



Episode #105:

**Educator Zach Morris on Helping Our Kids
Have a World-View Transformation**

April 24, 2018



Zach: In this attempt to effect change, I as a, as an agent of change need to remember that I'm merely creating the environment that's most conducive for it to occur. I'm not doing it directly. The only way in which I'm doing it directly is for myself. And that's, that's I think a really challenging differentiation to make when we're so emotionally invested in, involved in someone outside of us.

Debbie: Welcome to the Tilt Parenting podcast, a podcast featuring interviews and conversations and that inspiring, informing and supporting parents raising differently wired kids. I'm your host, Debbie Reber, and today's episode features a conversation with educator and co-founder of the LEARN Inc. School, Zach Morris. I had Zach on the show almost a year ago for a fascinating conversation on whole person learning and the power of using a non-violent communication model in schools. And since then as I can, I have been going back and forth a bit and realized we have a much more to discuss together. So today we're going to go deep into the idea of how we as parents and caregivers and educators can facilitate what Zach calls "worldview transformation." In other words, how can we help our differently wired kids change their thinking and perspective in a way that not only preserves our relationship with them but results in the best possible outcome for our kids. And just a little background about my guest, Zach Morris is the Executive Director and Development of Curriculum and Instruction at LEARN Inc., which is a not for profit school in Missoula, Montana in the U.S.. And LEARN Inc. is approaching education and that's thoughtful and alternative way and with very powerful results, especially for their neurodiverse students, which makeup actually 75 percent of the student body is very committed to the cultivation of a thriving student centered learning community built on compassion. And I have asked Zach when he's opening the Amsterdam branch at the LEARN Inc. School. I think you'll probably wonder when he's coming to your town too after you hear our conversation. This is another one of those just super interesting talks and there are a lot of nuggets peppered throughout the whole interview. So I hope you enjoy our conversation.

And just a few quick announcements before I get to the episode. I'm excited to be participating in a virtual online summit that actually starts tomorrow, April 25th. It's called the Bright and Quirky Child Online Summit and it's a five day virtual conference aimed at parents of gifted, differently wired and twice exceptional kids, so each day for six days you'll get access to two to five new interviews with guests such as Temple Grandin, Danny Raede from Asperger Experts, Michelle Garcia Winner, Peter Shankman and me, and you can go to the Bright and Quirky Summit to sign up, just Google Bright and Quirky Summit. it'll pop up. Or you can head over to the Tilt Parenting Facebook page at [facebook.com/tiltparenting](https://www.facebook.com/tiltparenting) and you'll find a direct link there. And lastly, it's just time for a quick shout out to the two new supporters of the tilt parenting podcast. So I just want to say thank you to Sandra Porter and Rachael Maher for helping me cover the production costs for this show as well as enabling me to get transcripts made for every episode. If you want to join Sandra and Rachel and supporting this show, you can go to [Patreon.com](https://www.patreon.com). Patreon is an online



platform that allows people to make a small monthly contribution to support the work of an artist or a musician, or in my case, a podcaster. It's really easy to sign up and even a small donation helps. I actually have a lot of people supporting the show at the \$2 a month level and I'm telling you it adds up. To support the podcast just visit Patreon.com/tiltparenting or you can find a link on the Tilt Parenting website. Thank you so much for considering that and now here is my conversation with Zach.

Debbie: Hey Zach. Welcome back to the podcast.

Zach: Hi Debbie. Thanks for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Debbie: Yeah. I'm looking forward to continuing this conversation. I feel like we could literally talk for hours and hours about this stuff and I want to bring our listeners into this conversation. And so you were on the podcast last year and we had this really interesting conversation about whole person learning and non-violent communication and how you're using that approach in your school in Missoula, Montana, the LEARN Inc. School, so you know, we've talked about continuing that conversation to get more into the nuances of what it means to help differently wired can be not only open to learning, but be excited to learn and then also weaving in our role as parents in this journey and what that means for us. So a lot to talk about and as a way to get into it, perhaps you could just take a few minutes to introduce yourself. For listeners who didn't hear that first podcast, tell us a little bit about you and your school and your mission and how you aim to serve learners through your school.

