

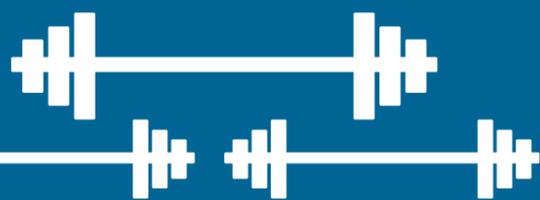
3 ways to use behavioural insight in the classroom

A guide for teachers and school leaders

For use in conjunction with
Everyone Starts with an "A"

By Spencer, Rowson,
Bamfield (2014), available
at: www.thersa.org/startswitha

www.theRSA.org
www.vodafone-stiftung.de
www.lehrerdialog.net



Mindset

Think about ability like a muscle that can be strengthened

Whether you and your pupils believe that academic ability is an innate trait (a 'fixed mindset') or can be strengthened through effort and practice like a muscle (a 'growth mindset') affects learning, resilience to setbacks, and performance.

The way that you (and parents) give feedback to pupils can reinforce or attenuate a given mindset.



Try:

- Praising pupils for effort instead of intelligence to help instil the idea that effort is key and intelligence is not a fixed trait. For example, try "great, you kept practicing" instead of "great, you're really clever".
- Becoming the lead learner. Educators can shape mindset through modelling it for the pupils.
- Giving a "not yet" grade instead of a "fail" to set the expectation that with the right support and mindset, a struggling pupil is not destined to perpetual failure.



Cognitive biases

Our judgements and thinking patterns might surprise us

We have thinking tendencies (biases) such as: seeking out information to support what we already believe (confirmation bias), over-valuing information we receive early on in an evaluation (anchoring and the halo effect), and feeling the pain of a loss more acutely than the pleasure of a similar gain (loss aversion).

These tendencies can affect learning of subject content, your (and your pupils') evaluation of their ability, and effort levels.



Try:

- Perspective-taking exercises, for both pupils and teachers, to mitigate the confirmation bias and halo effect, providing a more balanced view of the subject or of other people.
- Structuring incentives to evoke loss aversion. Consider having each pupil start with an "A" or a number of gold stars, with points or stars docked when appropriate.
- Discussing cognitive biases with colleagues and pupils. Recognising these tendencies is often easier to do in others than in ourselves. Greater discussion around how we think may help raise awareness without seeming like a personal attack on the person exhibiting the bias.



Surroundings

Cues in the classroom environment matter

Subtle and not-so-subtle cues can affect effort levels, ability to effectively manage major issues, aggression levels, and test scores.

Priming students with exposure to words associated with intelligence has been shown to improve test scores, as has priming with the letter "A" on top of a quiz. Visible signs of poverty might increase impulsivity, or preferring a small reward in the short term over a larger reward in the future. Views of nature or 'green space' may reduce mental fatigue and reduce aggression.



Try:

- Priming with grades and intelligence cues for example by asking students to place an "A" on their exams, potentially affecting effort and performance.
- Providing a green view from the classroom or keeping potted plants indoors, to help regulate certain dispositions and reduce mental fatigue.
- Ensuring school buildings are adequately maintained and physical signals of poverty are minimal. This may help to prevent a culture of short-termism and impulsivity.