



Perspective/Opinion

The Power of Yet

by Katie Dercks

"I can't do this!" "I'm not good at this." "I don't get it!"

These words have unfortunately found a common place within classrooms. They are a reflection of a child's frustration and go deeper into the child's own self-beliefs. I have been a teacher at St. Robert for nine years now, and I have watched as more students come into my fourth grade classroom with anxieties wrapped around tests, assignments and self-worth. Instead of putting the focus on learning and growing, these students are focused on "the grade" and looking "dumb" in front of peers.

In an attempt to teach students their own worth and what they are truly capable of, my colleague and I decided to dig deeper into the idea of growth mindset. According to Carol Dweck, author of [*Mindset*](#), people with a growth mindset believe that skills and qualities can be cultivated through effort and perseverance. Their goal is to grow their minds, embrace challenges and learn from feedback, a mindset we wanted for our students.

We decided to start with "The Power of Yet." When we heard a child say, "I'm not good at math!" "I don't know how to do that," we would respond by reminding them that they haven't mastered those things "yet." For example, "You're not good at this math *yet*; you just need more time practicing, thinking, and figuring it out!" We wanted students to understand that skills are acquired over time through practice and perseverance. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and it is important we identify both in order to truly grow.

Little did we know how much one phrase would change the culture of our classrooms and ourselves as educators. What seemed cheesy at first, commenting to students' negative remarks with, "Remember the power of yet!" soon became echoed by students to themselves and their peers. It was a powerful realization that even if kids didn't understand the deeper meaning of *yet*, they were beginning to play with the idea.

From then on, we decided to introduce more projects, activities and literature that highlighted each child's strengths and weaknesses, using these as tools to help them grow. My colleague and I would model how to work through problems in front of the students, showing them that struggle is normal and working through challenges grows one's brain and creates a feeling of success. As educators, we had to fight our instincts to jump in and help when a child was feeling challenged. We needed to allow them to struggle. When a child said, "This is hard!" our response would be, "Good. That means your brain is working. It is going to push you to find a new way of thinking." When a child succeeded, we had to change our words of affirmation from, "I am so proud of you," to "You should be so proud of yourself." After all, validation has to come from within.

When a child really felt stuck, we would take a moment to stop and ask the class to come up with strategies their peer could use. It became normal practice to help one another and appreciate small victories. We had students explain how they felt when they improved and succeeded. We discussed the importance of positive self-talk; the idea of what we tell ourselves is critical to how we produce and succeed.

By the end of the year, we saw that our efforts had changed the environment of our classroom. Students began to understand that every person faces his/her own struggle. One might struggle with math, while another student with behavioral issues may struggle with social interactions. Bullying decreased and the level of praise for one another was heightened.

Do we think all students will walk out of fourth grade with total confidence ready to take on the challenges of the world? No, it's a life process, but we have

given them the skills and strategies of a growth mindset. One student, who has taken this to heart, writes at the beginning on top of her tests, “I’ve got this” and has encouraged others to do the same. That makes me smile...because they do.

There are students who will always struggle with their inner anxieties and fixed mindsets, but we want our classrooms to be a start. We want students to remember as they move on in their education and life that the little things add up. The goal each day isn’t to win or lose, pass or fail, but just be a little better than they were yesterday. I, myself, still struggle with self-confidence at times, having to stop negative self-talk and the temptation to give up. And it’s important that students know this -- that even the teacher doesn’t have it completely figured out... *yet*.

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