

Teachable Moments: Growth Mindset

Failure is not our enemy, but an opportunity to reflect, assess, and reconsider, “What have I learned? What did I do wrong? How can I try again?”



"I'm just not good at this," you have often heard your students say. Perhaps you have also said or thought this about yourself. The problem with this statement is not just that it exhibits a "giving up" mentality. This statement reveals a "fixed mindset," a term that psychologist Carol Dweck coined to explain the thought that our abilities, intelligence, and talents are unchangeable. It's a paralyzing belief that makes failure our enemy.

With a fixed mindset, we view our mistakes as a reflection of our inherent inability. We are discouraged from trying again and taking on challenges.

On the other hand, when we learn that our brain and abilities are malleable and can be improved, we can begin to develop a "growth mindset." Failure is not our enemy, but an opportunity to reflect, assess, and reconsider, "What have I learned? What did I do wrong? How can I try again?" In that case, "failure" can be interpreted in Rita Pierson's famous words, "You're on the road."

Fostering a growth mindset in ourselves and in our students is crucial to meaningful and motivated learning. In her research (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007), Dweck found that the performance of students who were taught study skills alone continually declined over time. Whereas, students who were taught both study skills and a growth mindset continued to improve. So, how can we get started in our own classrooms?

Getting Started

Dweck (2015) offers a few examples of how we can foster a growth mindset in our students:

- Encourage them by helping them to understand neuroplasticity: when we do things that are difficult, even though we are not good at them right away, our brains are forming new and stronger connections and getting smarter!
- Praise students for their effort, perseverance, and strategic learning (rather than intelligence or talent).
- Encourage students to see that failure is helpful (rather than harmful). The mistakes they make, when productively processed and corrected become great opportunities for growth.

Citations

- Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child development*, 78(1), 246-263.
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- Dweck, C. Youtube. (2015, November 3). *Teaching a Growth Mindset* - Carol Dweck. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isHM1rEd3GE&feature=emb_logo