



Cultivating a Learning Disposition:

CONCRETE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Developed by Noah Rachlin

When explaining how to cultivate a learning disposition to faculty colleagues and other adults who work with students, Noah Rachlin often shares the following three strategies that he has successfully implemented in his own history classes.

STRATEGY 1

Topic: Mindset

Objective: Introduce students to the idea of growth and fixed mindsets and explain how these concepts might apply to their own experiences as students

Activity: On the day that the first essay or test of the term will be returned, students have no homework due. When students arrive in class, they are given time to read an excerpt from Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*. The reading is supplemented with two helpful charts, the "Carol Dweck mindset chart" and the "fixed vs. growth mindset chart."

Discussion Questions

- What is a fixed mindset? What is a growth mindset? What are the benefits of having a growth mindset?
- What are specific ways in which students can adopt a growth mindset in their academic work?

Narrative: I return the graded assessments at the end of class with the acknowledgement that we just spent the period discussing the fact that they can either interpret the feedback and/or grade as 1) an indicator of innate talent and ability that cannot be changed, or 2) an opportunity to focus on specific areas for improvement and growth. The choice is theirs, but research clearly points to the fact that one interpretation would be far more productive than the other.

STRATEGY 2

Topics: Deliberate Practice, Mindset

Objective: Encourage students to focus on a specific area for improvement in their written work and establish a structure that forces them to think about how they are going to make improvement

Activity: For each essay (after the first such assignment of the year), students are required to answer two questions on a page that becomes the cover sheet for their assignment.

- What is at least one specific area for improvement from your previous essay(s) that you are trying to address in this current essay?
- How have you gone about trying to address that area for improvement in your preparation, and/or what did you do as a part of your essay to improve in this way?

Narrative: More than anything else that I have tried with regard to writing instruction, this strategy has led to profound progress for students. In my comments, I often find myself applauding the progress that students have made in the areas that they had selected and then identifying something new for them to work on in the next assignment. Even better, they come up with particularly creative and insightful strategies that they or I can share with other students.

STRATEGY 3

Topic: Motivation

Objective: Create greater intrinsic motivation around essay assignments

Activity: Rather than selecting specific due dates in a term for an essay in my U.S. history class, I present at least one prompt every week. Generally, students write two essays per term; they must choose to write on one of the prompts before the mid-term and on another one in the second half of the marking period. Prompts go out after class on Friday and are due the following Friday. Students are not allowed to write on a prompt from a previous week.

Narrative: This has the twin benefit of being popular with my students and better for me as the teacher. Students regularly cite the flexibility of this system as one of the things they most appreciate about the assessments in the class, and I now have a much more manageable, albeit more consistent, workload with regard to grading. It also helps to improve my class planning and syllabus. I'm forced to think about potential essay questions every week, which ensures that I am presenting interesting and engaging questions in class, consistently moving through material, and providing enough depth for students to be able to complete the essay assignment.



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