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# The Ways Of Developing A Growth Mindset

## Introduction

Developing a growth mindset can help students set high expectations for themselves, focus on learning and understanding, and lead to a positive classroom environment that is encouraging and motivating. Developing a growth versus fixed mindset is one of the five beliefs that Ritchhart (2015) proposed to encourage setting high expectations for students. Ritchhart explained the research from Dweck that has found learners who believe talent, ability and intelligence are fixed are much more likely to give up when face with challenge or failure, while those with a growth mindset believe efforts can lead to improvement and hence are willing to set higher expectations. Focusing on efforts which is controllable by students instead of talents also creates a positive environment that suggests everyone can succeed.

## Supporting Evidence

There are a lot of supporting evidence on the merit of growth mindset, including psychology theory, empirical research and neuroscience evidence. Dweck (2008) explained that beliefs about our brains create different psychology for learning: 'one in which students are afraid of challenges and devastated by setbacks, and one in which students relish challenges and are resilient in the face of setbacks'. Students who believe intelligence is fixed are less motivated to learn, are afraid of effort, and give up easily after a setback. Fixed mindset students who had success in primary school might stop putting in the effort and struggle when they are challenged later, as they are afraid to make mistake and look stupid.

Many studies have shown that growth mindset has a positive impact on student's achievement across all ages and especially in science and mathematics (Ng, 2018). For instance, Ng (2018) described Dweck's research finding that students with growth mindset outperform the controlled group of students. Growth mindset teaches students that intelligence can grow through working hard on challenging problems. Hence, students are willing to set high expectations for themselves.

In addition, Neuroscience research has provided insights into the relationship between growth mindset and intrinsic motivation. Learner's brain activity can be monitored and the neural responses can be measured and relate to internal motivation. For example, individuals with growth mindset are shown to be more receptive to corrective feedback and hence able to persevere and progress towards set goals and expectations (Ng 2018).

## Teacher Actions To Promote Growth Mindset

### Action 1: Praise effort

Teachers can promote growth-mindset by praising efforts versus talent. For example, when a student finished a difficult obstacle race, instead of saying 'Well done, you are such a natural athlete!', say 'Well done, your training and hard work pays off!'. This way, students learn that

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they succeed because of their effort which they can control, instead of natural talent that they are born with and cannot alter. They are then more likely to set higher expectations as there is a way to achieve it. Dweck explained that the praise of effort should also be tied to the outcome or learning progress (Gross-Loh, 2016). The educational merit of this strategy is identifying which efforts have led to student's progress, hence providing a positive and supportive environment for learning.

## **Action 2: Constructive reaction to failure**

Students will inevitably make mistakes or fail at a task. Teachers should react constructively and treat failure as an opportunity to enhance learning. Attempts to comfort the students such as saying 'it is okay, you have tried very hard already' convey a negative message to students that they have put in effort but are unable to achieve the goal and lead to them setting a lower expectation for themselves. Instead, the focus should be on what can be learned from the setback and what can be changed to make it better (Gross-Loh, 2016). By doing so, teachers help students develop resilience and strategies to reflect and improve. This in turn encourages students to seek higher challenge for themselves as they see it as a learning experience.

## **Action 3: Teach students about neuroplasticity**

It is useful to explain the brain science behind growth mindset to students so they believe it will work. Some students have a fixed mindset built upon past experience or influenced by their parents or other teachers. To convince students of the benefit of developing a growth mindset, it is worth spending time on explaining how the brain works, using methods or analogies suitable for the age. For example, Dweck has developed online workshops for students and shown that these growth mindset workshops helped many of them to regain their motivation to learn.

## **Practical Applications**

The above three strategies can be applied in different ways depending on the age of the students. Teaching students about neuroplasticity can be done as a standalone workshop for older students, or as a fun exercise for younger kids. Cullins (2018) provided an extensive list of activities that can be used in the classroom, such as using an analogy of learning as riding a bike, sharing amazing facts about the brain, or building a brain model. These engaging and interesting activities can convince students of the merits of growth mindset.

The intervention of making failure a learning opportunity can be applied when students do not do so well in a test or miss a project target. To turn such a setback into a positive experience, teachers should discuss with students soon after the grade is given or the failure has happened. Self-reflection with an action plan for the next step is another way to keep students motivated. Lastly, teachers should always remember to praise efforts that lead to progress, even when passing minor comments such as praising their artwork or the tidiness of their desk. These growth mindset strategies should be used consistently and constantly and be truly adopted as the mindset of teachers as well as parents.

## **References**

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