Zach: Thanks Debbie. So my name is Zach Morris and I serve as Executive Director for LEARN Inc. which I started with a couple of other founders about five years ago. It had been serving families in Missoula from various different backgrounds and in platforms and things like that. And we are really committed to providing learning opportunities that honor neurodiversity, really give attention to ecological literacy and really just help empower students to become active participants within their learning. And we do all of that through this platform of whole person learning, like you said, and we utilize a lot of structures of, of non-violent communication and really want to just re-established for students that they have autonomy, they have choice and they have unique gifts to contribute to this world and we really need them. We really need them to, to help manifest all the things that we want to manifest.

Debbie: Yeah, absolutely. And before we get into this, could you give us a quick definition perhaps a whole person learning just again for listeners who aren't familiar with that concept?

Zach: Yeah, you know, I think of it existing outside of just traditional academics. So basically providing learners with the opportunity to access instances that will foster growth within the social realm, within the emotional realm, within the physiological realm, in addition to, to intellectual pursuits. And so really seeing learning as embodying all of those different foundations to really even get us to some of that higher level academic content or other content that we, we hope

individuals will pursue, you know, as they, as they move through life. And later in life,

Debbie: So for listeners to be aware, and this will probably come up in our conversation, but a lot of the students at your school, they come from, you know, maybe having negative experiences at other schools and a lot of people kind of move in and so you have your work cut out for them in terms of supporting them and maybe helping them recover or get past things that were really tough for them in other circumstances and other academic institutions. And I, I feel like that's a nice segue into what we wanted to talk about today, this idea of worldview transformation and because I know that that's the work that you're doing with these kids. And so could you explain what you mean by that? What, what is worldview transformation in the context of a child?

Zach: You know, in relation to what you're describing of a young person maybe coming with, with pain and trauma from any experience, in particularly in my case with within the education realm, that builds our schema for, for how we see things, what we value, what we think is possible, what we think is expected. And that, that comes out of all the experiences we have in, in continues into adulthood. This is what sort of solidifies the lens for which we see the world. And as students are coming into our school, like you mentioned, a lot of students are coming with sort of this deep pain from just their, what their experience has been and maybe they don't even have a lot of language to describe what exactly that experience has been like. They just know that it doesn't feel good and so they're, they're manifesting in whatever way they're manifesting that probably isn't looking desirable to the adults in their life.

And so they sort of find themselves in this place of being stuck. And so when students come to us, I see this need for the world view to transform or expand because if someone is coming with this, this world view that's grounded in pain, then it has a very limited scope of, of willingness, of motivations, of interest. And one of my roles as a facilitator in their lives as a mentor, as an educator, is to, to help effect change in them. Help them tap into their best selves, help them pursue the things that they want to pursue, help them contribute to their well-being and the well-being of all of those around them. So what I've found is in helping affect change in others and this, this information also comes out of a lot of different other people and organizations and people that have been doing this work for many years and we can kind of talk about that, but it comes out of giving them an opportunity to experience the world differently.

And so a transformation of worldview is a slow burn of a process. It, it really takes a lot of time, a lot of patience, a lot of subtlety, a lot of reflection and it's not something that someone can just package up and give to you and then all the sudden you can adopt it. It really has to come out of our own navigating of situations in our own transformation of understanding, based on counter experience to whatever that world view was before. And so that idea comes out of the Institute of Noetic Sciences. They talk about this idea of consistent counter experience being this opportunity that provides the greatest effect in helping someone transform their worldview. Kind of coming back to that idea

of, it's not about me just saying it in the right way or giving you the right motivator. It's how can I support you and support your environment so that it facilitates you having consistent counter experience to maybe the way that you currently see, see things, if that way of seeing things isn't serving you is in contributing to your wonderfulness.

Debbie: This is just personally such a relevant conversation for me right now to be hearing in living with a young teenager who's in some very stuck thinking at the moment. I'd like to just even dive deeper into or just maybe get some clarity around this idea of worldview. Are we talking about someone who maybe is a glass half empty kind of person or someone who has this worldview that maybe schoolwork, you know, this, this doesn't matter because I'm not interested in it. I want to get a sense just for our listeners. When you talking about worldview, what are some examples of what that might sound like or look like.

