

GROWTH MINDSET NEWSLETTER



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Growing Through Challenges: How Growth Mindset Helps Our Students Succeed

We all know learning isn't always easy - and that's actually a good thing! When students face and overcome challenging tasks, they develop both knowledge and resilience. This is where the growth mindset comes in: students who believe they can grow their abilities through effort (growth mindset) are more likely to tackle challenges, while those who think their abilities are fixed tend to avoid them.

What Research Tells Us:

Support Matters: Educational researcher R.A. Walker (2010), building on the foundational work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky, found that students learn best when tackling difficult tasks with support from teachers and capable peers. Just like a coach helps athletes master new skills, educators help students navigate academic challenges while managing frustration.

The Right Level of Challenge is Key: A 2018 study by Alderen-Smeets and colleagues discovered that students need opportunities to wrestle with challenging work at every grade level. While constant struggle isn't helpful, neither is making everything easy. Their research showed that when students only experience success, they miss crucial opportunities to develop problem-solving skills and resilience. Students need challenging, higher-level, creative, and open-ended tasks to develop a growth mindset and learn how to try new approaches.

Growth Mindset Makes a Real Difference: A comprehensive study by Rege and colleagues (2021) across both the United States and Norway showed impressive results: After learning about growth mindset, students across all achievement levels and backgrounds chose to take on more challenging work when given the choice. In both countries, students who received growth mindset instruction were more likely to select tasks described as "Very challenging, but you might learn a lot" over easier options.



Click here to hear Dr. Kathleen Ciez-Volz discuss Risk-Taking and Learning

What This Means for Our School Community:

- Students need regular opportunities to tackle appropriately challenging work
- Support from teachers and peers helps students develop both academic skills and strategies for handling difficulties
- Teaching growth mindset directly helps students embrace challenges rather than avoid them
- When students learn to approach challenges positively early on, they're better equipped to handle future difficult situations

By understanding and applying these research-backed principles, we can help our students develop not just academic knowledge, but also the resilience and problem-solving skills they'll need throughout their lives.

Learning Connections

Aalderen-Smeets, S., Walma, J., & van der Mole, J. (2018). Modeling the relation between students' implicit beliefs about their abilities and their educational Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics (STEM) choices. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 28(1), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-016-9387-7>

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R.A. Walker, Sociocultural Issues in Motivation, Editor(s): Penelope Peterson, Eva Baker, Barry McGaw, International Encyclopedia of Education (Third Edition), Elsevier 2010, Pages 712-717, ISBN 9780080448947, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00629-1>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780080448947006291>)

Rege, M., Hanselman, P., Solli, I. F., Dweck, C. S., Ludvigsen, S., Bettinger, E., Crosnoe, R., Muller, C., Walton, G., Duckworth, A., & Yeager, D. S. (2021). How can we inspire nations of learners? An investigation of growth mindset and challenge-seeking in two countries. *American Psychologist*, 76(5), 755-767. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000647>