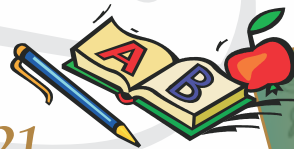


Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Was Joe Biden third time 'lucky'?



Joe Biden: 46th President of the United States of America

The above photo made a statement about the man. Joe Biden has his sleeves rolled up as he talked to American voters during his presidential campaign. He knew that the campaign would be a tough slog and an emotional, physical gruelling battle.

Twice before – in 1987 and 2008 – Biden had stood for president and been rejected. Yet even as a child, he had tasted the bitterness of rejection. In his early school days, he struggled with a stutter. Children in his class ridiculed him by calling him 'Dash' and 'Joe Impedimenta'. Not only was he verbally bullied but physically too. His father, a used car salesman, advised, "Champ, the measure of a man is not how often he is knocked down but how quickly he gets up." Biden often had to lift himself up from the canvas.

Today Joe Biden is president, thanks to a mindset given to him in his formative years. He achieved because of the way in which he was taught how to handle failure. Nobody is immune from failure. There are those who stay down when they are knocked down. Then there are those who stagger back on to their feet, wipe their bloodied nose and carry on the fight.

Carol Dweck, a world-renowned psychology professor, describes two main mindsets: **fixed** versus **growth**. In her book *Mindsets* (2017: 4-14), she described the person with a fixed mindset who viewed human qualities as carved in stone. You were born clever or you weren't. If you failed – well, there's nothing much that can be done about it. You have the ability or you don't.

In contrast, the growth mindset believes that we can develop, that we can improve even when we experience failure. Learning from mistakes, struggling through difficulties and persevering are part of the growth mindset.

At a personal level, I remember as a student teacher having a psychology lecture on the Alfred Binet IQ test. We were told that the IQ test was a strong indicator of a person's mathematical and verbal intellectual ability. A high score would suggest high academic potential and a low one, the opposite. We were also told that a person's IQ score was fairly static. The score was not expected to change much as one became older.

When a teacher sees the child with the eyes of a fixed mindset, the child could be denied the chance to achieve full potential. The teacher might feel that it's pointless spending extra effort on a child with a supposedly low IQ. The child accordingly loses out. So does the teacher. The teacher loses out professionally by not learning more effective teaching methods to help a child having learning difficulties.

Binet, the designer of the IQ test, was horrified at his misinterpretation of his work. He designed the test so as to help educationalists work out programmes to help learners get back track. Dweck (2017: 5) quotes Binet thus, "With practice, training and above all, method, we manage to increase our attention, our memory, our judgement and literally become more intelligent than we were before."

What's your mindset?

Here's a questionnaire compiled by Dweck (2017:12) where you decide whether or not you mostly agree with each of the statements:

- 1 Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.
- 2 You can learn new things but you can't really change how intelligent you are.
- 3 No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.
- 4 You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.

Questions 1 and 2 are fixed mindset questions while questions 3 and 4 are growth mindset questions. Which statements are you more inclined towards?

So, to answer the question: Was Joe Biden third time 'lucky' when he stood for being president of the USA? There is the saying that, 'Cometh the hour, cometh the man (or woman)'. Maybe there were factors that favoured Biden as against the political situations in 1987 and 2008. Yet it was his never-ending growth mindset that made the winning difference. Doggedness, learning from past failures and sheer hard work made Biden the 46th president. It definitely wasn't because he was third time 'lucky.'

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

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Dweck C S, 2017. *Mindset – changing the way you think to fulfil your potential*. New York: Robinson.

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This newsletter is a SAQI social responsibility project. Previous issues may be downloaded at www.saqi.co.za. Click on 'SAQI Publications' and then 'Quality Education News'. Contact Mrs Vanessa du Toit on vanessa@saqi.co.za if you would like to be put on the mailing list.





The ingredients of achievement

In South Africa there are two major switches that students have in their formal education. The one is going from primary to high school. The other is the switch from high school to a tertiary institution such as a technikon or a university. The switches can result in unnecessary traumatic consequences for thousands of young students.

There are those learners in the primary school who excelled in the classroom but as they progressed through high school, those bright young academic stars faded into oblivion. Then there are the distinction collectors in the matriculation examinations who perform poorly when they move on to tertiary education. In fact, 45% of first-year students at South African universities fail at the end of the year. What's going wrong?

Much of the blame is due to the mindset diet fed to those under-achieving learners in their primary and high school careers. They were given a fixed mindset menu. Praise was heaped on them when they achieved. They were told how clever they were and especially in relation to their peers. High intelligence was seen as a natural talent and they had it in bucket loads.

Somewhere in high school or at university, a cruel reality struck such students. Natural ability wasn't enough. The academic demands were becoming much tougher. Sheer hard work and perseverance were also now needed. The fixed mindset embedded in them had created the low-effort syndrome. They had been motivated to perform through external factors such as getting accolades, respect and rewards from parents, peers and teachers.

