

## Developing Enthusiasm for the Challenge

Learning to appreciate a challenge is something that can be taught to students, and pays huge dividends in changing their views on learning and goal-setting. Carol S. Dweck notes that the difference is in a mindset that students develop. She states that individuals who believe that their intelligence is fixed – believe that they are either smart, or good at a particular task/subject, or not. They do not make the connection between working hard and becoming better at doing something. In contrast, individuals who have what is called a *growth mindset* believe that their intelligence grows over time and that challenging work gives them an opportunity to learn and grow. These individuals thrive by taking risks in their learning, going to new levels of difficulty, learning from mistakes, and working hard. They value effort and realize that all individuals have to work hard to achieve success.

To foster a growth mindset in students, we can begin by providing the right kind of praise and encouragement. It is important to praise the process of work, rather than to compliment them on how smart they are. When students are praised for the effort they applied, strategies they used, or choices they made, this yields long-term benefits that help them to realize they can improve their performance. We should also emphasize that getting learning done “faster,” is not learning “better.” Gifted students often get used to “coasting” – easily accomplishing tasks and getting them done quickly because they are working at a level that is beneath their challenge level. This creates the belief in them that they are smart only if they can succeed without effort. The danger in this is that the first time they encounter something that is truly a stretch, they will tend to give up instead of working harder to achieve the goal or complete the task.

It is also important to help students set personal goals in learning – and establish goals that would be a big reach for them. I am always amazed at what students can do when they are given the structure and the encouragement. Students who take on challenging material or projects develop an enthusiasm and motivation for learning that will easily lead them to future success. In contrast, students who take the “easy” road are not on that same path to excellence and will start showing signs of problems as they encounter more difficult curriculum. For example, I have had students who are in access enrichment programs in spite of the fact that they also take performing music and only have every-other access day free. They are motivated and cheerful, eager to be challenged, and most of them successfully complete the course. Performing music students have developed a growth mindset that hard work – practice – will help them to get better at the task. In comparison, it is always a puzzle to me that students who have all four access days free more frequently drop out when offered an opportunity, even though they have more time available. They will more often make statements like, “I don’t like writing.” In comparison, students who have a growth mindset will say things like, “I want to get better at writing,” or “The reason I am here is that I know how important writing is to success.”

To read more of Carol Dweck’s article, go to <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Even-Geniuses-Work-Hard.aspx>.