Zach: Absolutely. I think what you're describing is definitely part of it and includes so many types of those thinking in regards to education in regards to your children like you're talking about. That could be maybe, maybe I'm in a, in a fixed idea of learning versus sort of a growth idea of learning. You know, this is something maybe people are very familiar with, fixed versus growth mindsets. And so if, if my worldview is that I can't do things to change my experience and that things just sort of are the way they are and that's maybe a bummer, that's maybe awesome or or whatever I've sort of evaluated it to be. If I, if I think that that I am not able to do things to affect that, to change that that's going to really change the way that I'm experiencing the world and the way that I'm navigating things.

That if I believe I can take action that might result in things being different. And this is one of the first things that I'm always looking at with students when they first come to me and I'm kind of gauging throughout the beginning of their process. And like you described earlier, that that healing process that occurs for a lot of students when they first come to me of just reestablishing what, what they're trying to do, what their intentions are, what learnings all about, what they're even experiencing emotionally and physically and in sort of all of those things. And so I want to know does a student have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset right now because that's going to completely affect the way in which I approach them. It's going to affect how much I think I can challenge them without putting them over the edge and into sort of shut down or, or meltdown or, or overwhelm or things like that.

So it could be sort of these very grand foundational types of thinking like that, you know, when we think of growth mindset versus fixed mindset that sort of infiltrates into to all areas of our life. Right? But then that could be also just within specific interactions with other individuals in whether or not they think there's even ability for reconciliation within a certain conflict or whether they think that they're capable or just all the ways in which I see myself, I see the people around me and I see the structures that I interact with, and that all being built out of what my experience has been like in the past. What the people around me have sort of offered and provided. And in terms of their thinking and

their modeling, you know, so this also gets into a lot of what, what am I modeling as an educator, as a, as a facilitator, if I'm, if I'm wanting to affect change in my students so that they're kind of expanding their growth mindset. Well I need to be tapping into my growth mindset on an extreme level, because I'm the one that's modeling that for them. And I think as parents, as educators, as mentors, that's a piece sometimes we forget about is that if we want to offer a shift in worldview to somebody else, it's not just about telling them that that's important, it's about embodying it ourselves so that they might see the value in that as well and decide, hey, I'm, I maybe want to try that out myself.

Debbie: So, you know, as you're talking, I'm just curious, you know, you're saying that we need to embody it, we need to model it, and not just talk about it. What are other ways that you've seen parents and educators are getting it wrong? You know, I think a lot of us feel like we could have that Brady Bunch conversation that sit down moment where we have this heart to heart and then the learning, you know, has shifted and then we can just move on with our lives and that doesn't necessarily work. And what are we, what are we getting wrong when it comes to how we're trying to shift our kids worldview?

Zach: You know, I think it's something that I've, I've heard you speak about, and I know it was a part of your work as well, but this idea of getting out of what things should look like in moving into what they could look like and I think that shows itself in pretty much all scenarios that, that I experienced in my work with students is if there's breakdown, it's usually because I'm stuck in something having to be a specific way. I'm so fixated on this is how it should be or this is what's going to be serving. This is what's valuable. That if I cannot get outside of that, I'm probably the one really affecting that environment to kind of stay either stuck in this place and not adapt or evolve or I'm not providing that opportunity for a student to see that I'm willing to also be flexible and also try something different in.

And even question my own thinking of whether or not I think this is crucial right now or whether I think it could be done a little bit differently or whether it could happen later. And so that's something I think, you know, when you say what essentially could parents be doing more of or what could teachers be doing more of to tap into this sort of escape, that trap of being in their fixed mindset. I think it's that constant reflection and that constant asking themselves what is the intention here? What, what ultimately is the goal? What is the need that I'm trying to meet? What is this, this thing that I'm trying to facilitate in the person outside of me. And it does it actually have to look exactly like this way that I've packaged it up and sort of envisioned it.

And so I guess I can speak about a situation that recently occurred to me at our school, um, where I sort of stepped a little outside of this vision that I had packaged it up after observing it not thriving as much as I was hoping for. At our school, we're a K through 12 school. And so there's a point in the morning where we really value being able to bring everybody together, K through 12, our whole learning community. Just to connect, just to touch base so everybody can see each other, everybody has an opportunity to to bring something up to the

learning community if it's necessary and so this is a very brief 10 to 15 minutes sort of experience of coming together, giving people a platform to be heard, to listen and then a brief kind of community connection activity and I had been bringing all sorts of different connection activities for our community throughout the years of our learning together and what I was finding, especially as our population kind of grew over the past year or two and and started to include more students. That I wasn't getting to to everyone or as many people as I was hoping for during this morning connection activity. I was losing some people in this attempt to bring us together and do something just briefly. And you know, this is part of our culture students know if, if they're not willing or able to be part of something that they don't have to, they're not going to be coerced. They're not going to be shamed. They're going to be met where they are and so again, that's not where it stops. I'm always encouraging or trying to figure out how can I resituate something or, or readjust something so that it, that is serving as, as much of us are bringing as much of us together as possible. And so I had started to observe that, that I was, this group started to dwindle within these morning connection activities. And so I started to ask myself, what's going on with this? What are, what's involved with all of these activities? What is it asking of all of the individuals?

