere can do it. Have you already learned how?"

His words made me laugh. "Learn to persevere? No way! You don't learn that. You just do it. It is like breathing; you just keep breathing.

Mmmuka replied, "No. Let's talk about it. He looked and pointed at the images of me crying when I fail to do the square bubble, and asked, "What is it that you do when you feel that way?"



“When that happens – mmmhh -- I think of my mother.”

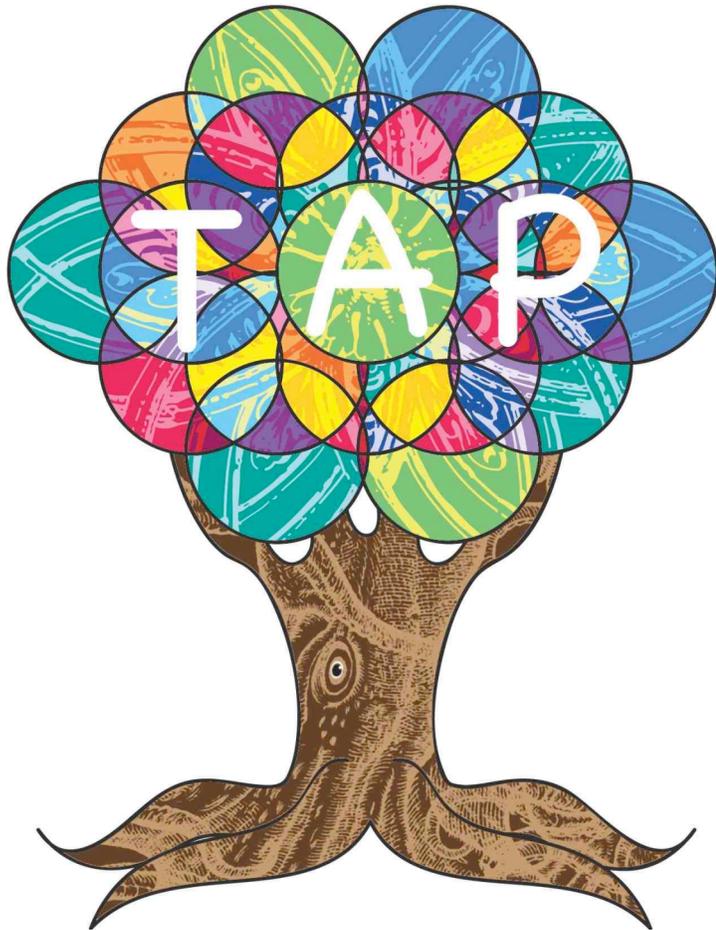
“Your mother?” Mmmuka seemed surprised.

“Yes, she says that I was born a genius. So, when I realize that I cannot make the square bubble I feel frustrated and stupid. I don’t want to disappoint her. I should be able to reach my goals.”

Mmmuka said, “You were born a genius? No no no no. Nobody is born a genius. You might be very good at some things and I guess that is why your mother calls you a genius; but skills develop little by little. That is what **TAP** has taught me.

“TAP? Who?” I said.

Mmmuka kept speaking, “TAP lives in Zukitia. Everybody considers him an example of growth because in order to develop he constantly **T**hinks, **A**sked and **P**racticed. Every time he **T**hinks, every time he **A**sked and every time he **P**racticed he learns a little and grows a little. His roots expand, his trunk enlarges and his branches stretch. When he stops learning, he loses strength and his growth stops. TAP’s goal is to learn and grow every day regardless of what other people say or think.” Mmmuka smiled.



