

Do I want my child to be successful?

a) What are the characteristics of successful learners?

The path to success is not easy but there is a simple formula. Oddly enough that path involves becoming familiar with failure as a path to learning more. No one learns how to drive or to ride a bike without failing during the early stages. They don't say I'm hopeless at driving or riding; they want to succeed so badly that they try and try again until they have mastered the skill. Successful learners apply this approach to everything they do; they do not say I'm hopeless at Maths or Science or Languages. The psychologist, Carol Dweck, calls this a '**growth mindset**' because good learners see their intellect as something which can be expanded through continued effort. Conversely, poor learners have '**fixed mindsets**' because they believe that they have only a fixed amount of intellectual ability which they are born with. For this latter group, which probably applies to the vast majority of people, they see failure as a reinforcement of their lack of ability. Therefore, when they find something difficult, they respond by telling themselves that they are poor at that subject; they say that they are useless at Maths or English etc. This then becomes the excuse for not trying to become better. Difficulties are seen as further evidence that they lack ability so even more reason to avoid that subject. This becomes a barrier to learning. A second element of successful learning is that learners become independent – they do not rely on their teachers or tutors because they research things for themselves. This is about how they use their spare time. Successful learners are interested in finding out even more than they learn at school in their lessons. They watch the news on TV and read journals / newspapers. They visit museums, exhibitions and art galleries. They attend lectures and watch lectures on You Tube. In this way they develop and feed their passion for a subject. These are the sort of people that are typical Oxbridge students.

b) How do parents and teachers prevent their children from being good learners?

Far too many of us, as parents and teachers, prevent our children from optimising learning because we seek to protect our children from experiencing difficulties / failures. Unwittingly, parents and teachers are responsible for influencing children to develop fixed mindsets. In our efforts to show high quality care and affection we have become over praiseworthy. From a young age we flatter our children by calling them clever when they achieve even the simplest tasks. As a result young people learn that you are only clever when you get something right; it follows that failure is a sign of not being clever. The problem with this is that when something becomes difficult to understand the fixed mindset person sees this failure as an inherent inability that is a proof that they are not clever. As parents and teachers we need to use praise to reward effort. For example, we might say ' Well done! I know that you tried really hard to complete that task'. In this case the praise is related to the persistence put into solving the problem and not simply being right or wrong. Children need to accept that failure is part of the learning process if we are to encourage them to develop their resilience. At St. Michael's the level of difficulty experienced by our pupils is progressive as they move on through the School. This explains why the number of pupils who find studying / learning progressively more and more difficult increases as our pupils enter each successive year group.

Further information on the place of failure in learning can be accessed through the following video links:

Videos on Carol Dwecks mindsets:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICLzbB1Obg&safe=active>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTXrV0_3UjY&feature=related&safe=active

Video on how intelligence can be improved:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-t1RC1LkbMI&feature=watch-vrec&safe=active>

Videos on the importance of failure:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_986088&feature=iv&src_vid=BTgRLzlitgo&v=iEfBU_zXFz0&safe=active

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjYoKCBYag&feature=related&safe=active>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKHTawgyKWQ&feature=related&safe=active>