

# CWLC Teaching and Learning News



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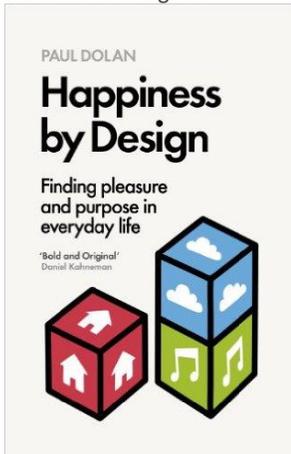
**"TO CREATE OUR OWN HAPPINESS, WE NEED TO DESIGN IT."**

SUMMER 2015

## Becoming a happier teacher

**Andy Tharby is an English teacher, blogger and co-author of "Making Every Lesson Count"** (Crown House Publishing, 2015).

I've just finished reading behaviour and public policy expert Paul Dolan's marvellous *Happiness by Design*. I have often thought that we teachers are very adept at making ourselves needlessly unhappy – at work and in life generally – and this book has helped me to conceptualise this and find some potential solutions. For me, at least. Dolan says that to create our own happiness, we need to design it.



First, we must listen in to the feedback that we constantly receive. *When am I feeling happy? When am I not? Am I paying attention to and noticing the things that genuinely make me feel good or the things that I think should make me feel good?* The solution lies in using our insights into these

feelings to construct our future actions. We should nudge ourselves in the right direction so that we design simple daily habits that will be conducive to happiness.

This article, therefore, is about the small, habit-changing decisions I am intending to make to balance the books, to chisel out more happiness for myself. Dolan suggests that a good way to commit to change is to tell others of your new routines so that you feel compelled to maintain them. That is the principal purpose of this post. I will start by sharing some routines I have already embedded which have had some impact on my happiness over the last year.

**I've realised that taking work home with me makes me anxious.** There's nothing more soul-destroying than a box full of unmarked books or a bag full of admin. A year or so ago my bag somehow became smeared in luminous yellow highlighter ink and at the time I didn't have the money to replace it, so instead I just topped taking a bag to work. I haven't taken one since. I'll take my lunch, yes, and sometimes a book or a kindle, but that's it. In other words, I carry with me only pleasure-giving items, not purposeful ones. The physical lack of a burdensome bag seems to have had a psychological mirror-effect too! I feel light and free as I arrive and leave, like every day is an INSET day.

**I've realised that receiving work emails on my phone makes it difficult for me to switch**

**off from work.** This all came to a head a couple of years ago when, at a beer festival, I flicked open my emails only to find a 1000-word tirade written by a parent and aimed at me. From that day on, I switched off my emails and, to be honest, I have never experienced that particular pain again. If I need to look at my emails in my own time then I will choose when to.

And now, here are a few adjustments I intend to make over the coming months.

**I've noticed that I am happier when the blinds are open.** Sometimes, halfway through the day I will realise that my classroom is bathed in darkness, the blinds closed. I have a simple trick to counter this: before I go home in the evening as well as closing the windows, I shall also open the blinds. *[cont. on next page]*

### In this issue:

The results of our growth mindset pilot

*What went well...* teachers from the T&L group outline what has worked for them in the past year

## Becoming a happier teacher

**I've noticed that I constantly check my phone for Twitter updates and this distracts me from what I am doing.** I have developed many habits since entering this world a year or so ago which distract me from enjoying ordinary life. So, I've deleted the app from my iPhone!

**I've noticed that I obsess about potential student failure.** Much of *Happiness by Design* centres on the fact that we should focus on *the now*, rather than our projections, concerns or dreams for the future. Every year, my concern and anxiety about my students' exam results leaves me in a panic. Nevertheless, every year the final results provide me with a mixture of satisfaction and dissatisfaction; I've never felt anything different. I tend to accept them pretty quickly, too. Therefore, my fear of future unhappiness and failure is far, far greater than any feeling I have ever experienced on the day itself. Indeed, even if the worst-case scenario were to show its hand – i.e. the results were so terrible that they threatened my position as a teacher – this would not be the end of the world. Dolan's argument suggests that major changes or disruptions – such as losing or changing your job – are usually less damaging to happiness than you would anticipate beforehand. We learn to adapt to new circumstances very quickly and, in the long-term, these are unlikely to make us significantly less happy, moment-to-moment, than we once were.

**I've noticed that unfinished work hangs over my head like the Sword of Damocles.** Even though marking and admin tasks are burdensome and feel both purposeless and pleasure-less, this feeling is exacerbated if I leave them for longer. I have to add on the anxiety caused by thinking about doing them to the tedium of actually doing them. The only solution is to do them straight away. One of the strategies I have followed for years involves working late on Friday afternoons (or sometimes Saturday mornings) and the first day of holidays. Why such madness, I hear you ask? Again, if I wait until Sunday evening or the last day of holidays, then the anticipation of the work I have to do hangs over me, damaging my enjoyment of everything I do.

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So, if you have made it this far and think that Dolan's ideas appeal to you I suggest you buy the book! Thanks for reading.