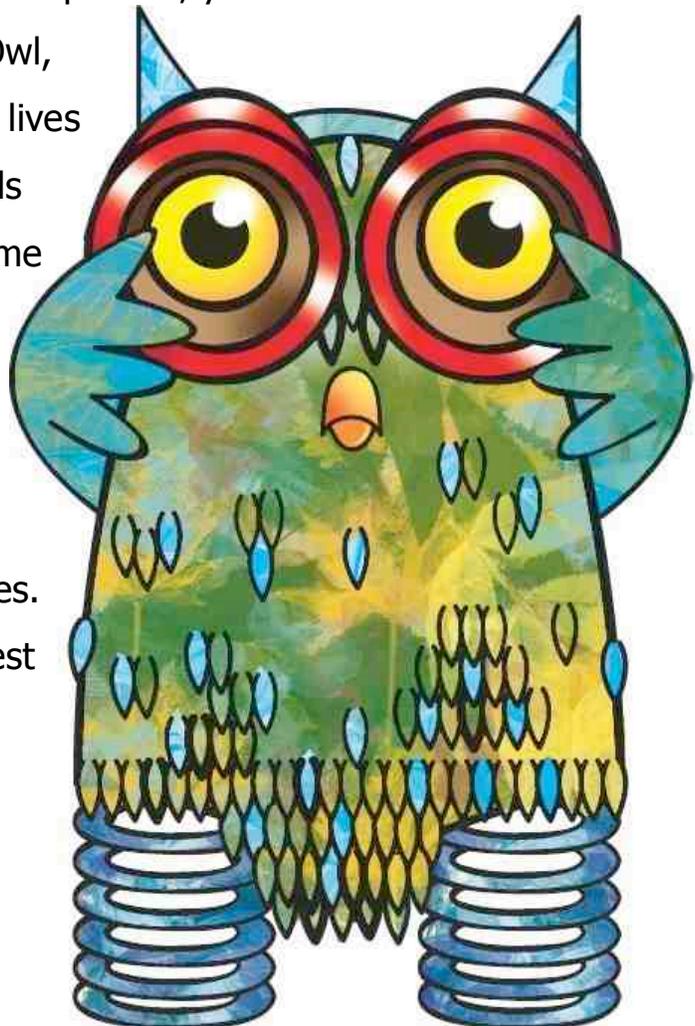
"Oh, I see. Mmmuka, what happens when you can't do something, when you just don't know how to?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" Mmmuka asked.

I explained, "The other day when I was trying to make a square bubble I found a metallic box. I thought that I was going to finally make my bubble with it. I experimented with the box in many different ways. I insisted like the rhymes we sing at school: "Never stop and please don't fear, PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VERE. I didn't stop but at the end, I didn't succeed. I didn't know what else to do."

Mmmuka replied, "Those rhymes says to never stop, but stopping is good sometimes. If you want to develop ideas, you need time to think.

This reminds me of my friend the Owl, best known as "**Trail-hunter.**" He lives in the tallest tree of the planet. Owls usually fly at night following the same route to the lake; this owl is different. He likes to stand on the highest branch and he uses his binoculars to explore the horizon. He observes, observes, and observes. He looks north, south, east, and west in search of different paths. It is incredible, but he never repeats a previous track, he tries a different direction every night.



"Wow! So you are trying to tell me that there are different solutions to the same problem?" I asked.

"Not always, but most of the time." Mmmuka smiled.

"So Tato, tell me, did you look for different paths when using the box to make the bubble?"

"Huh? Paths?" I asked.

Mmmuka smiled and said, "Yes! What did you do when you used the box in different ways and noticed that it was not working? Did you think or look for different options other than the metallic box?"

"Mmmhhh...nope," I responded

"Oh well, now you know what to do next time!"

We both laughed.

"Tato, What do your teacher, your parents, and friends tell you when this happens to you? Do they help you?"

"Oh nooooo! They don't know! Well, I have not told them. I have not asked for their help to make my bubbles because I should do it on my own. I don't need their help and I prefer to work alone."

Mmmuka's smile faded and he said, "Wait a minute! You don't know it all! Nobody knows it all. If someone knew it all, there would be nothing to learn and life would be very boring. This is something I learned from **Antbuddy.**"

“One of your buddies is an ant? That is funny!”

“Yes! Antbuddy is a very curious and friendly ant. She is the president of the International Happy Ant Association. She is always looking for new ways to improve her colony by helping ants have a better life. She is always learning and traveling around the planet, visiting colonies, searching for opportunities to talk, listen, and work with others.



“Awesome!” Mmmuka’s friends were great and fun. I felt very curious to visit his planet and meet them. I wanted him to tell me more stories about Zukitia.

Mmmuka kept asking, “How do you feel when you are stuck with a problem?”

“Mmm...Every time I tried to make a square bubble, I failed. In fact, I fail every day. In class, when the teacher asks a question I am always the first to answer but most of the time I am wrong. It is soooooo embarrassing! I am not good when making bubbles and I am not good when trying to answer questions in class.” I sighed.

