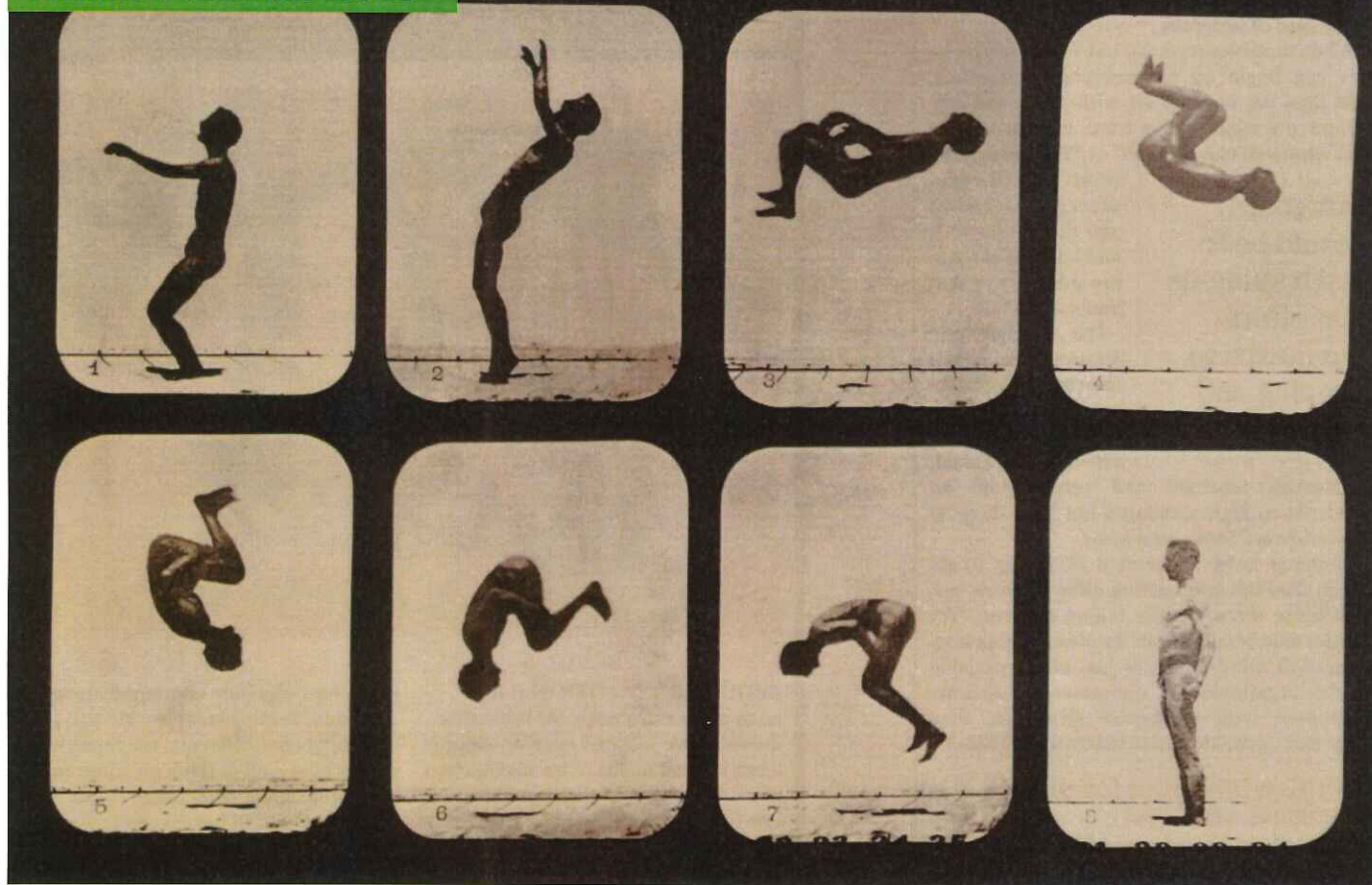


CLASSROOM PRACTICE



PEAK PERFORMANCE: Celebrating effort with no focus on achievement is the wrong way to look at developing a growth mindset in children

Praise the effort, not the outcome? Think again

Set a high bar and help students to reach it, urges growth mindset pioneer

CAROL DWECK

ALWAYS TRY to praise the effort, not the outcome. That's the lesson that parents and teachers often take from my work. But it's the wrong lesson, or it can easily become so.

Yes, the research that underpins growth mindset theory does show that praising

children's hard work or strategies when they've done well – "process praise" – has a number of positive effects.

