


# TEACHING TODAY'S LEARNERS #5

## Developing Growth Mindsets in the Classroom



While everyone is in some way a combination of both a fixed and a growth mindset, researcher Dr. Carol Dweck advocates for understanding yourself and further developing your growth mindset. This thinking assumes that while some issues are tougher than others for each of us, we can all grow; and given enough effort, we can fair far better than we ever imagined just by changing our thinking. Developing a growth mindset doesn't mean we live in denial; we just refuse to believe in a fate that is destined for us, one we have no control over. If I am not good at math today, I am not destined to be poor at math forever; this is not my identity.

In thinking of our students, while we can't shape the years of experiences that have led to the development of a growth or fixed mindset, there are things we can do to set our students on the path of further developing their growth mindset. Both adults and kids can fall into the trap of fixed mindsets. We get stuck in routines and old patterns and become lazy when it comes to taking risks. We make excuses as to why we can't change or grow or make a difference. But, we can transform that thinking! Here's to cultivating a growth mindset this year as you teach and lead your students.

### Some Possibilities:

- **Talk about adopting a growth mindset in class**—tell stories about former students who thought they would never learn the subject but who, with persistence and effort, ended up being successful.
- **Talk about what it will take to effectively learn the material**—make explicit your expectations for the amount of time they should be putting in and the types of activities they should be engaging in outside of class.
- **Teach "deep learning"**—emphasize that "fast" learning, or getting assignments /group work done quickly, is not the same as "deep" learning. Focus on the process rather than the product – the process they will use again and again, the product? Maybe not.
- **Break difficult or complex tasks down** into their component parts so that students will see for themselves their own skills building up over time.
- **Use the word "yet"**— Dr. Dweck believes this single word, while it isn't magic, can transform the way students view their problems. Yet may be the light at the end of the tunnel.
- **Teach students about the brain**—teaching students about how their brains work—in particular, that the brain can develop new capacities with effort and practice, makes a big difference in how constructively students deal with mistakes and setbacks, and how motivated they are to persist until they achieve mastery.
- **Affirm variables that are in their control**: "I love the strategy you used on that problem." "I've noticed your work ethic in practice."

# Growth mindset vs fixed mindset



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## SUCCESS ↔ FRUSTRATION

1. I can learn anything I want to.
2. When I'm frustrated, I persevere.
3. I like to challenge myself.
4. When I fail, I learn.
5. I like being told that I try hard.
6. If my classmates succeed, I'm inspired.
7. My effort and attitude determine everything.

1. I'm either good at it, or I'm not.
2. When I'm frustrated, I give up.
3. I don't like to be challenged.
4. When I fail, I'm no good.
5. I like being told that I'm smart.
6. If my classmates succeed, I feel threatened.
7. My abilities determine everything.

From Reid Wilson  
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## GRIT

## Learned helplessness

# 10 Growth Mindset Statements



## What can I say to myself?



INSTEAD OF:

TRY THINKING:

- I'm not good at this.
- I'm awesome at this.
- I give up.
- This is too hard.
- I can't make this any better.
- I just can't do Math.
- I made a mistake.
- She's so smart. I will never be that smart.
- It's good enough.
- Plan "A" didn't work.

- 1 What am I missing?
- 2 I'm on the right track.
- 3 I'll use some of the strategies we've learned.
- 4 This may take some time and effort.
- 5 I can always improve so I'll keep trying.
- 6 I'm going to train my brain in Math.
- 7 Mistakes help me to learn better.
- 8 I'm going to figure out how she does it.
- 9 Is it really my best work?
- 10 Good thing the alphabet has 25 more letters!

(Original source unknown)

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