And what I found is they were really verbally based. I was asking so many times in the morning for students to connect verbally and to connect through critical thinking. And I was really kind of challenging them in this, this start of the day experience when I maybe even haven't even had an opportunity to check in with a lot of students and find out where they are and what they've come with today and all of that. And so that's kind of a tall order for a lot of students depending on where they are within their learning process, depending on how long they've been with us and how a part of this culture they've been where they are in their healing. And so started to brainstorm how can we change this? And so through research, through my own practices, my own interests sort of had this idea of what about a morning drum circle, you know, there's been research out there that shows people's brain frequencies that participating in a drum circle all start to align, start to match up.

And that's something I was really trying to do within our morning connection was just help us align, help us connect. Even if just for a moment. Even if in that alignment it was an understanding that, hey, some of us aren't even aligned, right? And so I brought this idea to the students and I expressed to them, here's what my observation is with our morning meetings. And I told them all the things that I was just telling you and really authentically express to them. So, hey, here's where I find myself. I want to do something, I want to take action. I'm not exactly sure what the answer is, here's what I'm hoping to to reach or get out of it and here's what I want to try... Are people willing to go there with me? And this started probably just about three weeks ago where we started doing this and people that I had never been able to have part of that community connection activity. All of a sudden we're taking part. All of the sudden we're telling me how much they enjoyed that experience, were we're asking if we could do it during other parts of the school day, and it was, it was an opportunity for me to see, wow, I was so. I had such a clear idea of what this

morning connection time was going to look like and in for a while it worked and for awhile it was really fruitful. But once I started to notice that that was changing, and it maybe was giving me and our community less of what I was really trying to hope to do. I knew I had to shift and I knew I had to come back to the drawing board and myself so that I could also model that for my students when I'm asking them, hey, are you, are you willing to try something different if you've identified that this way isn't working?

Debbie: Oh, that's a great story. So you know, what I'm hearing you talk about too is just being willing, you know, that noticing piece, like, this isn't working and then being willing to let go of all these ideas that you had. What was that like for you? I mean, I know for so many of us as parents, we feel like we've got a problem solved and we're humming along and then all of a sudden it stops working and we're like, well, wait a minute, you know, where do we go now from here?

Zach: Yeah. It was really empowering for me because what it did was remind me that I do have power. I can take action that will result in things changing in those things may align with a little bit more with what I'm trying to do. And it also reminded me that my students are wonderful, amazing, unique beings that has so much to contribute and just because they weren't able to show up in the way I wanted, in the situation that I wanted, that doesn't speak poorly on them or that doesn't speak towards, towards anything besides the structure just wasn't set up for them to experience success in and for them to thrive. And so I think that's another common experience that facilitators and mentors and parents and educators can do is slip into asking the people outside of them, hey, how come you just can't show up to this thing? How come we can't do this? Like I read this seems like really reasonable. Are you, you know, will you please just do this for me? How can, how can I set up sort of those coercion or reward sort of opportunities so that I just get you to kind of do this thing because it seems like you should be able to do this thing. You know? And, and what this reminded me of is it's not about that. And it made me also come back to what Carl Rogers, you know, wrote about years ago. Carl Rogers was really a pioneer for client centered therapy and, and I think the client centered approach is so much a part of whole person learning and compassionate structures and all of those things in from Carl Rogers talks about if you want to affect change in somebody else, the relationship that you build is, is sort of the most important aspect of that.