Praising children's ability ("You're really good at this!"; "Aren't you a clever girl/boy?") conveys a fixed mindset, ie, the belief that abilities are simply fixed. Such praise may feel good in the moment, but it makes students worried about difficulty and mistakes, worried about losing their "clever" label.

"Process praise", on the other hand, conveys to students that they can develop their abilities and it suggests how this can be done. We find that it makes children more likely to want challenging work and to persist when the work gets more difficult. Recently, we've

found that a mothers' level of process praise to a toddler predicts the child's growth mindset and desire for challenge five years later. What's more, the child's growth mindset at that point predicts achievement in reading and maths two years later.

So what's wrong with praising the effort, not the outcome? There are two key areas where things are going awry.

1 Lack of focus on outcomes

We are now seeing some educators piling on the praise for effort regardless of whether learning and progress have taken place. Our goal should be to teach students that effort is a means to learning and progress. The goal

Carol Dweck will be writing a series of articles for TES.

You can read her next piece in the 4 March issue

is not simply to make kids feel good about their lack of progress.

When students try hard but fail to progress, we can begin by appreciating their effort, but then we need to sit with them and say, "Show me what you've tried, and let's figure out what you can try next" or "Tell me exactly

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what your thought process was when you did it this way, and let's see if there are other ways that you can try."

The teacher and student can then take steps to collaborate on how to move forward more effectively. In fact,

successful teachers and tutors hold all students to high standards but help them to move toward those standards.

Students need an arsenal of things to do when they are confronting difficult work, not just brute force. Simply telling children "Try harder and you'll get it" is often misleading. A growth mindset is not just about praising effort regardless of outcome: if students persevere with ineffective strategies, they may end up feeling particularly inadequate.

2 Praise isn't just for when students struggle

A parent recently lamented to me that it was hard not to praise her child's wonderful accomplishments and only praise her when she was struggling. I told her that of course she could praise the wonderful accomplishments, but she should tie them to what the child did – the strategies she used, the effort she put in, or the information and input she sought. We want students to understand that a good process leads to good learning. Any notion that growth mindset applies only to situations where a child is struggling is incorrect.

Of course, I understand that educators want to take the emphasis off outcomes like test scores. So do I. But I don't want to take the emphasis off learning and progress. I want students to enjoy and to relish their learning and progress. With educators' help, I want students to find their schoolwork meaningful and I want them to take pride in their growing skills and understanding.

So, praise the effort not the outcome? Let's change that to: praise the effort (as well as the strategies, focus, perseverance and information-seeking) in relation to the outcome – with particular emphasis on learning and progress. True, it may not roll off of the tongue quite as easily, but it will certainly help our students more. ●



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Claire Lotriet's world of ed tech



REDUCING TEACHER workload is, to my mind, a complex issue that doesn't have just one answer – if only – but instead needs to be approached in many ways. And tech could be one tool that could prove particularly useful. Nicky Morgan, England's esteemed education secretary, certainly seems to agree with me here: at the opening of the Bett show this year, she stated that she believed education technology could in fact play a critical role. So, how might this look?

Well, for me, one of the big ways that technology can help teachers is in assessment and data analysis. Whether it's fast, formative, ready-made assessment tools like Socrative, Kahoot or Quick Key, or full-on tracking and assessment systems like SIMS or Classroom Monitor, capturing data digitally can potentially make analysing it and turning it into something meaningful and useful a whole lot easier. Like any tool, though, it is how it's used that is the real key to this.

What tech can also do is to make it easier for teachers to share stuff – and we have a lot to share. From planning and resources, to ideas and vital info, I'm not sure where I'd be without it all. I've used the cloud to plan lessons with colleagues, who I've struggled to find time to sit down with in school, and even collaborated with teachers who I hadn't met in person at that point (thank you, Twitter).

And lastly, where I've seen technology really have an impact

is in how teachers communicate with parents. Texting services, virtual learning environments, the humble class blog – all of them go some way towards enabling teachers to get messages out to parents and carers quickly and simply. Schools building their own dedicated apps are also a growing trend. Of course, these all require parents and carers to download, install or engage on the other end, but the potential is there.

Tech can make our lives simpler in a lot of ways, but it can also do the exact opposite

In a way, all of the above comes with a mild health warning, because, yes, tech can make our lives simpler in lots of ways – but it can also do the exact opposite. Keeping myself in check is what's needed here because my natural disposition as a bit of a gadget geek can be to use tech solutions just because they are there and I can. By forcing myself to question if tech is really needed for the job, or if I can do it better without, helps to maintain some sort of balance and not add to my workload – because that is definitely big enough already.

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