Mmmuka replied, "Ooohh, I understand! The same thing happens to me! I also make mistakes when I am in my English, French, German, and Chinese class. Actually I make mistakes in all my classes."

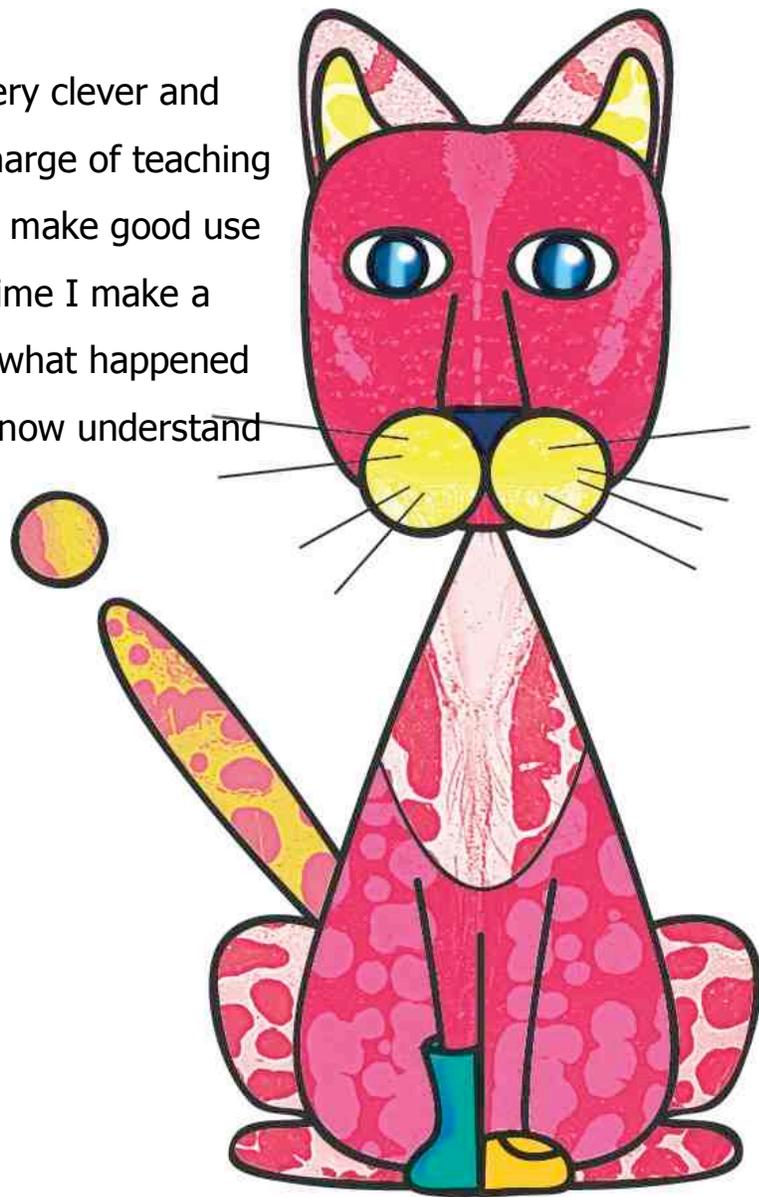
"What!?! You speak Chinese?" I couldn't believe my ears.

"Yes. It is hard but challenging. I am getting better little by little. Every time I make a mistake, my friend Ideabelle comes to mind."

"Another of your friends?"

Mmmuka nodded.

"**Ideabelle** is a very clever and creative cat. She is in charge of teaching us to understand and to make good use of our mistakes. Every time I make a mistake, I stop to think what happened and I learn from that. I now understand that mistakes bring up opportunities to learn and get new ideas."



"Tato, you don't need to rush to give answers. **Mr. Corn** knows this well. Whenever he has to give an answer, he takes time to think. He believes that it does not matter how quickly the answer is given because the first idea is not always the best one. Taking time to think lets ideas flow. Mr. Corn always collects his ideas before sharing them.