And he says if you don't have a general liking of that person that you're trying to affect change in and you're trying to create relationship with, you're already off to a really wobbly start and it's probably not going to be very effective. And so what I was also noticing was that it brought me back to this increased just general liking of these people that I was starting to in my own head, kind of evaluate in certain ways. Right? And say, oh, they just don't, they don't care enough maybe to just do this little thing that we ask. Or they, they're not interested in, in creating community with everybody. All the things that we tell ourselves all the time, and that was starting to taint even, just even subtly or subconsciously how I saw that person and as I start to slip into those things, it becomes more challenging to have a playfulness with that person. It becomes more challenging to support them in their process and ask questions and get

information and be objective and not just slip into evaluation and judgment and so that was a huge piece that came up, but out of it as well is how can I just reconnect with these people that I'm starting to feel disconnect within?

Debbie: So many things I want to touch upon. So one, I just want to point out that we recently had Seth Perler on for a two part conversation about executive functioning and he's brilliant and I'm so grateful that he sharing his wisdom with. But you know, that's something that he really emphasized in one of the conversations was that the relationship is everything. It's the foundation for everything and how critical that is. So I love that you brought that up. And then what also is coming up for me is, you know, I'm a firm believer, and I talk about this a lot, I have a chapter about it in my book that we need to question everything we thought we knew about parenting and you know, just even hearing you talk about it, I'm thinking just on a personal level that that's something that is going to be ongoing.

It's not like you can be like, ok, I'm questioning these conventional ways and we're going to forge ahead and it's all good. I mean it really does creep into all aspects of, of our parenting life, our journey with these kids and we have its continuous work. And again, on a personal level, that's where I'm at right now. So this is a very relevant conversation for me. I guess what I would love to hear from you is how can parents then get started if we are, you know, you gave this great story about your relationship with this, the students in this meeting, you know, what do we do? How do we start if we're getting kind of stuck in a, in a dynamic that's just not working anymore and we're trying the same approaches and getting frustrated because they're not reacting the way we think they should be.

Zach: I think what I have found in my experience that the more honest and authentic I can be with the young people in my life where I'm at in my process, the more connection and understanding and in even opportunity for collaboration that's established and so I think parents and educators can, can start to adopt to this idea that, that we need to be able to, to, to show them that we know all the time. And there's actually times where we don't know and that's completely ok and in fact that really needs to be modeled for our students. And so that kind of comes back to the drum circle anecdote I talked about, which was part of that communication was bringing up to the students, hey, I don't exactly know how to, how to get what I'm looking for. Out of all of this. I have some ideas on what I want to try. I'm also open to other people's ideas, but all I kind of know is what I'm aiming towards and what my experience is. But other than that I don't really know the direct path and we might try this thing and it might turn out to also not be fruitful or valuable. And if that's the case, I hope we can continue collaborating. And so I think what the first thing that parents can do is be totally authentic with themselves about what's going on and what their experiences, and also share that with their children and open up. And what I would say is that young people have, have such a bigger threshold and access to complex concepts and conversations like this. Then I think we often will give them credit for. And what I've found is if I can just authentically express where I'm at, ask what their thoughts are and truly listened to that and get out of this idea that I

kind of know and therefore I'm asking them to, to adopt my knowing. And instead of get into this sort of shared, hey, we're going to figure this out together. And I might have some more experience and I might be coming with some just more initial ideas, but I, I need, I need you too. This isn't just about following me or adopting what I have. This is about us maybe building something together and being willing to come back and totally change that. If it turns out it didn't work.

Debbie: Right? Yeah. That's reminded me of Dr. Ross Greene's collaborative and proactive solutions. Just that having those conversations. And I think yeah, I think that is so important and it's so respectful to approach it that way.

Zach: Yeah. And you know, this makes me think of another aspect that I think is involved with and all of this, Debbie, and that's this concept of the window of tolerance and, and this comes out of the, the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Science. And this idea of the window of tolerance is that when we exist within this window of our being this, this state of regulation, the state of having our needs met we're able to access our current skills that we have. We're able to integrate new challenges that might help us build new skills. We're able to to really experience the meta reflection were able to do things that when we're outside of that window of tolerance become really, really challenging. And the way that I often describe this to people is if you think about being really hungry, that puts a lot of us outside of our window of tolerance pretty quickly, right where we referred to it as hangry.

