

*What are our children's
attitudes to learning?*

What impact do they have?

How can we help them?

Notes from a Parent Workshop
21st January 2016

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What impact do they have?

How can we help them?

Understanding how children learn is complicated. There is an overwhelming amount of different research conclusions, theories and initiatives. But one thing is clear: By far the most important factor in determining how successful learning will be, is the learner themselves.

We can have the best teachers, the best curriculum, the best homework but it can all be entirely undermined by children's own attitudes to learning.

'Mindset: How You Can Fulfil Your Potential' by Carol Dweck

A Mindset is the views held by a person about the nature of intelligence –and of their own intelligence.

Everyone has one of two basic mindsets:

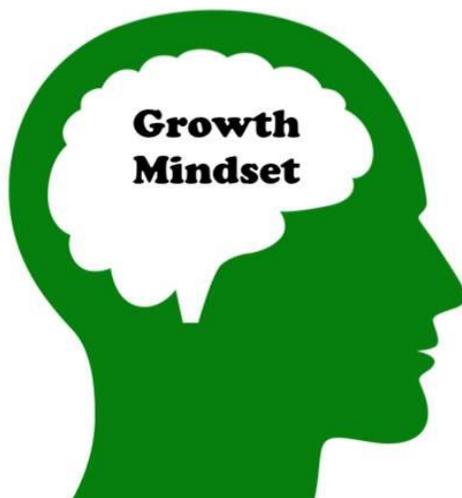
Fixed

- You believe your intelligence, talents and abilities are set in stone.
- You either have them or you don't.
- You are 'performance orientated'

Growth

- You know that intelligence/ talents can be built over time.
- You have potential that can be developed
- You are 'learning orientated'

What Kind of Mindset Do You Have?



I can learn anything I want to.
When I'm frustrated, I persevere.
I want to challenge myself.
When I fail, I learn.
Tell me I try hard.
If you succeed, I'm inspired.
My effort and attitude determine everything.



I'm either good at it, or I'm not.
When I'm frustrated, I give up.
I don't like to be challenged.
When I fail, I'm no good.
Tell me I'm smart.
If you succeed, I feel threatened.
My abilities determine everything.

This simple but profound conclusion has had a huge impact on the teaching and learning at Hollymount. Staff training days and pupil assemblies introduced the concept in September with our "INSPIRED" learning values and teachers attended a joint cluster INSET led by Barry Hymer (The Growth Mindset Pocketbook) in October. The language now used in school is all about growth and the belief in effort.

These are the problems faced by a child with a **Fixed Mindset**:

- You must prove yourself over and over trying to look smart and talented at all costs.
- Struggles, mistakes and perseverance are not part of this picture.
- This is the path to stagnation because practice and hard work implies that you are not 'Smart'. They believe:
 - "The main thing I want when I do my school work is to show how good I am at it."
 - "To tell the truth, if I have to work hard at my school work, it makes me feel like I'm not very smart."
 - "If I don't get something correct, it is because I wasn't smart enough, I'm just not good at this subject."
 - "I would spend less time on this subject from now on."

These are some reasons why a child with a **Growth Mindset** has far more chance of successfully learning and leading a happier future life:

- This is the path to success and opportunity.
- These people have a determination to learn even when it is difficult.
- They thrive on challenges, and overcome setbacks through effort. They believe:
 - "It's much more important for me to learn things in my classes than it is to get the best grades."
 - "The harder you work at something, the better you'll be at it."
 - "If I don't get something correct it is because I haven't put enough of the right sort of effort in"
 - "If I want to get better at this, I am going to have to work harder at it from now on."

What we can do

Research proves that children can change their beliefs. They are incredibly susceptible to the messages we give them, sometimes inadvertently.

Developing a Growth Mindset is now central to your child's school life. For example:

- *The school is centred on the question 'What makes us good learners?'*
- *We specifically explain and exemplify the 'effort belief'.*
- *We share our own 'life-long learning' - Mrs Jackson's Monday assemblies focus on this with her own efforts in learning Italian, to knit....and most recently, to juggle! Pupils are able to share in the process of her learning something new – and also in the setbacks.*
- *We are inspired by famous, successful people who got where they did through effort and resilience.*
- *Friday assemblies now celebrate the "INSPIRED" values with Learning Power Awards, recognising the particular growth mindset attitude pupils have demonstrated that week.*
- *Our feedback to children has the biggest influence on their progress and we have to be careful we get it right.*

INSPIRED

I *Independence / Interdependence*

We make wise choices in our learning, about when to work on our own, when to collaborate with our peers and when to seek advice from adults

N *Not giving up*

We want to be resilient, able to persevere with our learning. Through practice and hard work we achieve our goals.

S *Self-motivated*

We are motivated to learn and grow, extending our interests and passions.

P *Positive attitude*

We think and show a positive attitude towards learning and life.

I *Inspired by challenge*

We embrace challenges and understand that "struggle" is an important part of learning.

R *Risk taking*

We think outside the box, problem-solve solutions if something doesn't go as planned and learn from trial and error.

E *Enthusiastic*

We show confidence and curiosity in our learning journey.

D *Developing*

We grow as learners, wanting to develop our path into the future.

There is a fascinating research study by Carol Dweck into the impact of praise. When children were given praise based on their ability / intelligence / how smart they were, their performance in subsequent, more challenging activities was less than those children who had had their effort praised. Furthermore children given 'Fixed Mindset Praise' were less likely to volunteer for harder challenges.

We must be aware of praise that could be reinforcing a judgement of a child's permanent traits. We must try to 'Praise the Process' and the effort, not the intelligence, the talent or the product. Remember that praising children's intelligence or talent, tempting as it is, sends a fixed-mindset message.

Try to focus on the processes they used; their strategies, effort, or choices.

- What did you learn today?
- What did you try hard at today?
- What mistake did you make that taught you something?
- What was a challenge today?
- What did you practice today?

The secret to raising 'smart' children? - Don't tell them that they are.

**More than two decades of research shows that a focus on effort -
not on intelligence or ability
is key to success in school and in life.**

