Messages that influence motivation

- Motivating students to do well in school involves more than just providing encouragement.
- Messages that we intend as helpful may have effects we did not intend
  - Praise can be harmful, comfort or offers of help can imply lack of ability
- The key is to understand how students interpret our messages, verbal and nonverbal, intentional and unintentional
- Teachers' responses of pity, anger, praise, or blame communicate the teachers' assumptions about the child's ability
  - Younger children see high effort as indicating high ability, but see effort as indicating low ability when they get older

Carol Dweck’s Fixed versus Growth Mindsets

**Fixed Mindset**
- Intelligence is static
- Leads to a desire to look smart and therefore a tendency to...
  - ...avoid challenges
  - ...give up easily
  - ...see effort as fruitless or worse
  - ...ignore useful negative feedback
  - ...feel threatened by the success of others

**Growth Mindset**
- Intelligence can be developed
- Leads to a desire to learn and therefore a tendency to...
  - ...embrace challenges
  - ...persist in the face of setbacks
  - ...see effort as the path to mastery
  - ...learn from criticism
  - ...find lessons and inspiration in the success of others

As a result, they may plateau early and achieve less than their full potential.
All this confirms a deterministic view of the world.

As a result, they reach ever-higher levels of achievement.
All this gives them a greater sense of free will.
Messages that encourage a fixed mindset:

- You have a certain amount of math intelligence and you can’t really do much to change it.
- It’s OK, not everyone is a “math person.”
- You must be smart at these problems.
- You’re so smart!
- This must be your lucky day.
- Maybe this just isn’t something you’re good at. Let’s try something else.
- He’s a bully.
- She’s so bright. She does well and doesn’t even have to study.
- Interpret a student’s performance as indicating who they are as a person.

Messages that encourage a growth mindset:

- Praise the specific process or actions a student used to accomplish a task by commending effort, strategies, focus, persistence in the face of difficulty, and willingness to take on challenges.
- You must have worked hard at these problems.
- Why don’t you practice and try again?
- Let’s find some new study strategies that might help you.
- Tell stories about achievements that resulted from hard work.
- Mistakes are so interesting. Here’s a wonderful mistake. Let’s see what we can learn from it.

Intervention studies

- Changing a student’s mindset to a growth mindset has a greater positive impact on later performance than does building confidence or creating opportunities for success.
- Carefully planned interventions that teach students about the malleability of the brain, the capacity to get smarter when we try new things and persist in the face of difficulty improve the academic achievement of children and adults.
  - The key is that students must believe what they are learning. The message must be internalized to become the students’ mindset.
- Interventions that work to change academic mindset also can change mindset in areas related to social adjustment and understanding changes in personality traits.

What else is needed?

- Learning study skills without also learning a growth mindset does not motivate students to apply those skills.
- Once a student has learned a growth mindset, the next step is to develop metacognition, or understanding their own thinking and learning processes.
- We also must be careful not to use the concept of mindset as an excuse to blame students.
- We must remember that mindset refers to a system of beliefs. It can’t be taught as just another worksheet or classroom exercise.
- Focusing on mindset does not replace paying careful attention to how we teach or what we teach. Increasing students’ motivation to learn only will be helpful when opportunities to learn also are available to students.

What should we do?

- Only tell students to try harder if they believe they did not try hard already.
- Praise the processes students use to be successful rather than the qualities students possess.
- Teach the power of “yet.”

Helpful Resources

- Project for Education Research that Scales: https://www.perts.net/