The Zipzap

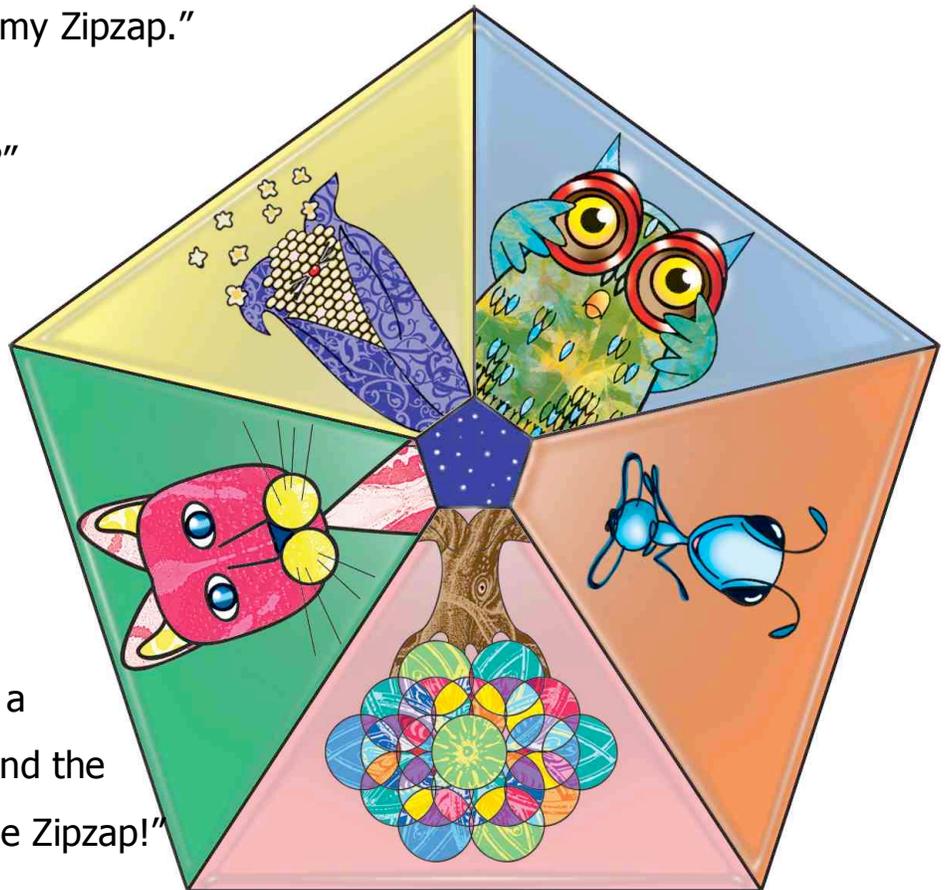
I was jumping with joy and singing, "PER-SE-VERE, PER-SE-VER ... I will cheeeeeeeeeer." I hugged Mmmuka and said, "I will have all these things in mind when I try to do my bubble! Thanks!"

He looked at me with a grin and handed me a colorful object. "Here, you can have it. It is my Zipzap."

"Your Zipzap??"

What is this for?"

I was intrigued.



"When you face a problem and cannot find the way to solve it, use the Zipzap!"

"How?"

"Look at it! The images will remind you of all the strategies that we talked about. Those are the ones I use but you can add your own on the blank spots on the back of it. You will learn better and Per-se-vere.

Practice, practice, and practice. Develop your skills and ideas little by little and one day, you won't need this tool anymore." 

With the Zipzap in one hand and a smile on my face, I waved Mmmuka goodbye from the purple flying bubble.

I practiced that afternoon, the next morning and the following day. I used the Zipzap during the day and I dreamed about it during the night. I took it everywhere. Every time I had a problem that I couldn't solve, I looked at the images to remember the messages. Mmmuka was right; I was learning and improving little by little.



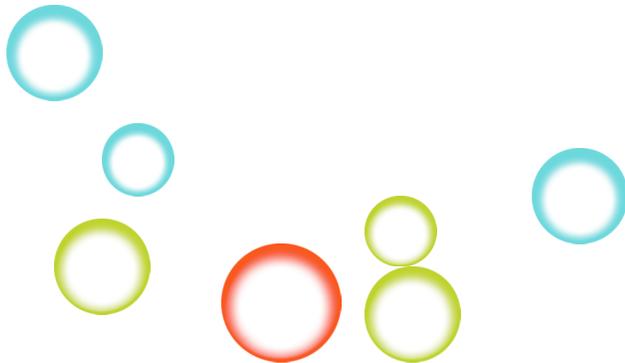
I made a lot of mistakes but I didn't get upset! I felt challenged. I didn't find a way to make a square bubble for the Science Fair but my presentation was still about bubbles and it was a lot of fun.