Yeah, exactly. And so, you know, we know and we've all really accepted that if I'm interacting with somebody and they're super hungry, like they're not going to be thinking as clearly they're not going to be able to be as patient. They may be not gonna be able to even have the energy to, to try what I'm sort of asking them to try and. And so that's a really easy way for us to see that. Right? But I think that expands to including a lot of really foundational needs. Some of these needs of autonomy, needs of choice, needs of being heard, being seen, having connection, having community. These really foundational means that in a lot of ways, you know, after our need for food and shelter and sort of these really basic physical needs are met, these become some of our most important needs. So depending on what my experience with and all of that is, I could be outside of my window of tolerance and so that's an aspect that affects that and that's not even necessarily looking at the way in which trauma in our, in our past experiences affect that window of tolerance. And so I'm, I have, I have my own window of tolerance based on my experience, based on my conditioning, based on some of what my worldview is. Right. And I might also come from somewhere where that window has really shrunk based on my pain and my trauma. And so even if I can access that window, maybe that window's really small and maybe I'd get outside of it really quickly. Maybe I get outside of it a lot more quickly than you do. And so then maybe that's challenging for you to see, hey, I'm not at my-- I'm not on my foundational platform. I can't, I can't access even my best self right now, and so as we get outside of this window of tolerance that starts to look like dysregulation, right? And we're familiar with,

with some of the ways in which dysregulation can manifest, it can manifest behaviorally, it can manifest in, in saying things that we don't really mean.

Zach: And then as we get out of dysregulation, we go even further outside of this window, we start getting into things like hyper-arousal and hypo-arousal where we're either were either feeling so overwhelmed that we're in shutdown and we maybe don't have anything to offer outside of us. That sort of that hypo-arousal that's, that shut down. Sometimes we're overly excited where we're sort of almost in this manic state and that's that hyper-arousal. And so one of the things I'm looking at it all the time is where is this person that is outside of me in relation to their window of tolerance? And where am I in my window of tolerance? Because if, if me and this other person are trying to navigate a complex situation, if we're trying to have conflict resolution, if I'm asking them to step out of their thinking and entertain another way of thinking, well if they're not in their window of tolerance, that's going to be really challenging and maybe because of what I'm observing I'm in, I'm in, I'm seeing that they're not tapping into skills that I've also seen them utilizing the past.

I might then start to tell myself all kinds of evaluations about that. Right? That's when I maybe really tell myself this person doesn't care or this person just just is trying to make my life more difficult or all the things will slip into because. Because I'm thinking, wait, but I've seen them do this in the past. I've seen them implement this skill so they must have it and so therefore, if they're not using it right now, it must be a matter of willingness. It's not a matter of ability. Right. But sometimes it is absolutely a matter of ability.

Debbie: Oh, that's such a good reminder because I, that's something I hear from so many parents and experienced myself too. That idea that sometimes we feel like our kids are doing things out of choice and very rarely is that the case. It's because they're not in a position. Even if they've done it before, as you said, it's because at that moment they're not in a position to have the capacity to do any differently than they are.

Zach: And so if we are asking people to, to be led by us, to be challenged by us and they're actually not able or willing and then we're just setting up structures where they sort of become willing because they basically would just rather do anything than what the punishment is or the potential reward that they could get if, if, if they do do what's being asked. And I think that's also dangerous as well. You know. And so that sort of speaks to this other kind of complex concept of challenging and encouraging somebody vs. also really honoring their No. And you know I have a student I'm working with right now who's window of tolerance is very, very small and very quickly can he be outside of that window of tolerance and so again, one of the things that I'm trying to offer the student more than anything is, is a platform for his worldview to transform, for him to believe that he can take action that will change his experience for him to be willing to try something outside of his ideas because he believes it. It might result in more wonderfulness in his life and because this, this window of tolerance is so small because he's outside of that so often, even the amount of challenge that I'm asking him to meet me is pretty, pretty minimal in what I can

really access before I'm slipping into him only maybe doing something just to humor me because we do have rapport, right? We do have relationship and so when that happens, we do want to do for that person outside of us sometimes even if it's just for the sake of them thinking that we want them to right? And so, so we kind of become a little bit willing, but it's really not for me at all, right? It becomes for that other person and, and, and so one of the things I've been looking at is, but if I want to help him transform his worldview and one of the things that's necessary for that is consistent counter experience and he's describing to me, hey, I'm, I'm feeling so down right now and so unmotivated and I just sleeping horrible and there's nothing I can do, nothing I can do to change that.

