

Study: Reflecting on their mission increases teachers' growth mindset

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By reflecting every now and then on what they want to achieve in their job, teachers can boost their students' motivation. As well as their own.

The less [teachers](#) believe that it's necessary for students to have an innate talent in order to perform well, the more they will boost motivation and success in the classroom.

An international research team led by Professor Anke Heyder from the Department of Psychology at Ruhr University Bochum, Germany, has identified a simple, compact and effective way to strengthen this belief: they invited student teachers to reflect and briefly write down the [mission](#) they associate with the teaching profession and how they personally would like to make a positive impact on the lives of the students they teach.

A week later, participants remained strongly convinced that all children are capable of learning and succeeding in school, regardless of their individual abilities. The researchers published their report in the journal *Learning and Instruction*.

All children can thrive

Whether or not students enjoy school and perform well in the classroom depends very much on the teachers, whose fundamental beliefs can be transferred to the learners. "The important factor is whether a teacher is convinced that all children can thrive and learn," explains Anke Heyder. In psychology, this belief is referred to as the [growth mindset](#).

"The belief that a talent or fixed aptitude is necessary for learning success, that students will fail otherwise, is more likely a hindrance." This so-called fixed mindset tends to reduce motivation, especially among students with poorer performance.

Even though these relations have been identified in many studies, a compact intervention designed to reinforce the growth mindset among teachers hasn't been introduced as yet. "Our intervention is new, and it is

both short and subtle," points out Anke Heyder. "At its core is a brief reflection on your personal mission: why am I a teacher? How do I want to make a difference to my [students](#) through what I do?"

Survey on teacher beliefs

To test the [intervention](#), the researchers recruited a total of 576 student teachers for their study. The participants were divided into groups. In the [intervention group](#), they were asked to briefly reflect on and write down their mission, before completing a [survey](#) on their beliefs. In the control groups, they didn't reflect on their mission but on a different question, and then answered the questionnaire.

"We showed that the beliefs of those participants who focused on their mission was significantly more inclined towards a growth mindset than that of the [control group](#)," explains Anke Heyder. This result was unrelated to the subject the student teachers were pursuing. A survey one week later yielded the same result.

"This indicates that the effect does last—at least for a while," says Heyder. Follow-up research will be necessary to establish whether the effect is permanent. "I can only advise teachers, but also university lecturers and [business leaders](#), to reflect on their own mission every now and then," concludes the researcher. "Not only does this benefit the people for whom you are responsible, but there's also evidence that it boosts your own motivation and [job satisfaction](#)."

More information: Anke Heyder et al, Reflecting on their mission increases preservice teachers' growth mindsets, *Learning and Instruction* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.learninstruc.2023.101770](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2023.101770)

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