

Growth Mindset

What it is: The concept of a growth mindset was developed by psychologist Carol Dweck and it describes a person’s belief that intelligence and talent are not fixed traits. “In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point.”¹ This concept has gained momentum in the education sphere and the word “Grit” has been associated with this philosophy. Grit can be defined as the dedication to working towards a goal with passion and tenacity despite failure.

Why it’s important: Emphasizing a growth mindset with students establishes the belief that they can succeed, academically and otherwise, if they show persistence in achieving their goals. Research has determined that grit, not innate intelligence, is the one personal attribute of successful leaders, regardless of field of expertise.² Studies also indicate that students who have a growth mindset do better in math and science than students with a fixed mindset³ and that repetition and practice with challenging tasks can positively influence fluid intelligence (the ability to reason and to solve new problems independently of previously acquired knowledge.)⁴

Strategies to support a Growth Mindset in *ACCESS AfterSchool*:

- Emphasize a culture of practice and repetition to gain skills in content area
- Suggest new or alternate methods when students are struggling
- Establish high expectations for all students
- Create an environment that embraces risk-taking and failure as part of the learning process
- Give feedback based upon effort and tenacity rather than innate talent or intelligence
- Draw parallels to overcoming challenges in class to other areas of students’ lives
- Discuss the malleability of the brain and the ability to influence intelligence with practice

Applications/Examples:

- Rock climbing students are encouraged to attempt a challenging route and to practice until they reach the top.
- Chess club students are coached to continue trying new strategies in the face of losses.
- Mighty Makers students discuss the many failures of ultimately successful scientists and inventors, such as Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein, prior to starting their projects.

¹ Growth mindset (2013, August 29). In S. Abbott (Ed.), *The glossary of education reform*. Retrieved from <http://edglossary.org/growth-mindset/>

² Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92, 1087–1101.

³ Dweck, C. (2008). *Mindsets and math/science achievement*. New York: The Opportunity Equation.

⁴ Jaeggi, S. M., Buschkuhl, M., Jonides, J., & Perrig, W. J. (2008.) Improving fluid intelligence with training on working memory. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 1–5. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.0801268105