

Mindsets and Success



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What's the idea?

The optimal success rate for learning is high – possibly 80% – but not 100%.

What does it mean?

Successful learning stems from early success and applying effort to effective strategies. This requires a degree of motivation, which is supported by having a growth mindset, as opposed to a fixed mindset. This helps students to experiment, take risks and regard setbacks as learning opportunities.

Growth mindsets build around eventually finding success through effort, not constant failure or a false confidence through under-challenge. If success is too easy, students tend to set lower goals or apply less effort; if success is too hard to achieve, they tend to give up.

The trick is to support students to find the right balance. Rosenshine

suggests that an 80% success rate in some contexts is about optimal. The precise rate is not important – the main idea is that consolidation and success are essential elements in effective learning.

What are the implications for teachers?

If your aim is to secure an 80% success rate, you need to adjust your teaching to build confidence if a student's success rate is too low, or increase the challenge if they are getting everything right. If a student is struggling, go back to getting them to practise things they can already do and then try to move on by building their confidence – avoid

battering away with things they can't do. If a student is getting everything right, it's time to push them to harder material before they get too comfortable.

It's important to remember that simply urging students to work hard, not give up or believe that 'every mistake is progress' doesn't help unless, at the same time, you direct them towards more effective strategies that will lead to success. In the absence of effective strategies, growth mindset mantras are pointless. Worse, they can set students back because, unless success arrives, students may feel even more strongly that trying is futile.

TOP TIP / Analyse students' performance to identify strategies they can work hard at to improve, rather than focusing on motivational phrases and growth mindset terminology. It's about practice, not intentions.

Want to know more?

Carol Dweck: Mindset - Updated Edition: Changing The Way You think To Fulfil Your Potential (2017) Robinson

Barak Rosenshine Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies That All Teachers Should Know. American Educator Vol. 36, No. 1, Spring 2012, AFT, Strategy 7 Obtain high success rate.

David Yeager, Gregory Walton, and Geoffrey L. Cohen Addressing achievement gaps with psychological interventions Kappan February 2013.

