

# Recognizing how our BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING shape our actions

Expectations operate as "belief sets" that "act as an internal compass" as we make decisions about teaching and learning. "It is our expectations for students, for ourselves, and the learning process... that form the foundation for the culture of [learning in our classrooms]." ~ Ritchhart (2015)

Alan Schoenfeld, who researched teaching behaviour for decades, discovered that teachers don't work from a set of practices, but rather, are "guided profoundly and implicitly by their belief sets about teaching, learning, and the meaning and purpose of school." (Schoenfeld, 2010)

"The beliefs we hold as teachers shape the beliefs children take up about themselves as learners, the learning process, and the world around them."  
~ Mills & O'Keefe (2015)

"It is important to explore how a belief gives rise to a set of actions that then results in certain outcomes... having clear expectations... requires a conviction on our part. We must first set and then calibrate our internal compass if we want it to act as a reliable guide." ~ Ritchhart (2015)

## BELIEFS TRANSLATE TO ACTIONS

"Our beliefs underpin the moves we make as teachers, [therefore...], by reflecting on and naming our beliefs, we can honestly strive to bring them to life as practice. [...] Ongoing reflection on the relationship between our actions and beliefs helps us teach with intentionality." ~ Mills & O'Keefe (2015)

**Beliefs**



**Intentions**



**Actions**

"If I believe..."

"My intention  
is to..."

"So I will..."



Ron Ritchhart has laid out the following five belief sets in his book *Creating Cultures of Thinking* (2015) for educators to use as they reflect on their practice:

Learning  
vs.  
Work

Understanding  
vs. Knowledge

Deep vs.  
Surface  
Learning

Independence  
vs  
Dependence

Growth vs.  
Fixed MindSet

# 1 Focusing the Students on the Learning vs. the Work

The metaphor of work - students as workers and classrooms as workplaces - is well entrenched into our notions of schooling and education, as is evident by the language we use in schools: students earn work habits, have workbooks, are given work periods, are assigned worksheets and homework, and teachers ask, "did you get your work done?"

A study by a group of teacher researchers (Claxton, Chambers, Powell, & Lucas, 2011) showed the word "work" was used 49 times more than the word "learning" in classrooms.



"Work is what we do for someone else, learning is what we do for ourselves."  
~Ron Ritchhart

**In a work-oriented classroom, students are focused on work completion. In a learning-oriented classroom, teachers and students focus their attention on the learning as the priority, letting the work exist in context and serve the learning. The work is a means to an end, not an end in itself. (Ritchhart, 2015)**



Beliefs about learning over work impact all decisions educators make in the classroom. Learning focused classrooms tend to have:

- a strengths based culture where mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, grow, and rethink
- explicit learning outcomes for tasks that students use to create intentions for their own learning
- more choice in how students explore their learning and show their learning
- students learning together collaboratively to build the collective knowledge of the group
- teachers spending time conferencing with students to listen, build relationships, provide feedback, and guide next steps



## 2 Teaching for Understanding vs. Knowledge



"Understanding requires knowledge, but goes beyond it. Understanding depends on richly integrated and connected knowledge. This means that understanding goes beyond merely possessing a set of skills or a collection of facts in isolation; rather, understanding requires that our knowledge be woven together in a way that connects one idea to another."

"A long line of research in science education has shown that merely imparting information to students does little to effect their understanding. In fact, students may be able to produce results on tests when simply asked to recall facts, but can't apply that knowledge to problem-solving situations or give explanations for common events." (Ritchhart, 2015)



Curious



Capable



Competent

Students are curious, capable, and competent; they are not vessels to be filled with knowledge. Students are wired to wonder and love mysteries because their brains crave the joy that comes with discovery. When teaching for understanding, the role of the teacher and the role of the students shift to embrace the learning journey together as co-learners.

**In a classroom designed to foster understanding, students are often:**

- collaborating
- reflecting on their learning
- seeking connections between the learning and the world around them
- exploring topics from various perspectives
- challenging assumptions and looking for bias
- finding ways to apply and transfer their learning
- creating something new
- taking action
- building collective knowledge with others



# 3 Encouraging Deep Learning vs. Surface Learning Strategies

Deep learning goes beyond low cognitive demand tasks such as note taking, passive listening, memorizing, and repeating procedures taught by the teacher. Deep learning strategies need to be provided, scaffolded, and modeled by the teacher in order to help students think about their own thinking and the thinking of others. Deep learning strategies require high cognitive demand from students and include thinking routines, such as those from Making Thinking Visible (see <http://bit.ly/ILT-MTV>).



You don't want to cover a subject; you want to uncover it."  
~Eleanor Duckworth

Educators are discovering that inquiry based learning is a way to allow students to go deep with their learning as they build their skills and develop a deep understanding of overarching concepts. Students who are exploring learning that they feel is relevant, authentic, and valuable will be much more likely to actively engage in their learning. Students need to be given time and opportunities to think critically, creatively, collaboratively, reflectively, and compassionately.

