

# The Student Achievement School Counselor's Viewpoint

Debra Hill, Ed.D.

## **The Power of Mindset: Fixed or Growth**

Based on Dr. Carol Dweck's research - *Mindset: How We Can Learn to Fulfill our Potential and Mindsets in the Classroom: Building a Culture of Success and Student Achievement in Schools*

*Fixed mindset* believes that one's qualities (intelligence, personality, and creativity) are carved in stone, rather than something that can be developed. This belief creates an urgency to prove oneself over and over. In other words, risk and effort are two things that might reveal one's inadequacies or that one is not as "smart" as others have suggested.

*Growth mindset* is based on the belief that one's basic qualities (aptitude, talents, interests, temperaments) are things one can cultivate through effort, meaning everyone can change and grow through application and experience. Those with a growth mindset embrace challenge and effort and become resilient learners.

New Research informs us that the brain has more elasticity than once was known. The brain is like a muscle; it must be continuously stretched to shape, develop, and grow it. It is now known that the I.Q. can be improved or diminished depending on how much the brain is exercised.

When adults focus on or praise "ability" with students, a fixed mindset is developed and reinforced. Typically, students do not take risks or increase their "effort" when the focus is on their intelligence. For example, "Wow, you got 8 right – that's a really good score. You must be so smart or you're so talented" etc. (The belief is "smart" people do not need to try hard, or persist/persevere; nor can they risk failure.

An "effort" response: "Wow, you got 8 right – that's a really good score. You must have worked/studied really hard." They were not made to feel that they had some special gift; they were recognized for doing what it takes to succeed – hard work and effort.

For example, two groups of students with equal ability were selected to participate in a research study. Each group was "praised" for completed work. However, right after the "praise" was given, the students in each group began to differ. The "ability praise" group pushed students right into a *fixed mindset*, and they showed all the signs of it: When given a choice, they rejected challenging new task that they could learn from – they didn't want to do anything that could expose their flaws/inadequacies and call into question their talent. They feared being exposed/ discovered that they were not "that smart" after all.

In contrast, when students were "praised for effort", 90 percent of them wanted the challenging new task that they could learn from. They were given hard/complicated problems; they didn't do so well. However, the *effort* students simply thought that difficulty meant "apply more effort." They didn't see it as failure, and they didn't think it reflected on their intellect.

With repeated assignments, the performances of the "ability-praised" students plummeted, even when they were given easier problems. While the "effort-based" students demonstrated better and improved performance. They used hard problems to sharpen their skills, so that when they returned to easier ones, they succeeded easily.

Summary: These outcomes were based on the "praise" language and responses of the adults, which greatly affected student performance even though all students had equal ability.

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The Lesson: Educators (Teachers, Administrators, Counselors, Afterschool staff, support staff, parents can influence and shape student learning. 😊