



## Grammar School Symposium: Introduction to Classical Education and Grammar School Teaching with Lori Jill Keeler

### Lesson 8: Developing a Growth Mindset

#### Outline:

#### Developing a Growth Mindset

#### Definitions of Mindset and Implications

- **Fixed Mindset:** A belief system that suggests that a person has a predetermined amount of intelligence, skills, or talents. Example: “I am not good at math. I am not a math person.” A fixed mindset can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Advanced learners can suffer from a fixed mindset too, thinking they don’t have to put forth much effort. Such learners may start avoiding challenging situations for fear of failing because they prioritize “looking smart” over learning.
- **Growth Mindset:** A belief system that suggests that one’s intelligence can be grown or developed with persistence, effort, and a focus on learning. Intelligence is malleable and can be developed—a belief that almost anything can be learned with effort and perseverance. The focus is on learning, not on looking smart, and not on grades.
- “An educator with a growth mindset believes that with effort and hard work from the learner, all students can demonstrate significant growth and therefore all students deserve significant opportunities for challenge.”
- **Recipe for optimal learning:** “A teacher who is equipped with instructional tools and strategies, a willingness to respond to a learner’s needs, and an ability to nurture critical thinking processes.”
- **A gospel mindset includes a growth mindset** - The gospel teaches us that growth is possible through the power of Christ (Philippians 2:13); with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26).
- **Qualification:** A growth mindset does not mean you can be anything you want to be—like an NBA player. Some things will not be possible. However, I





could improve my basketball skills. A growth mindset means that students can improve in any area.

## Shifting Mindsets

- We need to break down the belief that intelligence is static. Little by little mindsets can shift.
- All of us have ingrained attitudes that are hard to change.
- Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to change, adapt, and rewire throughout our entire life.
- Neuroplasticity / Brain Research: Multiple research studies show that the brain can develop and grow. Smart is not something you are, it is something you become. New connections are created and connections not used often are eliminated.
- We all have different levels of innate ability at birth. Yet, we can all grow in any area. Some students with less intrinsic ability can surpass students with more intrinsic ability. How can this be? Through ongoing persistent work and effort.
- Sometimes, however, we remove opportunities for students to learn because we communicate low expectations or prematurely remove from challenging environments. Example of low expectation: “That’s the kind of answer I would expect from a student like you.”
- Be careful not to remove students from challenging situations before they have really had a chance to work through them.

## Why Mindset Matters

Grade	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
K	N/A	100%
1	10%	90%
2	18%	82%
3	42%	58%

- By third grade, nearly half of students have a fixed mindset, even though all students start with a growth mindset in Kindergarten.
- We need to capture, develop and sustain the growth mindset that students bring with them to Kindergarten.
- How do we accomplish this?
- In many classical schools, there is often a time when some students think they can’t make it a classical curriculum. What messages are we giving students that they should believe this? “Have we pegged certain students as slow learners without giving them the tools to succeed?”

## The Necessary Ingredient: **GRIT**

- **G**rowth



- Resilience
- Integrity
- Tenacity
- **Embracing some frustration:** Test score mania has exacerbated our short-term focus on scores and results. Our job is to give students the tools for learning—which involves GRIT: tenacity and perseverance. Does this run counter to a caring environment in which frustration seems to eliminate fun learning? No; grit means students will experience and need to learn to embrace some frustration and pain along the way.
- **Positive response to failure:** Therefore, students must learn how to respond positively to setbacks and failures. Regardless of their academic performance, students will experience setbacks and failures in the real world. It is important for students to learn how to respond positively when (not if) things go wrong. How can students learn what they have not experienced? Highest flying students must learn this too. Students need to lift “heavy weights” to strengthen their brains.

## Building a Growth Mindset as a School

- Educators, faculty team
- Parents
- Students
- **Bell Curve Mentality:** Many schools and faculties still hold to the “bell curve” mentality and don’t know how and don’t want to learn how to help students to move at the pace they expect.
- Our current cultural setting (with so much media, for example) is changing the way student’s brains are developing, which will affect the way we teach.
- **The shaping power of teachers:** Be wary of labeling students as “quick or slow.” Your words can kill or give life.
- Think about what areas in which you have a fixed mindset. Why do you think you do? What might you need to change to better help your students?