To find more deep learning strategies and thinking routines, go to [www.rcsthinkfromthemiddle.com](http://www.rcsthinkfromthemiddle.com) and <http://bit.ly/ILT-MTV>

## Teachers need to provide students with the time & opportunity to:

- see learning as authentic, relevant, and valuable
- connect learning from different content areas and to the world around them
- build their thinking and communication skills
- process their thinking and make it visible (see ILT visual)
- change their thinking
- collaborate with others to build collective understanding
- ask and explore questions
- grow from their mistakes
- set personal learning intentions (could be guided by a learning map)
- reflect on their learning intentions and determine next steps for their learning



# 4 Encouraging Independence vs. Dependence



Education begins the moment we see children as innately wise and capable beings. Only then can we play along in their world.  
~Vincent Gowmon

In a learning environment where student independence is valued, students will be actively exploring and seeking answers to their questions, while freely accessing the resources they need. Independent students understand that when they are struggling, they are strengthening the connections between the neurons in their brains. Educators who value student independence do not see themselves as holders of knowledge; but rather they are models, guides and co-learners alongside their students.

"Independent learners are internally motivated to be reflective, resourceful, and effective as they strive to accomplish worthwhile endeavors when working in isolation or with others - even when challenges arise, they persevere."  
~ Rose-Duckworth and Ramer (2008)

When educators strive to put students at the center of their learning, students grow their independence. These teachers release the need to control the direction and pace of learning and are comfortable with uncertainty.

Independent, self-navigating learners:

- set their own learning goals
- collect evidence of their own learning
- consistently reflect on their learning to understand themselves as learners
- are empowered to seek answers to their questions
- access a variety of resources to support learning, including peers
- have choice in their learning and feel like their learning is important to them
- transfer learning to new situations



# 5 Developing a Growth Mindset vs. a Fixed Mindset

Over many years of research, Carol Dweck has uncovered that peoples' beliefs about their own talents, abilities, and intelligence shapes how they approach challenges and deal with setbacks.

Dweck discovered that learners who believe that intelligence and ability are fixed "are much more likely to give up when they encounter difficulty [... and] shy away from opportunities to learn new things out of a fear that failure will expose them as not being as smart or talented as others might think they are." ~Ritchhart (2015)



"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right!" ~Henry Ford

A growth mindset is the belief that everyone can learn and grow their abilities. Students with a growth mindset "understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort and persistence. They believe that everyone can get smarter if they work at it." ~ Morehead (2012)

**"Students with a growth mindset are more likely to focus on the learning over the work, framing challenges and questions as opportunities to learn and develop their understanding." ~Ritchhart (2015)**

Teachers can cultivate a growth mindset by creating a culture where mistakes are celebrated, feedback is ongoing, and students regularly wrestle with challenging concepts, all for the purpose of deepening learning. It is false to think that students' growth mindsets can be established through one isolated lesson. The language used on a daily basis plays a large part in shaping this culture. "Teachers and parents deliver implicit messages to learners about the nature of abilities through praise and feedback." ~ Dweck (2007)

## Language Matters

A shift in the language teachers use to praise students is powerful.

TEACHER LANGUAGE

You're so smart!



You really worked hard at this and it shows!

You're a really good reader!



I'm noticing that as you push yourself, your reading keeps getting better and better!

You're very talented!



That was really difficult but you stuck with it and did it! Way to go!

Teachers can foster growth mindset language in students.

STUDENT LANGUAGE

I'm not good at math!



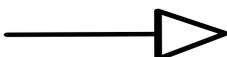
I'm just learning and if I keep trying, I'll get it!

I made a mistake!



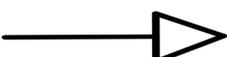
When I'm learning, mistakes help my brain to grow!

I'll never be as good as her!



I'm going to challenge myself to improve!

I can't do this!



I can't do this YET!



# More BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING

From *The Teacher You Want to Be*  
edited by Matt Glover and Ellin Oliver Keene

## Teachers as Researchers

We believe that teachers are researchers and that instructional decisions are best when based on what teachers have learned and documented by observing and listening carefully to students throughout the day.

## Teachers as Learners

We believe that the way teachers approach their own learning should parallel the way students approach their learning, and school is the place where both teachers' and students' learning is characterized by engagement, purpose, and self-direction.

## Appreciative View of Children

We believe educators should have a positive and expectant view of students, with an understanding that students enter school with personal histories and particular strengths that teachers should recognize and use as the foundation for working with them.

## Struggle is Where Learning Happens

We believe students, families, and teachers should see challenge, struggling, and mistakes as positive, creative opportunities for learning and growth.

## Engagement

We believe students desire and have a right to autonomy, self-direction, and choice in their development of life-long learning and engaged citizenship, and that teachers should design learning environments to foster rich opportunities for engagement.

## Ownership of Learning

We believe both teachers and students should share ownership of the learning experience, whereby they collaboratively make meaningful decisions that impact the course of learning day by day.

## Intellectual Stimulation

We believe students have a desire to interact with challenging questions and inquiries of real importance to themselves, to their community, and to the world.

## Joy

We believe that learning is based in relationships, and that interactions between teachers, families, and students should be joyful, compassionate, and authentic.

## Teacher Professional Growth & Collaboration

We believe that teachers develop professionally through meaningful inquiry and collaborative opportunities with colleagues, characterized by sharing observations of students, exploring instructional possibilities, and reflecting on their growth as learning teachers and teacher-leaders.

## Interdependent Learning / Student Collaboration

We believe students grow theories about the world around them through their collaborations and interactions with one another.

## Time

We believe students need time, both within a school day and across a school year, to deeply explore topics of importance and interest.

## Family

We believe positive and integrated relationships between families and educators are crucial, and plentiful opportunities for collaboration between students, teachers, and families are essential.

## Head & Heart

We believe teachers have the opportunity to learn more about students' ideas, experiences, and interpretations, when we offer them multiple means of expression.

Designed by the Central Okanagan School District's Instructional Leadership Team