

Praising Kids for Effort Is Out of Control....

...says the Psychologist Who Inadvertently Invented it

By Melissa Dahl



It's become something of a self-esteem cliché in the classroom: assuring kids that it's fine if they messed up their homework assignment on long division, because, hey, they tried really hard. The underlying intention is a good one, and it can be traced back to Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck's work on mind-sets. Dweck has argued — both in academic-journal articles and in her best-selling book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* — that there are essentially two distinct ways to think of yourself and your intellectual abilities. There is a fixed mind-set, which means you believe talent is innate and, therefore, pretty much unchangeable. And then there is a growth mind-set, the idea that your abilities can improve with effort over time.

You can see how the dots connected, and how the notion of a growth mind-set might have led to the thinking that it's a really good idea to praise kids for effort. But as writer Jenny Anderson notes at Quartz this week, to stop there misses the point. "Recently, someone asked what keeps me up at night," Dweck herself recently wrote for Education Week. "It's the fear that the mindset concepts, which grew up to counter the failed self-esteem movement, will be used to perpetuate that movement."

Because a growth mind-set is about more than just effort; it's about effort that goes somewhere, causing kids (and adults, for that matter) to seek out new strategies and advice from their teachers or parents when they're just not getting it. It's effort with an end goal, which eventually leads to, well, growth. "It was never just effort in the abstract," Dweck told Anderson. "Some educators are using it as a consolation play, saying things like 'I tell all my kids to try hard' or 'you can do anything if you try'. ...That's nagging, not a growth mindset."

Instead, there is one tiny word that makes a key difference here: yet. Dweck explains this in an earlier Science of Us post — though, as a commenter then noted, Sesame Street recently did a pretty decent job of explaining the potency of the little word, too.

But here's Dweck:

We've found that putting in certain phrases like not yet or yet can really boost students' motivation. So if a student says, "I'm not a math person — yet" "I can't do this — yet." And it means that with your guidance they will continue on their learning trajectory and get there eventually. It puts their fixed mindset statement into a growth mindset context of learning over time.

Teachers and parents attempting to use the growth mind-set to help their kids, Dweck appreciates your effort, even if you're not quite there — yet.

Source; <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2016/01/on-praising-kids-for-effort.html#>