I am still in search of the way to make "The Square Bubble Maker". I have learned a lot in the process. I realized that one of my strategies was not good enough, so I looked for another path, as Trail Hunter Owl does. This helped me learn how to make bubbles with my hands and I found a way to make bubbles in form of stars! I can make another kind using a tin can, and I even made a bubble with a piece of yarn!



I shared my ideas like Antbuddy and I discovered that my father makes such strong bubbles that you can touch them and they don't burst.

When I shared my project with my teacher, she was very interested and she asked me to help her make the bubble mix for our next field trip. I asked my classmates for help. Javier and Gonzalo got very excited and we did experiments together. We invented a bubble race and Javier was the winner. He kept his bubble in the air for the longest time. It was a lot of fun.



A week later, Liz, the music teacher said, "It is time for each one of you to play with music." She continued, "You should invent a song a rhyme or a tongue twister."

"A song? About what?" I felt nervous. For a minute I thought that I was not good for that but I knew that my Zipzap would guide my ideas and I would find a solution.

I opened my backpack, to get my Zipzap out but it was not there!! I looked everywhere and couldn't find it.

I screamed inside, "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH, my Zipzap! Where is it?! What am I going to do without it?! I won't be able to persevere ever again!" I wanted to cry.

The teacher said, "You have 15 minutes to improvise."

"Improvise? What is she talking about? Oohh! No!" I felt terrible. "Calm down, breathe, and relax!" I tried to control myself.

I imagined the Zipzap and pictured the image of Antbuddy. That made me think about talking to the teacher. I felt very nervous but I knew that if I told her, she could help me. I walked to her desk and said, "I can't. I don't know how to improvise a song."

The teacher smiled and said, "Of course you do! Tato, you can do it. Give it a try. Remember all the songs we have done together. Trust yourself. Have fun!"

I went back to my seat but the bad thoughts continued. "I am not good at making songs, I won't be able to do it. All my classmates will notice that I am stupid!"

In that moment, I pictured TAP. His goal was to learn more every day, no matter what other people said or thought. That helped me focus on what I wanted regardless of others. As I tried to look for different words for the song, Trail Hunter Owl came to mind and many ideas started flowing. I didn't rush; I stopped, thought about the options and chose the best words for my song. It was fun!

It was not easy but I did it. I felt very happy and not worried at all. I remembered what Mmmuka told me: "Only those who learn how to PERSEVERE can do it." I wondered if I was starting to learn how to persevere but knew the answer right away. "YES! I have done it already. I know how to do it!"

A few hours later, my brother Oscar and I were doing our homework and something incredible happened. Suddenly, he screamed, "AAAAAAAAAAGGHHH!! I can't, I can't, I can't!"

I was so upset by his screams. He looked like if he was going to cry forever! While I was thinking about how to help him, from the corner of my eye, I saw a tiny purple bubble floating over his head. It was the tiniest bubble I had ever seen. "Wow! Where did that come from?" I asked myself. I then saw another one and one more. Oscar kept crying without realizing what was going on around him.

I looked all over the place. I wondered who was blowing all those bubbles. I couldn't believe my eyes when I realized that the bubbles were coming out of my backpack! "This must be a sign." I thought. Excited, I opened my bag to check what was happening inside. And guess what I saw???

Guess!

Something that would help my brother for sure –

the Zipzaaaaaaap!



