



Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre

### Growth Mind Sets

The idea of a growth mind set comes from extensive work by Carol Dweck at Stanford University in America. She has undertaken much research around the theory of motivation. She has studied the effects of students' beliefs about their own intelligence and how their own views can affect their progress. She suggests that students who think their intelligence cannot be changed have a 'fixed mind set'. She describes others, who believe that they can increase their intelligence through effort, have a growth mind set.

We learn by experiment and experience. We learn from what doesn't work as well as from what does - so long as we are not discouraged or told that we can't do things. Allowing a student to think that they're simply not bright enough to be successful is a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right."

What it means for us at Rachel McMillan is that practitioners motivate children more effectively when we give feedback on the processes of learning and not by assessing an end result.

Staff will tend to say 'You worked very hard at making sure all the blocks went in the right place' rather than 'Well done' or 'Good job'. We would say 'I like the way you have made the sun look happy in the top of picture' rather than 'That's a lovely picture'. Giving meaning and purpose to what we say, helps a child with their learning and thinking and creates room for growth.

If something goes wrong or a child makes a mistake staff will use this as a learning opportunity. For example if a child puts their wellies on the wrong feet we may either let them carry on and let them notice for themselves or just say 'Have a look at your feet, does that feel right for you?' rather than 'No, no, you've got them the wrong way round.'

Understanding about growth mind sets makes us much more conscious of how we work with the children, the families, other staff members and the language we use for our own actions.

*"What on earth would make someone a non-learner? Everyone is born with an intense drive to learn. Infants stretch their skills daily. Not just ordinary skills, but the most difficult tasks of a lifetime, like learning to walk and talk. They never decide it's too hard or not worth the effort. Babies don't worry about making mistakes or humiliating themselves. They walk, they fall, they get up. They just barge forward. What could put an end to this exuberant learning? The fixed mindset! As soon as children become able to evaluate themselves, some of them become afraid of challenges. They become afraid of not being smart. I have studied thousands of people from preschoolers on, and it's breathtaking how many reject an opportunity to learn."*

*Carol S. Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology Of Success*

