

Growth Mindset in Action

Video: Ability Grouping

(JO BOALER:) We do know that, as I said, putting students into ability groups delivers a very fixed mindset message to kids, the ultimate really. And we also know, from the research of one of Carol Dwight's students, that the point at which students move into tracks or sets, ability groups, the stunts will switch from fixed, from growth sorry, to fix mindsets. And that particularly happens amongst the highest achieving students who go into the top groups, they develop fixed mindset thinking, so even if you're delivering the message to kids that you're smart, you have the gift, that would be harmful to them, and it would give them fixed mindset thinking and set them along this dangerous pathway. So with ability grouping, many teachers think it's most productive to have students who work at a similar level. It's very hard to shift to having more mixed classrooms for teachers unless they've got the materials and the support to go along with that, I really get that but what we know from international comparisons is the countries that group the least and the latest are the highest performing countries. And so then the most high performing countries have no ability grouping at all. So there's plenty of evidence that we don't need to do it, that it has damaging impact on kids at high and low levels. But, we also know that it's a big shift for teachers, and if we were going to delay or get rid of that kind of labeling of students, we'd need to give teachers quite a lot of support in ways of doing that. We know, it's short, I mean, one of the amazing studies that I've been sharing recently from the brain scientists here at Stanford showed that, they brought in students between the ages of seven and nine, half of them had been diagnosed as having a learning disability, and they looked at their brains and they actually saw differences in the brains with the kids with the learning disabilities had more brain areas lighting up. So that's kind of counterintuitive for people who think kids with learning disabilities are, have less going on in their brains. Turns out they had a bit too much going on in their brains, that you want to focus in a bit when you're doing a maths task. So anyway, they trained the kids in the study for four weeks doing, you know, visual, number lines and things, and at the end of that period, the kids were not only achieving at the same levels as the kids without learning disabilities, but their brains were exactly the same. So in that period of time they took away some, you know, activity that they didn't want to see in the brain, and got the kids to the same achievement point. In four weeks. But in schools, these kids are diagnosed with having learning disabilities and then set on this pathway for the rest of their school career. So, the brain evidence is really stacking up to say anybody can learn anything, and we'd have to stop thinking of kids in these categories and give them the help that they need, and we see the differences between kids disappearing.