Zach: And I asked him if he's, if he's willing to explore some, some possible ways that he might take some action that could result in things being different and they might not, but they could. And in his answer to me is no, I'm not willing. Maybe I'm probing a little bit further, right? To say, hey, but you know, how about just for this little bit of timeframe, you know, why don't you come on. I really think it could be helpful and maybe he joins me along in great and we get into that. But if he doesn't, I think I need to be very conscious and aware of also honoring that that's where he's at and if I push him just enough to come follow me in, it's really not out of his own intrinsic want. It's, it's really just kind of this, I'll do this. So you just sort of get off my back and then he doesn't experience that thing adding any value or wonderfulness to his life. Well then I've actually done the opposite of what I intended. I validated his previous world view, his current world view, attempt to offer him something to try to get outside of that world view, but even maybe experience this other other realm that I'm, I'm hoping he'll see basically shown him one more instance in which, hey, you tried something and it didn't work out and so the next time I want him to do that he's going to be super resistant, is going to be really not receptive. And so, you know, I think there's also dangers in kind of talking people into things which is, which is very different than encouraging and somebody being willing. You know. So I, I talked to students about this all the time of sometimes I'm going to ask you if you're interested. Sometimes I'm just going to ask you if you're playing willing and, and it's, it, you don't always have to be interested, but in order for me to, to lead you, in order for me to give you direct instruction, in order for me to take you somewhere outside of yourself, you have to have a willingness.

Debbie: So again, just so much good stuff here and I want to know like for listeners who have kids who they are maybe in, you know, some tug of war with or control battles or you know, I think so many of us feel pressure, especially members of the community who have kids who are really not thriving in their school setting. Are there like some problems that have to be addressed right now? You use the word have to with air quotes, but that needs to be addressed and they're looking more for quick fixes. They're trying to solve problems and what you're describing is a very slow timeline here. Potentially just really having to let go of all expectations and it sounds like the question has to continuously be, are you willing to try this? And we keep asking that question until they say yes, like what it, what does it actually... Can you give us an example maybe for a parent who is who's in that situation?

Zach: Yeah you know and what I would also speak towards with that is they might never be willing in. That is ok too, because ultimately this person is an individual autonomous being and I can encourage them and I can provide the opportunity and the exposure and the support and all of those things. But, but this is another person, another being outside of where I end and they begin and it's also ok to not be willing. And so that's a piece that I encourage, you know, parents and educators to ensure that they're communicating as well during these times is that this also isn't just a sort of subtle process of, of shaming them into saying yes is also completely recognizing and being willing to hear no and have that be completely ok and that just merely becomes information for us to affect the next strategy we utilize or the next approach we take.

And it is a process of time. It is a process of sort of this continuous patience, in this continuous asking myself, what is my main goal? What is my main intention? What am I, what am I willing to try? If I'm stuck in it's gotta be this, then there's probably more that that I could sort of be willing to look at as well. And so what I say to parents is that everybody wants to be their best self and if they're just not able to, to sort of tap into the challenges or the energy exertion that is going to include that. That doesn't mean that's forever that that could be for years, that that could be for what seems like a really long time. But I have seen students go from literally not even being able to talk, have the word learn be mentioned in conversation without putting them in shut down to four years later asking me if they can have support, expanding their high level math skills.

And so I'm even needing to remind myself how unique of a process this is for each individual. Especially as I start to take in more students. I'm now in the place where I've had some of the students I'm working with for four or five years and I'm still bringing in new ones that are coming in this year. And so now I have have students on such a different point of the spectrum within their learning where I need, I need myself to remember this pace as well. And some of the time that this took to get where we're going. And I think when we really open ourselves up to being authentic with the young people in our lives and communicating this experience in just telling them what we're trying to do and what our ideas are and what the strategies we want to take, I've seen young people become so much more willing to forge that relationship as well or try outside of, out of outside of themselves.

And so this constant reminder that this is a process and I'm learning as well. I'm going through on my own learning process as a parent or as an educator. And so it's this idea that we don't create change directly, but we create the most conducive environment for change to occur. And that comes out of the Institute of Noetic Sciences as well, is in this, in this attempt to effect change. I as a, as an agent of change, need to remember that I'm merely creating the environment that's most conducive for it to occur. I'm not doing it directly. The only way in which I'm doing it directly is for myself. And that's I think a really challenging differentiation to make when we're so emotionally invested and involved in someone outside of us.

