

Effort vs Achievement

Pretty much anyone working in schools can talk extensively about the difference between effort and achievement – particularly in the scenario when some students seem to cruise through their school life with very little effort whilst achieving high grades whereas others continuously ‘bust their gut’ trying, but only ever achieve average academic outcomes.

While situations like this can be frustrating for teachers to watch, it can be downright disheartening for those students in the latter group. But when we fast-forward and look at the individuals in their later lives, evidence shows that the kids who learn the value of effort are the ones that are more satisfied and successful in work and life. They are the resilient ones.

Often, schools can focus too heavily on achievement and neglect to encourage effort. Of course, academic outcomes are important, but not at the expense of promoting the development of a solid work ethic.

No matter what your ability is, effort is what ignites that ability and turns it into an accomplishment.

Carol Dweck

If students can see the value of effort, they will be more inclined to take ownership of their learning and develop and practice the persistence required to not just survive, but thrive. So, how do we help students understand the value of putting in a good effort and show them not only how this links to achievement, but how it links to a better life?

Here are some tips to promote this development:

Embrace a **growth mindset**. Dr Carol Dweck’s work on Growth Mindsets emphasises de-valuing and actively rejecting ideals like natural ability and talent and focusing instead on fostering perseverance and determination. She recommends that we praise persistence and effort, not talent. Monitor your use of praise.

Establish clear **effort expectations**. Be transparent and explicitly identify what a good effort looks like vs an excellent effort. Explain the difference between achievement and effort and continuously refer to the two as separate but related goals for school and life.

Provide **specific feedback** on **effort** as well as achievement and if possible, **link** the two e.g. *“Your writing is currently sitting at a B. I can see you’ve made a solid effort to produce this draft. If you spend some time editing using the feedback I’ve provided on the criteria sheet, your efforts could help bring your work up to an A.”*

Use **language** and **actions** to demonstrate that you **value effort** just as much as achievement. Take the time to commend the student who works hard at something, focusing specifically on the **energy** the student put into the task, rather than the outcome. Look for opportunities to celebrate a whole class effort and reward the students collectively.

Build on strengths rather than identifying weaknesses. Remind students how they persevered at a previous task if they are struggling with the current one.

Key points

Effort and achievement are different but both are **important** in school and life.

Explicitly teach the difference as well as how they are connected.

Be specific about effort and set high expectations for how students demonstrate effort.

Praise persistence and effort not talent.

Read more about growth mindsets.

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