

Using the Growth Mind-set approach to narrow the gap

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Published 20 July 2015

To discuss this case study, please contact us via email customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk



Key Points

Our aim was to use evidence based practice to close the attainment gap between children entitled to Pupil Premium and others

Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

We had two groups at either end of the attainment spectrum who were not achieving their potential: children used to succeeding who were not prepared to take risks in case they failed, and children who were overly dependent because they lacked confidence in their own learning. We looked at evidenced-based research from a range of sources such as the EEF Sutton Trust and the work of Professor Carol Dweck on Growth Mind-sets. To have a growth mind-set is to understand that fundamental qualities like intelligence and talent are not fixed, but developed by effort, hard work, taking risks and learning from others.

Who were the identified target learners?

All children, but especially those at either end of the attainment spectrum who were unwilling to take risks in their learning.

What specific curriculum area did you intend to have impact on?

All areas of learning.

How were you intending to improve pupil learning?

If children believe intelligence is set they tend to value looking smart above everything else. They can see effort as a sign of weakness and don't handle setbacks well – if they have to work at something rather than it coming naturally this means they are failures and they become defensive or stop. This means they can miss out on vital learning opportunities or even fun because they are afraid of failing or looking silly. Conversely, those with a growth mind-set see challenges as opportunities, they don't give up when things are difficult because they understand problems need working at. They see challenges as a chance to improve and therefore are more likely to tackle such work with enthusiasm.

We intended to develop a growth mind-set in our school, where challenges are seen as opportunities, children understand the importance of effort, are not afraid of making mistakes and are motivated to learn. To do this we have removed ability groups, instead setting

challenges that children self-select, we have weekly-changing learning partners, a no-hands-up culture, and explicitly teach lessons about the brain and the impact of practice on neurological development.

To view a short film about our approach, click [here](#).

What were your success criteria?

- To make sure we were engaging children who were not taking risks in their learning because of fear of failure or overdependence.
- To narrow the gaps and remove the ceiling in attainment.

Methodology

What did you do - what teaching approaches did you use?

Embracing the principle that intelligence and talent can be developed by effort and opportunity demands a re-appraisal of pedagogy and changes in methodology. Here are some of the ways in which our growth-mindset approach manifests itself:

1. A change in the way we praise children (all adults – teachers, teaching assistants, parents) so that we are developing their understanding of effort. We have a bank of praise expressions.
2. We work on brain science with children, exploring how neurons connect, that it is like a muscle you need to exercise with practice, and the impact of nutrition, sleep and hydration.
3. We use stick picks (coloured sticks with a name on each) to randomly select learning partners every week. Learning partners sit together for lessons. They may not always be doing the same work, but always support each other's learning. Working with a different learning partner each week means children form relationships with children other than their current friends, and are drawing on a range of qualities and ideas present in the class.
4. We do not use ability grouping at all, thus removing the ceiling for learners.
5. We have three levels of challenge: green (mild), yellow (spicy), and red (hot). Children self-select challenges, learning very quickly how to self-select at an appropriate level. If they are not good at self-challenge (eg if they are new to the school, we have high pupil mobility) the teacher will support them in choosing their challenge level.
6. Planning of activities that require challenges with an element of failure built in: investigations, trial and improvement, open-ended tasks, etc. to develop children's resilience in learning.

7. No-hands-up, but instead thinking time and stick picks. Every child has to think to prepare the answer – it might be their name next. We emphasise that mistakes are part of learning – if you are not making mistakes, you are not challenging yourself. FAIL = First Attempt In Learning. (Hands go up only to ask a question.)
8. Learning Stops – an opportunity to help children learn to use feedback effectively. It might be a successful piece of work, or a learning mistake that will help the learning of all the class. Their work might be shown under the visualiser. There is no stigma attached to a learning mistake, because children appreciate it is part of learning.
9. Peer assessment with their learning partner, using success criteria and thinking of ways of improvement.
10. Growth mind-set is embedded in the whole school culture, so all displays are illustrating and promoting the principles.
11. Research time for staff. They are given a day to read and research, and try things out, embodying the growth mind-set approach. We have a lesson-study approach to CPD. In researching with their class, they can use IRIS videoing equipment to simultaneously film themselves and the children, and view it back in split screen. They present their research to their colleagues in INSET sessions.
12. In assemblies we explore role models who have invested effort to achieve success, and there are many, eg Albert Einstein, JK Rowling, Michael Jordan.
13. It is also about wider school life: our Reception children go to forest school weekly, we have adventure activities, sporting activities, visiting art and music, etc. All our children are trying lots of things and not missing out because they are scared of failing or showing themselves up.

What specific teaching resources did you use?

The work of Carol Dweck including resources and films available on the internet were especially useful

What CPD experiences, materials, research and expertise have you drawn on?

We spent two years researching and embedding the growth mind-set approach (and will constantly need more.) We had two full days on Growth mind-set, and a day with Shirley Clarke on Assessment for learning. Then we trialled certain things and progressed from there. Our teacher research sustains our professional development, building the lesson study model into staff meetings across the year.

Good progress and attainment is built by motivated and highly skilled teachers. Recruiting, retaining and developing staff is at the heart of our success.

Resources

- <http://mindsetonline.com/>
- [John Hattie](#)
- [Sutton Trust](#)
- [North Tyneside EAZ site](#) has links to relevant sources.
- Our own [video on learning at Christopher Hatton](#)
- [IRIS](#)

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning?

- Attitude – our children have developed a really positive learning attitude, taking risks in their learning
- Lifting the lid on achievements – children love the challenge
- Children are putting in more effort and practice – they understand the purpose when they see the brain science and see the impact.

Evidence of impact on pupil learning

Results for all children are high. There has been a huge impact on the lower attaining children, they are really holding their own. In 2014 100% of Pupil Premium children achieved level 4 in English and Maths.

[How the attainment gap has narrowed](#)

What has been the impact on teaching?

100% of all teaching is judged good or outstanding. Our teachers have a growth mind-set themselves and are willing to take risks to improve their practice.

Evidence of impact on teaching

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Middle level, indeed all staff take on research projects and have a collaborative attitude. Y5/6 are involved in the Lesson Study maths programme at Cambridge. Y3 are researching into reciprocal reading groups. Y2 are researching into the best use of learning stops. Early Years are involved in Camden's Early Years lesson study. Teachers work across the borough a lot on literacy, maths and leadership.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

This work is resulting in changes to professional development structures such as peer development and use of filming to improve self evaluation

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

That it is a whole school enterprise and all staff buy in to it.

What would your next steps be?

1. Maintaining
2. Taking further: developing oracy skills (reciprocal reading, speaking frames for science, reading and maths) to give children the language skills to articulate reasoning and viewpoints.

Sharing Practice

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where should they start?

Get teachers to read the research on Growth mind-set and do research for themselves, to really understand the theory behind the practice.

What would be the essential elements to include?

- Reflection on pedagogy. Reflection is going to have a positive impact – What are we doing? Why? Is it the best way?
- Developing a whole school culture – work with a peer, lesson study, share findings,

trial more widely.