“How to Implement Growth Mindset in the Classroom,”

by Zanae Rodrigo

Mindset is a personal belief we all carry around. When we believe we’re good at something, such as “I’m a great writer,” our mindset is positive. When we believe we’re particularly bad at something, such as “I’m an awful singer,” our mindset is negative. Mindset can be extended to school. What students believe they can and can’t do, determines their success.

There are two kinds of mindset: fixed and growth. When students have a fixed mindset, they believe nothing can be done to alter their capabilities. They believe that those who succeed in specific classes, such as [fill in the blank], are born with an innate intelligence or talent that ensures success. As a result, when presented with a challenging concept in class, they come to the conclusion that “it’s too hard” and that they’re “dumb.” Since there’s nothing that can be done to change their abilities, failure is inevitable, so why even try? They give up, which corroborates their initial finding that they “weren’t really that good at [fill in the blank] anyways.”

When students have a growth mindset, they believe that they can succeed. Intelligence is just a beginning point. Talent is a bonus. They believe that success is equally determined by hard work and perseverance. It’s belief in the 10,000 hour rule that an investment of 10,000 hours of practice in any field can make you exceedingly competent, if not an expert.

The key is to create students with a growth mindset, students who believe they can overcome any challenge, rather than allowing the challenge overcoming them. How do we achieve this? The key is to change our mindset as teachers.

First, change how you praise your students. Rather than tell someone that they’re “smart,” try praising their effort. Rather than allow them to fixate on the negative loop they pay in their heads, have them refocus on what they can do and work from there. Middle school math presents its challenges, so I’ve become an expert at saying things like, “I appreciate the effort you’re putting into this math problem. Let me see if I can help you.”

Two, cultivate a sense of purpose with students by instilling the idea that growth in something is as valid as success. Have them value process over the end result. We collect our writing in notebooks. This is a perfect opportunity for students to see and then reflect on their growth over the course of a year.

Three, cultivate a sense of purpose. Institute the idea that we’re all warriors on the road of knowledge. Have students reframe their beliefs in the classroom. Instead of allowing them to say, “I can’t [fill in the blank],” tell them, “Nobody’s good at anything if they don’t know how to do it. My job is to teach [fill in the blank] so you understand and master the concept.” Have students turn the negative loop in their head to the positive loop by saying, “I haven’t learned how to do [fill in the blank] yet, but once I do, I’ll know [fill in the blank].” Have students replace the word failing with learning, and emphasize growth over speed.

Four, praise grit and determination. Remind students that it took JK Rowling five years to write the first Harry Potter book and that several publishers turned down the right to publish her novels. Had she not had grit, she would’ve never gotten published and the world would’ve been worst off having never read about life at Hogwarts.

Turning around students’ mindset can be challenging, but like anything else, it begins with our own mindset. When we establish the growth mindset in the classroom, success for all students is within reach.