

# MICROMESSAGING

to Reach and Teach Every Student™



NAPE  
National Alliance for  
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## Research Nuggets

**Topic** Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

**Unit** Social Learning Theories

*Mindsets are beliefs. In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. (www.mindsetonline.com)*

## Introduction

Dr. Carol Dweck, Stanford University social and developmental psychologist, examined the effects of failure on the individual and sought to answer why some people fold under perceived failure while others view failure as an opportunity. What Dweck uncovered is that one's reaction to failure depends on one's mindset. Those who uphold a "growth" mindset believe that they have the potential to learn new skills to help meet the next challenge. Growth mindset people accept that through practice and effort increases in intelligence and confidence will follow. Individuals that maintain a "fixed" mindset believe that they are born with a predetermined amount of intelligence that is unchangeable. When faced with obstacles, fixed mindset people internalize the belief that without innate ability, they will not be successful no matter how hard they try.

## Illustrations and Examples

Dweck assessed a group of 91 low-achieving math students attending a New York City public middle school. Students were divided into two groups, and each group participated in weekly 25-minute periods for 8 weeks. One group learned that intelligence is something that can be improved upon with practice and dedication—a matter of exercising the brain. The other group was taught study skills. Dweck's findings illustrate that students who learned that intelligence is malleable gained a confidence in their abilities as students and improved their math grades. Students who learned nothing beyond the study skills had lower confidence and continued to see their grades drop.

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### Successful Research-based Strategies

- Share with your students what Dweck's research demonstrates: "With the right mindset and the right teaching, people are capable of a lot more than we think," Compliment students' abilities using a growth mindset strategy; acknowledge how hard they worked at something until they got it right, not how smart they are for getting it right.
- Teach students that failure, when treated as a temporary setback, leads to greater productivity if they treat failure as an opportunity to improve upon and further develop their skills. Give partial credit for a problem that was answered incorrectly but was set up properly. Understanding the process is tantamount to producing the right answer.
- Share your own struggles with the content of your discipline.
- Consider giving credit for correcting errors on assignments and assessments.
- Praise risk taking among students, particularly when failure may be an outcome. For instance, asking a question or the first question is a risk.
- Be a role model and take risks in the classroom by stepping outside your comfort zone, trying new strategies, or planning new activities. Whether your outcome is failure or success, highlight the process of learning you experience and demonstrate its value as a model to your learners.

### References and Bibliography

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