THE END

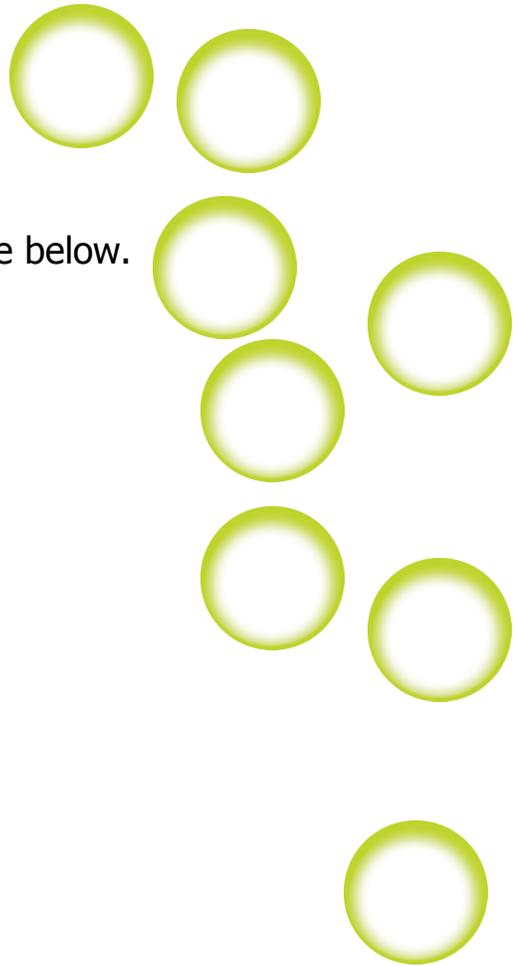


PER-SE-VERE
activities

Tato's passion was blowing bubbles.

What is your passion?

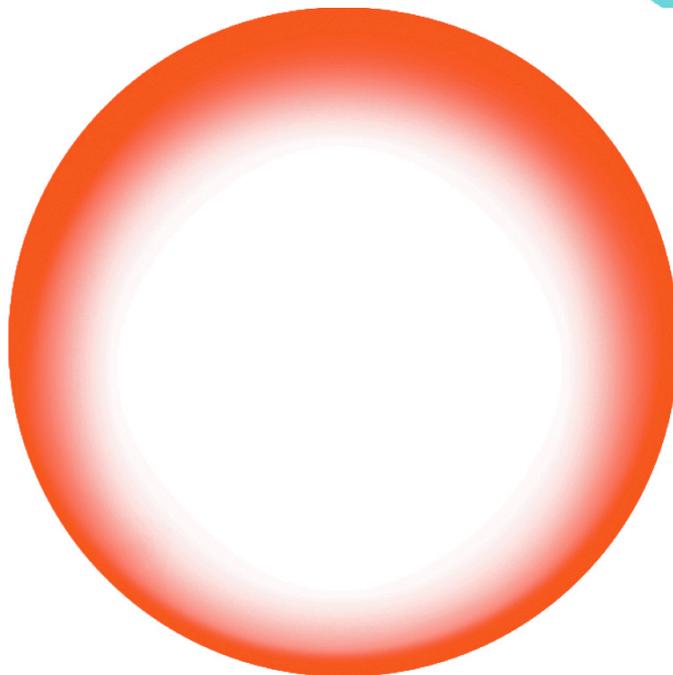
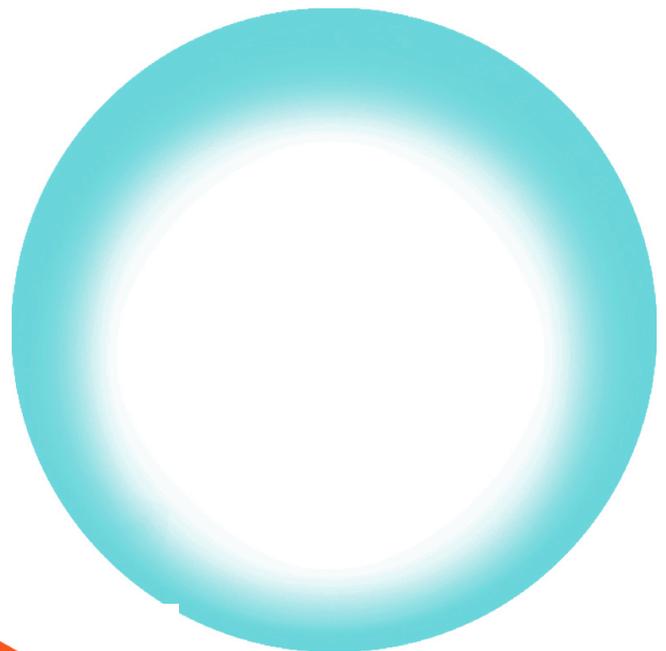
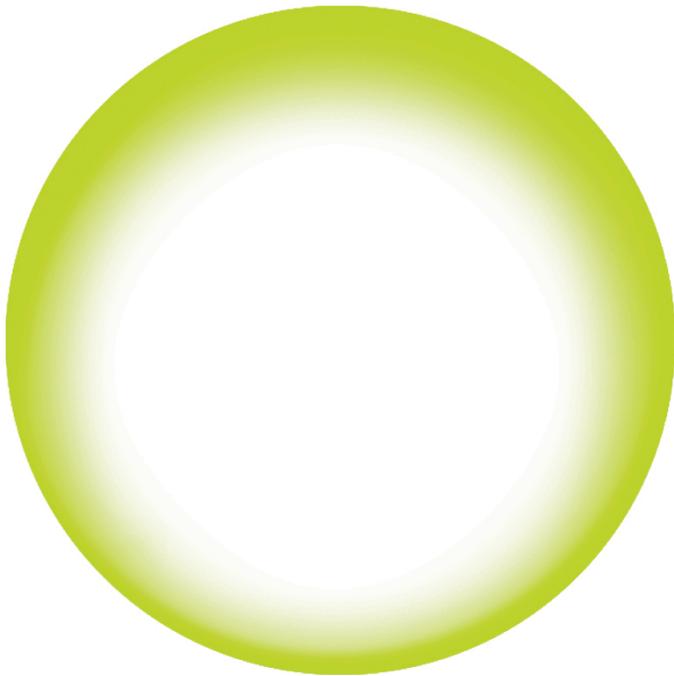
Write or draw to describe it in the space below.



