

10 strategies for talking to students about growth mindsets

Researcher Carol Dweck has studied the attitudes people hold about their learning ability and has come up with a continuum, with a ‘fixed mindset’ at one end and a ‘growth mindset’ on the other. People with a **fixed mindset** believe that their intelligence and ability are innate and fixed, and there’s not much they can do to change that. In contrast people with a **growth mindset** believe their abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved through perseverance, good strategies and support from others. They do not deny differences in capability between people, but they believe people can increase their intelligence through the right learning strategies and effort. Growth mindsets are positively linked to the use of cognitive strategies, help-seeking behaviour and a belief in self-efficacy.

Here are 10 strategies you could use when talking to your students about growth mindsets

1. Encourage students to notice when they find something hard and have to struggle, and remind them that is the feeling of their brain learning.
2. Come up with class slogans such as “learning starts with error” or “go out and try this and come back to share your interesting mistakes!”
3. Express new expectations about success. For example: “The point is not to understand this all straight away. The point is to grow your understanding step by step. What might you try next?”
4. Use the powerful word “yet”, as in “you haven’t learned this yet” or “I’m not a music person yet” or “You’re not supposed to understand, not yet”. Write “not yet” rather than “fail” (‘NY’ rather than ‘D’ or ‘F’) on tests or assessed work. These two words convey your belief that the required learning is well within the student’s grasp.
5. Use a green pen rather than red for marking – tell students green means “go”, as in “let’s go work this out” or “let’s go keep on learning”.
6. Tell students that when they feel confused, that is a good sign, because the student who is confused is often the one who understands enough to see a problem.
7. Normalise difficulty by asking questions like, “where did you struggle?” and “how are you working to solve those problems?”
8. Tell confident children with high ability that this ability is just the starting point and that to fulfil the potential of that ability challenge, effort and learning are required.
9. Have high expectations. Don’t accept effort as a good enough response, and certainly don’t tell students “just to do your best”, which implies they can only do what they can within their fixed quota of intelligence.
10. Encourage students to replace comparisons between people (“She is smarter than me”) with within-person comparisons (“I am better at this today than I was yesterday”).