Such external motivation wasn't enough to help get them through new rigorous learning areas such as calculus and chemistry. Failure was being experienced. The way to deal with failure had not been learnt. A sense of helplessness overcame the student. Too often in the past, the way to deal with failure had been to 'cop out' or walk away. As a result, high school or tertiary education came to a halt. Academic potential had been unfairly stopped not because of intellectual inability but because of an incorrect mindset.

The student cannot now rely solely on external motivation. There's now a need for inner motivation – the need to be motivated from within oneself. A growth mindset is needed. A starting point of the growth mindset is that it's OK to fail. In fact, it's a challenge to take on and definitely not something to walk away from.

This growth mindset praises ongoing, relentless effort. There's a clear focus of what needs to be done and what Dweck describes as a 'bottomless trunk full of strategies' (2017:67). This trunk looks at different ways to learn new material. Try to really understand what is being taught rather than a meaningless regurgitation of memorised facts. The student with the growth mindset still needs praise. Yet the praise is different. It's given in recognition of hard effort, the refusal to give up and a willingness to try new ways to reach true understanding.



Tiger Woods and his growth mindset dad

"If Tiger had wanted to be a plumber, I wouldn't have minded, as long as he was a hell of a plumber," was the comment made by Tiger Woods father at a media interview.

"My parents have been the biggest influence in my life. They taught me to give of myself, my time, talent and most of all, my love," remarked Tiger Woods about his parents.

Caring and loving parents want the best for their children. In so doing, they give unconditional loving support with a growth mindset. The love is not conditional on how well they do ... or not do. Parents might be very involved in their achievements but they aren't judgemental. They don't impose their personal and sometimes unfulfilled dreams on to their children. Rather they teach them how to put effort and perseverance into being the best that they can possibly be.



How do we praise?

Simon ran excitedly towards the front door of his home. In his hand he held his Maths test paper. Mom was standing at the front door. Full of joy, he shouted, “Mom, I got 95% for my Maths test!”

“And where was the other 5% ?” was his mother's pursed-lips reply.

The little story reflects an attitude adults can have towards the children's school results. Mom was unhappy that her Simon didn't get full marks. The missing 5% was a form of failure. No doubt Simon picked up his mother's feeling of disapproval.

Another way to respond to Simon's 95% was to start with fulsome praise for an outstanding effort. Then, when the elation had subsided a little, it would have been time to read over the paper. Identify where the few mistakes had been made to avoid them in the future. Grow from the tiny failures.

Many teachers usually write a comment next to the mark on a test paper. End-of-term report cards contain remarks about the child's achievements – or lack of them – in the term. The remarks can be more meaningful than the actual marks. By reading the teacher's remarks, one can sense either a fixed or growth mindset.

Typical comments of the fixed mindset teacher are:

- Congratulations, Mia! You are brilliant!
- These results reflect that Justin is working at absolute ability. Very well done!
- If Penny was to do her daily homework properly, her marks would be improve.
- David will fail English if he does not pay attention in class.

The first remark simply cannot be true. There will be times where Mia's marks aren't going to be brilliant. How will she handle dealing with failure? Poor Justin! The teacher has decided that Justin has reached his scholastic ceiling. Learning should be a challenging, always-stretching experience.

Yes, maybe Penny and David need to put greater effort into their work but the big question is: “Why aren't they?” Find the reasons. Make the learning more attuned to their preferred ways of being taught. Guide Penny on how to do homework properly; give David the skills to being an attentive learner who absorbs what is being taught. Maybe the teacher needs to add sparkle to the lesson to keep David tuned in.

The growth mindset teacher makes these sort of comments:

- Congratulations, Mia! You've worked with gritty focus resulting in brilliant marks.
- You are trying so hard, Justin. Well done. Keep up the wonderful determination!
- Next term we shall draw up a homework timetable to help you improve your marks, Penny.
- There will be extra English lessons to help you, David. Determined efforts will be rewarded.

Mia is made to understand that her brilliant marks are the end results of excellent focus and not simply natural talent. The teacher is encouraging Justin in his efforts but has not judged that he has reached the limits of his abilities. Indeed, Penny and David

need help with their school work. Yet the teacher has not dumped the problem on to them. Rather, they've been given encouragement through the teacher's action to bring about improvements. The teacher believes in their ability but it is conditional on more effort and perseverance.

Praise should deal, not with the child's personality attributes but with his efforts and achievements.

Haim Ginott, child psychologist

Giving praise in the growth mindset is fine ... but it should be of a certain kind. It praises the child for what has been achieved through practice, study, persistence and effective learning strategies. It doesn't praise after a judgement call has been made on regarding a child's intelligence or talent. Rather, the praise is for the prior hard work that led to the actual achievement (Dweck:180).