## Helping Parents to Develop a Growth Mindset

- Parents can build resilience in students by cultivating a growth mindset in their children.
- **Over-protective parents** prevent students from developing and growing through grit-building frustration.
- **Snowplow Parents:** Parents who remove all obstacles from the path of their students. **These parents prepare the way for their child instead of preparing the child for the way.**
- **Communicating with Parents of High-flyers:** Because they aren’t used to their students experiencing frustration, we need to explain to these parents how it can be beneficial. Compare the parent who says, “My child had never earned less than an A before—what can we do?” What’s better than all A’s



- developing character and grit. No student is primarily “an A student,” but rather “a child of God.”
- Some picture books to use to talk about grit and perseverance:
    - *What Do You Do with a Problem* by Kobi Yamada
    - *Your Fantastic, Elastic Brain: Stretch It, Shape It* by JoAnn Deak
    - *Beautiful Oops!* by Barney Saltzberg
    - *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires
    - *Thanks for the Feedback, I Think* by Julia Cook
    - *Making a Splash* by Carol E. Reiley
  - Children’s Literature that teaches grit:
    - *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder
    - *Little House in the Book Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder
    - *Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner
    - *Johnny Tremain* by Esther Hoskins Forbes

## Messages We Give to Students

- **Fixed Messages:** You have permanent traits and I am judging them.
- **Growth Messages:** You are a developing student, and I am interested in your development. Praise influences the mindset we develop.
- **Fixed Message Examples:**
  - “You are so smart.” But you can’t replicate smart. When children encounter a frustrating challenge they may wonder if they are still smart.
  - “You are just not a math person.” “You are being lazy.” “You really don’t need to study for that.” “I wish all my students got this as quickly as you do.” “You are really athletic.” “You’re a great artist.” “You always get good grades, I am so proud of you.”
- **Growth Message Examples:**
  - “You put a lot of effort in that and it shows.” “You hustle a lot on the field.” “I can see you have been practicing your drawing.” “It looks like the way that you studied didn’t work this time—what can you do differently next time?” “I will help you work on some different strategies.” “When you put forth effort, it makes your brain stronger.” “I like the way you took on that more challenging project.” “I am excited to see you stretching yourself, instead of only choosing ways that come easy to you.” “Everyone learns in different ways, keep trying until you find the way that works best for you—I’ll help you.” “I like the way you worked hard, but let’s work together some more and figure out what you didn’t understand.” “If we keep working together, I know that you will understand this.”

## The Power of “Yet”

- “I can’t do it...yet.” This means students are not looking just at the present but at the future.
- Even an “F” is a “not yet” grade.



## Developing Grit

- **Establish the environment:** How do you measure success in the classroom? Do you recognize effort and improvement, or do you only focus on the end goal? Do you give students time to share difficulties and support one another? Is hard work cool in your school?
- **Set the expectations:** Consider posting a grit chart and reward students with “grit cards” (recognition only, no prize) when they toughed it out.
- **Teach the vocabulary:** Use the word “grit” and “yet” frequently. Help them to understand what grit looks like and analyze for themselves whether something is easy or hard for them. Teach them to name feelings of tenacity, perseverance, failure, and resilience.
- **Share examples and create opportunities:** Teach them about people like Thomas Edison: “Now I know another way it doesn’t work.” Use athlete examples. Steph Curry after being MVP in 2015 was in the running as “Most Improved” the next year.
- **Monitor the experience:** It is hard to perceive when a student may be surrendering to frustration. Therefore, it is important that you circulate and observe carefully.
- **Reflect and learn:** Turn a good a failure into a success; a bad failure is a failure that students never learn from. Students should learn to persevere with grammar-level literature so that later they will be equipped to read the more complex literature like Shakespeare, etc.

## Conclusion

- **Your mindset:** Have a growth mindset yourself so that you can have expectations for growth in your students.
- **Empowering growth:** To develop a culture of learning, we need to empower our students and our parents to understand the importance of believing that with effort everyone can grow and change.