What does perseverance...

- looks like?
- feels like?
- sounds like?

Draw or write in the bubbles the answers to the following question:



Tato learned new ways to face his challenge. Share what Tato did before and after he used the Zipzap. Write or draw your ideas.

BEFORE using the Zipzap

AFTER using the Zipzap

Example: He responded to questions fast, without taking time to think. Didn't rush to share answer.

Tato went to Zukitia to interview Mmmuka's friends. He asked them one question:

"What do children need to do to learn better and persevere?"

Their responses:

TAP- "Think, Ask, and Practice."

IDEABELLE- "Don't be afraid of mistakes! Experience and errors help you learn!"

MR. CORN- "Wait, think.....talk!"

TRAIL HUNTER- "Explore different options."

ANTBUDDY- "Together we think better!"

Use the space below to respond to the following questions:

1. Which of the ideas mentioned above have you practiced? Even a little bit!
2. If you had the opportunity to talk to Mmmuka or his friends, what would you ask them?
3. How do you think when trying to learn or solve a problem?

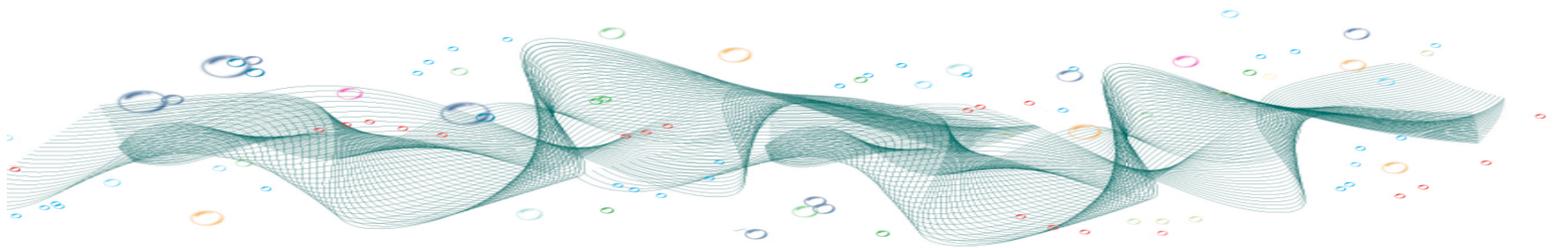
Describe a situation when you worked very hard to complete an objective.

What motivated you to continue?

What is an example of something that made you stop?

How did you feel in the process?

What did you learn from this story? What things will you remember about this story?



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