

Grant Eckstein of BYU spoke on language learning strategies and mindsets.

Based on psychological studies from Carol Dweck, we may distinguish two different mindsets in learning: fixed mindset and growth mindset. The fixed mindset learner sees success as the result of intelligence. First of all, failure is a sign of ignorance, and so they fear assessment that might make public their perceived lack of intelligence. The growth mindset student is more flexible, possessing and expanding a wide range of learning strategies, using trial and error to guide learning. If one strategy had not worked, that does not mean I am stupid; rather, I should keep trying but with a different strategy.

Expanding this to language learning, students who struggle with learning language may use the same strategies as successful learners, but they use fewer strategies and stick to them more persistently. In contrast, successful language learners tend to use a greater variety of strategies. Very importantly, they are flexible in these strategies. If the strategy they have used has led to failure, they do not see this as a failure of intelligence. Rather, they see this failure as an opportunity to try a different strategy that will enable them to learn better.

Feedback to students should focus more on effort and less on intelligence. If a student sees success only in terms of intelligence, he may be more likely to give up when he fails at something. Don't question students' intelligence; question their effort and strategies. If a student has failed an exam or project, ask them to reconsider the strategies or effort they are employing. Likewise, do not praise successful students as "so smart." Rather, praise them for the strategies they have employed.

Don't lower your standards. Set high standards and then help students acquire the variety of learning strategies that will help them meet these standards.

In rewriting my texts and reconsidering teaching in ESL, I should spend time in lessons asking students to reflect on the learning strategies they employ and experimenting with different strategies.

In listening, have students listen to a brief lecture and take notes. After the lecture, have them try to summarize what they have heard, but without using their notes. Then have them work in groups reconstructing the lecture from their combined notes and then have a member of the group give the lecture. This should help them recognize the value of note taking over simply listening, but also the value of practice—of going through their notes and even speaking the information aloud to better understand and remember lecture information.