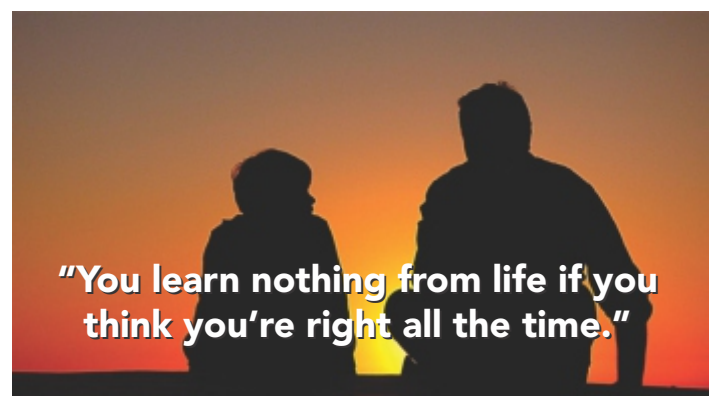
In contrast, the fixed growth mindset gives praise which has a judgemental aspect to it. The child is praised because it achieved the top exam mark or won the Victrix or Victor Ludorum on sports day. The praise was conditional on actual achievement. If you don't come out on top or walk away with the trophy, you are judged negatively. Praise is then withheld.

John McEnroe, the Wimbledon Men's Singles Champion, was a victim of having a dad with a fixed mindset. His father was highly critical when there was any failure. There was continual harsh judgement and pressure to never make mistakes on the court. McEnroe has publicly stated that all the negative criticism took away much of his enjoyment of playing tennis.

With the growth mindset, the criticism is constructive. The teacher doesn't shy away from talking about failure. Yet the criticism is never about supposed shortfalls in the child's character such as a lack of grit. The feedback is honest but does not impair the relationship. Criticism is used to give encouragement and guidance on better ways of achieving. Crucially, criticism guides the child towards finding enjoyment and stimulation in the challenging learning process.

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Moving away from stereotyping and a fixed mindset

Alistair Johnston created a nurturing school

Teachers don't like admitting to having stereotype thinking. They wouldn't want to own up to biases and prejudices. Yet we all have them in different ways. Boys are better leaders than girls or vice versa. Girls are meant to be less able than boys to excel in Maths and Science. Boys are supposedly less organised when doing group projects than girls. In interpersonal relationships, girls are apparently more empathic than boys. These and other types of stereotype thinking are without foundation.

Sadly, so many teachers take their stereotype thinking into the classroom. They live them out in the different expectations of their students. A direct result is that their fixed mindset thinking deprives certain children of opportunities to thrive. As mentioned on page 1, what's the point of having great expectations for a child who – for example – gets a low IQ score rating? Rather put in the extra effort on the student who has a higher IQ.

The late Alistair Johnston was the beloved principal of Leicester Road School in Johannesburg. The school was renowned for being a happy place but also one of educational excellence. Many former pupils excelled when they moved on to high school and beyond. A core teaching philosophy of the school was to create a nurturing environment. Every child was to be nurtured, to made to feel that they belonged.

In such an atmosphere, the children were encouraged to give of their best. The classroom and extramural curricula were broad enough to give all children places where they could shine.

The word 'nurture' conjures up words such as 'gentle' and 'soft'. Yes, there were times when Leicester Road teachers dealt with a child in such ways. Yet in the midst of the nurturing, there was rigour too. There was no compromise on giving of one's best.

There would be times of failure. That's a natural part of school life. Through skilful nurturing by the teachers, the child was helped to take up the challenge. There was a belief that with hard effort and resilience in the face of setbacks, there would be success. Nurture but also challenge.

When the annual national Grade 12 results are announced, the media visits three types of schools. There are those schools that get the publicity because of outstanding results. Much of the achievement is explained as due to fine human and physical resources. Then there are those schools that get appalling results. Those schools are often in deprived communities. Why are the schools expected to achieve – a number of their principals argue – when they are in the midst of such deprivation?

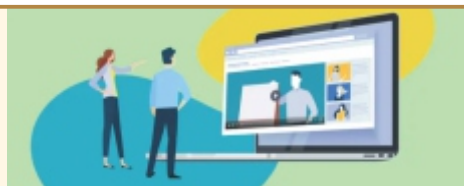
A third group of schools that get media attention are those schools that excel in spite of a severe lack of resources. Such schools might even be near those badly performing schools. Why are they able to do so well? Successful schools have staff and student communities that have growth mindsets in nurturing environments. Yes, the situations are tough but they nurture and encourage each other. They rise to the challenge; they put in the hard effort.

In the media there are those who wail that South African schools are basket cases. That definitely applies to some schools. Yet there are those schools that excel in spite of dire difficulties. The wailers see our schools with a fixed mindset. If they were to have a growth mindset, they would do much to motivate struggling schools.

If every school was a nurturing one with a growth mindset, every South African school could be a success story.

Reference

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Zoom into professional development



SACE
South African Council for Educators

Towards Excellence in Education

During the coronavirus pandemic, education has been turned upside down. There are new ways of teaching in these distant-learning times. There are new top priorities. One example is the health and safety precautions needed in a school. Yet there are those former top priorities of a quality school that remain unchanged. Staff professional development is one such priority.

SAQI (South African Quality Institute) has workshops which are endorsed by SACE and earn Professional Development points. Programmes are facilitated by Dr Richard Hayward, a former principal of two state schools. If you'd like details of the 2021 workshops, please contact him on either 011 888 3262 or rpdhayward@yahoo.com
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