



## Using Growth Mindset Learning at Girton Glebe Primary School



*"Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you are right!"*

At Girton Glebe Primary School we endeavour to instil a sense of resilience and independence in our pupils. These traits are imperative life-skills that will help our children to become successful learners and adults. One of the ways in which we instil this outlook is through acting on the research and advice of Prof. Carol Dweck and her work into growth mindset learning.

This research has proven to be an incredibly powerful tool in education and we have been using it within all classrooms at Girton Glebe Primary School to support our children in becoming reflective, resilient, independent learners.

### What is a 'Growth Mindset'?

A 'Growth Mindset' is a phrase coined by Carol Dweck, professor of psychology at Stanford University, after 40 years of research into learning styles and attitudes. Through her research Prof. Dweck identified personality traits which lead to success and resilience which she refers to as 'growth mindset' beliefs. Contrasting traits are referred to as 'fixed mindset' beliefs. A person with a growth mindset believes that intelligence is cultivated through persistent learning whilst a fixed mindset person believes that intelligence is a fixed trait.

Through research across all age-groups and cross-sections of society, Prof. Dweck found that roughly 40% of people will fall into either category although, importantly, these outlooks can be moulded by external factors such as praise and feedback.

### What characterises a 'Growth Mindset'?

Mindset	Fixed	Growth
<b>Your belief:</b>	Intelligence or talent are fixed traits	Intelligence is cultivated through learning
<b>Your priority:</b>	Look smart at all costs	Become smarter through learning
<b>You feel smart:</b>	Achieving easy, low effort successes and outperforming others	Engaging fully with new tasks, exerting effort, stretching and applying new skills
<b>You avoid:</b>	Effort, difficulty, setbacks, higher-performing peers	Easy, previously-mastered tasks

Having a positive growth mindset challenges responses to setbacks, changes opinions of what 'talent' is (whether it is natural or earned) and instils a desire to improve in individuals.

In the face of difficulty, people with a fixed mindset are likely to think:	In the face of difficulty, people with a growth mindset are likely to think:
"I guess I'm not very good at this task/activity."	"The harder it gets, the harder I need to try!"
"I'm no good at maths/languages/PE."	"I should slow down and try to figure this out."
"I never did have a good memory."	"I love a challenge!"
"Maybe I should've chosen an easier task..."	"Without making mistakes I cannot begin to learn."

### Fixed Mindsets: The long-term consequences

- Over-generalising from one experience - *"I couldn't do this task today so I must not be any good at art/maths/hockey..."*
- Exaggerating failures relative to successes
- Categorising themselves in unflattering ways
- Setting self-worth contingencies
- Losing faith in ability to perform tasks
- Underestimating the value of effort

### How are we encouraging growth mindsets at Girton Glebe Primary School?

A lot of the learning currently taking place in the classrooms is geared towards provoking thought about growth mindsets and is aimed at developing resilience in all areas of the curriculum.

Staff encourage our children to embrace mistakes as an important part of learning and often share stories of high-profile people who have encountered many failures on their road to success (see Michael Jordan's *failure* commercials for Nike on YouTube as an excellent example of this). The children and their teachers openly discuss the effort applied in completing tasks and children are encouraged to discuss their dissatisfactions within activities so they know how to build upon their efforts and learning in future sessions. Classes are often encouraged to

keep a log of their own efforts and mistakes and teachers allow time during the day for children to share their experiences with their peers.

Our whole-school assemblies place a huge emphasis on learning skills, growth mindset challenges and the school's Core Values. Here, on a daily basis, the children get to explore many of the important values in becoming resilient, reflective learners.

Our staff have spent a great deal of time exploring the term 'effort' with their classes as an understanding of this, in conjunction with effective feedback, are the main factors in moulding growth mindsets.

### **How to Mould Growth Mindset: Using Effective Praise - Effort v Ability**

Research has shown that it is vital that both teachers and parents place an emphasis on praising the effort that our children apply to tasks rather than their perceived talents. It is through the careful use of praise and feedback that growth mindsets can be moulded and resilience can be instilled into our learners.

If we would like our children to 'master' something then it is important that the praise highlights the effort that they have put in. It is this emphasis on effort that will encourage them to come back and go 'one small step beyond' when they are next challenged by an activity. Perseverance will allow our children to reach their goals, whereas praising talent only encourages our children to become performance learners who will often avoid tasks when they become too difficult through fear of not being seen as the "brilliant mathematician" or "wonderful artist" that they have been billed.

Here are four examples of feedback to consider alongside the subtext for praising ability or talent:

<b>Praise</b>	<b>Subtext - What does this actually say to the child?</b>
"You're really smart - I'm so proud of you!"	My value to you is based on 'cleverness'. What happens when I get something wrong? Am I no longer clever or valued?
"You've completed these that fast? Wow, you must have a mind like a computer!"	Speed must be the key to success! I must rush through tasks as quickly as possible to show that I am capable!  This says that speed, not persistence, is the key to success.
"You've excelled again - I can always rely on you to produce the goods!"	What happens when I don't produce? Supposing I have an off day or I just don't understand?
"That is a great job...very creative!"	This praise seems relatively harmless but is far too vague - why is it creative? <i>I like the way you used those colours/I like how you decided to put that there.</i>

## 6 Rules for Wise Praise

Growth mindset research presents us with the following challenges for giving effective praise:

1. Praise the effort not the ability or the talent.
2. Praise specifics - What is it that you like about the way they completed a task?
3. Praise privately - Not everyone likes to be built up in front of others (Think about the pressure mounted on a child who is billed "an amazing footballer" in front of others").
4. Praise authentically and not too much
5. Praise "now that" not "if...then..." (*Now that you have done xyz, how can you add to that?* **not** *If you had done xyz it may look/work better*) Too much direction kills intrigue and motivation.
6. Praise the behaviour, not the child.

### Where can I find out more about growth mindsets?

There have been many books written about growth mindsets but the best place to start would be with the books published by Prof. Carol Dweck herself:

- *Mindset: How I Can Fulfil My Potential* by Carol Dweck is a practical guide on how to develop a mindset necessary for success.
- *Self Theories: Their Role in Motivation* by Carol Dweck covers the experiments conducted in growth mindset research in some detail
- Further information can also be found on the *Mindset* webpage:  
<http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/>

*The Growth Mindset Pocketbook* by Barry Hymer is also an incredibly useful book. Barry Hymer is professor of psychology in education the University of Cumbria and has worked alongside Prof. Dweck for many years.