Debbie: Wow. This is, I knew this was going to be one of those conversations. Mind is a little blown at the moment, but before we jump off this call, I just wonder if you have some words of advice or thoughts for parents who, who are in this situation and who wants to do, as you're suggesting what to create that environment for change. Want to really stay focused on the long game and, and seeing their child as an autonomous being. And you know, it sounds so great in theory and I know the reality, the day to day reality when we have expectations and pressures and things happening, it's really difficult. So how do you suggest parents take care of themselves through this process? Or how can we best set ourselves up for moving through this in a way that feels good?

Zach: I think the thing that has served me in that I would also offer to other parents is that whatever you can do to reduce the experience of fear or defensiveness in the young person that you're trying to support, this is what is going to increase life serving communication between the two of you. And in communication whether that's verbal or non-verbal. We create connection. We create understanding. We create an opportunity for collaboration and I think if we can create a relationship that really supports those three needs being met, I think everything starts to open up of what becomes possible and where we can go with that. And so especially in this current climate of the world and there's so much we could we could get into within that. But this experience of fear and defensiveness for children is so stunting so debilitating to creating relationship that has depth and relationship that has value for them as a unique being.

And so I really encourage parents to see that in their children and also see that in themselves. The fear and defensiveness, they bring to standing so firmly in what they think it should be like really challenging for themselves where do these ideas come from? What are they grounded in? Do they hold the value? Are they serving for me or am I willing to step outside of them and try to build something different? And this is the process of learning that experience, right there is the process of learning that we want all of our children to go through and that experience as Carl Rogers talks about it and as has been echoed by Marshall Rosenberg and in so many people, is that this is a painful reorganization. It is really hard to give up our ways of thinking our ways of perceiving our ways of conceptualizing. When we start to get out of there, we get so into the unknown. That's anxiety producing, maybe. It's overwhelming, maybe. We all of a sudden find ourselves in a place where we're saying, I don't know. And if I encourage parents to model anything for their students or for their children. It's that idea that sometimes I don't know because if there's anything that I see getting away for the majority of students in transforming their world view, it's this incessant belief that they know.

Debbie: Wow. Ok, that's great. Great food for thought. I'm sure a lot of listeners are thinking deep thoughts at the moment. So I just wanna thank you for sharing this and, and just giving us a lot to digest and consider as we are moving through this journey with our own kids and for our listeners, I will, you know, Zach mentioned a lot of different resources and I will include them on the show



notes and Zach, if people want to learn more about your school work and they go to find out more,

Zach: They can go to www.learninmontana.com and that's all spelled out and you can read about our school, read about our philosophy and all the things that we're trying to do and also has some contact info in there if people want an email directly with some more questions or thoughts or, or anything they have.

Debbie: Fantastic. Well, thank you again for just taking the time to share with our listeners that it's just such a delight for me to get to have these kinds of conversations and I really appreciate you coming by.

Zach: Thank you, Debbie. Thank you so much for having me.

Debbie: You've been listening to the Tilt Parenting podcast for the show notes for this episode, including links to Zach's school website and all the resources we discussed. Is it tiltparenting.com/session105, and a reminder that if you want to take a sneak peek of my upcoming book *Differently Wired: Raising an Exceptional Child in a Conventional World*, the first chapter and the table of contents are available for download on the Tilt website. Just go to tiltparenting.com/differentlywired and you'll sign up and you'll have access to it right away. Lastly, this is my weekly reminder to head over to itunes and leave a rating or review or both if you haven't done so already. There are a lot of parenting podcasts out there. There are new ones cropping up every day, and so those ratings and reviews help keep her podcast highly visible, which in turn makes it easier for me to land those bigger guests. Thank you so much and thanks again for listening. For more information on till parenting, visit www.tiltparenting.com.

RESOURCES MENTIONED

[Learn Inc](#) (Zach's school)

[The Center for Nonviolent Communication](#) (Marshall Rosenberg's Global Organization)

[Institute of Noetic Sciences](#)

[Carl Rogers](#) (on Positive Psychology Program)

[A Masterclass on Executive Functioning with Seth Perler, part 1](#) (podcast)

[A Masterclass on Executive Functioning with Seth Perler, part 2](#) (podcast)

[Dr. Ross Greene's Lives in the Balance](#)

[National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Science](#)