

CONNECTED EDUCATION

EVERY LEADER, EVERY
TEACHER, EVERY LEARNER

BRIDGE



LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION



GROWTH

MINDSET



A BRIDGE Knowledge Product



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LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

The ways in which teachers praise and encourage students has been proven to have a substantial effect on their learning and growth. This document takes a look at the concept of “growth mindsets” and how the cultivation of a growth mindset in the classroom can impact on the ways in which students learn and their engagement and success in the learning process.

ASK YOURSELF

WHAT AM I GOOD AT? WHAT AM I ABLE TO DO? WHAT DO I THINK I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO DO? WHY IS THAT?

Many people are taught that talent and ability is something fixed: something some people are “just born with” and others are not, but research, particularly years of research by psychologist Carol Dweck, shows something far more complex.

For over a decade, she and her team at Columbia studied the ways in which learners in a dozen New York schools responded to praise. Researchers would go into New York’s fifth-grade classrooms, and ask children to complete a nonverbal IQ test that was fairly easy for all children to do well on. The researchers then praised each learner with a single line: randomly divided, some were told, “You must be really smart at this.” This praised them for their intelligence. Others were praised for their effort, and told: “You must have worked really hard.”

This is where it gets interesting – with just a single line of praise, learners’ performances and actions were markedly influenced. They were given a choice of test for the second round.

The first option was that they could take a test that would be more difficult than the first, but they’d learn a lot from taking it. The second choice was an easy test just like the first one.

Of the learners praised for their effort, 90 percent chose the more difficult test. Of the learners praised for intelligence, however, the majority chose the easy test, effectively “copping out” of the chance to learn.

WHAT DOES THIS SHOW US ABOUT HOW PEOPLE LEARN? AND WHAT DOES THIS SHOW US ABOUT WHAT LEARNERS ARE CAPABLE OF?

Learners told they were “smart” were essentially told that their ability was a fixed, static thing, that could not be improved upon. Learners told they had worked hard, however, were told that they could apply that action – working hard and doing their best – to any task, and derive benefit from it through learning and challenging themselves.

The result of course, is that these learners were the ones who took the opportunity to learn more. Even if the test was harder, and even if they stood the chance of failing. It would all be an opportunity to learn. This is what a **growth mindset** is all about.

Think back to the questions you asked yourself. If you took one thing you are certain you would not succeed at, and just worked hard at it – without aiming to win, or to avoid failing – what do you think you could accomplish? **If the fixed mindset voice says, “I can’t do that,” the growth mindset thinks, “I can’t do that yet.”**

So how do we incorporate a growth mindset into our teaching?

- Praise can make or break a child’s development – we need to be careful about what we encourage in students.
- Focus more on praising the process and effort rather than supposed innate abilities. Every word and action sends a message. It tells children how to think about themselves.
- How we encourage learners and the words we choose is vital in fostering a growth mindset – rather than using fixed terms like “smart”, emphasize traits like being hardworking, creative, etc. These lead learners forward rather than causing learners to remain in the same place.
- It can be a fixed mindset message that says: “You have permanent traits and I’m judging them.” Or it can be a growth mindset message that says: “You are a developing person and I am interested in your development.”

"When you learn how to do a new kind of problem, it grows your math brain!"

"If you catch yourself saying, 'I'm not a math person', just add the word 'yet' to the end of the sentence."

"The point isn't to get it all right away. The point is to grow you understanding step by step. What can you try next?"

The following resource draws on a presentation given by Chris Olivas, a member of Teach With Africa, at the Axis Education Summit in July 2016.

To access Chris' presentation, click [here](#).

Chris' presentation was accompanied by a video by British education author and Professor of Mathematics Education at the Stanford, Jo Boaler. To access Jo Baoler's video on the brain science on growth mindset, click [here](#).