*The full text of Andy's blogpost is linked to on the T&L Hub via the school website.*

# A year of growth mindset research

*After embracing the ideas and principles behind growth mindset, at CWLC we've decided it is definitely a road we want to travel down and explore. This article details how we decided on an 'organic' approach to introducing it as a whole-school focus. One of the important things for us was that staff should not be asked to take on anything that we hadn't, in part at least, tried out first in our own context, with our students.*

*Through our Teaching & Learning group, Head of Drama Simon Beasley, volunteered to run a pilot project that would trial a number of growth mindset strategies and, importantly, measure their impact.*



## Our Growth Mindset Pilot Project

Simon Beasley

The study took place over the course of the academic year 2014/15 and went through various stages:

- Student questionnaire
- Guidance Time sessions with focus students
- Lesson studies (observations of key students in a range of subject lessons)
- Results analysis
- Staff interviews

I picked out six students (4 girls and 2 boys) to work with who showed signs of having a fixed mindset and who were high achievers. We had identified this profile of student as one that was prominent at our school and could

potentially benefit from a push towards growth mindset thinking.

### What is fixed mindset behaviour?

In the lesson observations the students exhibited very "typical" behaviour when they faced challenges. Students who were on the

surface quite able switched off the moment that they had to complete a task they found difficult and, where possible, they would simply seek out the answers from any source rather than trying to figure it out for themselves. They had developed their learned helplessness and would be very needy of the teacher exclaiming that they could not do the task and that it was too hard.

I interviewed eight teachers overall from Maths, English, MFL, Geography, Science and DT in order to ascertain a wide range of opinions from a variety of subjects. Each of the teachers when interviewed said mostly the same thing that the students were doing well but that they were not very resilient and that they required a lot of support.

### What did teachers do differently?

The staff who volunteered to take part in the study were given copies of *Mindset* by Dr Carol Dweck in order to help them to understand the theories. I also ran a couple of sessions where resources were given out to support the staff. Each member of staff then came up with a way of implementing the ideas and measuring their success:

**In Maths** the focus was to be on changing the language of the teacher so that they spoke to the students in a manner that helped to instil a growth.

**In Science** the teacher focused on teaching the neurological aspects of leaning and the

importance of understanding the neuroplasticity of the brain.

In **Geography** the focus was on feedback and methods the students could develop to improve their work in a more independent manner.

I undertook a series of lesson studies (where the students, not the teacher are the focus) to observe the impact of the teaching and the reaction of the students to the work.

"The message of the malleability of the human brain and the power of effort and resilience is, as the Americans would say, a no brainer. How we convey that message, however, may need work and some subtle design and application. Quick, well targeted and stealthy growth mindset interventions may well prove to be our best bet given the growing evidence."

Alex Quigley

### What did lesson studies show?

This was a very interesting phase of the study. The students who were in lower sets seemed to fully embrace the system and were responding exceptionally well. The atmosphere in the classes that I visited was purposeful and the students were active and thriving.

In one Maths lesson, lower ability students made an enormous amount of progress completing work that would not be expected of them.

However, this was starkly contrasted by the students in the higher sets. There was a great deal of resistance to the work. Students shied away from challenging tasks. They were still obsessed with making sure that they got things right and became distressed when there was a possibility of getting it wrong. In a Drama lesson, a group of very capable but fixed mindset students completely fell apart in their performances when expected to learn lines. This was a task that had been completed with ease by a less able group from the year below.

In another Maths lesson, students all opted for the easier questions rather than the 'challenge' work despite having been taught the method well at the start of the lesson. When the students were questioned about this, they admitted they were capable of answering the questions; they were just afraid that they would get it wrong and therefore feeling stupid.

This contrasted so much with the lower ability students. Higher ability students are used to getting things right. When they do well in a

test or in class it reaffirms their self-belief that they are intelligent. Anything that challenges them or that belief risks making them feel like they cannot achieve. This then becomes a vicious cycle making the students wary of completing anything but that which they feel they can do without challenge.

### Which students made better progress?

In **Science**, the mindset group were on average **0.4 of a grade higher and made 2.6 grades more progress than the control group**. These are impressive results but the most interesting aspect of this was that some of the students in the control group were also in the mindset group for Maths where they had made enormous improvements using the mindset skills.

In **Geography**, the control group improved on average by 1.4 sub levels whereas **the mindset group improved by 2.5; a difference of 1.1 sub levels over the course of a year**. If this can be maintained throughout KS3 alone the students will achieve roughly a whole grade higher over the course of Years 7-9.

In **Maths**, the set 3 students in the mindset group made more progress than those in the control group. The control group improved by 0.9 of a grade while **the mindset group improved by 1.2 grades**. However, the results in the top set were not as impressive. The mindset group improved by 0.7 and the control group by 0.9 of a grade.

This follows the pattern of what we were expecting from the observations and the focus group that I ran in the first half of the year. The more able students found it difficult to adapt to the challenge. It forced them to be more cautious as they struggled to maintain their self-theory.

### What did staff think of it?

In the final phase I interviewed each of the teachers involved in order to gauge their perceptions of what they had faced over the course of the trial. Here are some of their comments:

"I felt that in lifting the lid on the students I also to a certain extent lifted the lid on my own teaching. I felt like I had brought certain expectations to my classes that I am not proud of and that this process forced me to re-evaluate my prejudices as it were of what a grade E student could achieve."

"My students now have higher aspirations. It hasn't worked on all, but the majority are working towards achieving much more than they usually do. While students may not be passionate about the subject, they have become much more passionate about improving."

"It is a much more enjoyable process and way to teach. I have felt stuck in my ways and this process has helped me to re-evaluate things like marking and its use. That improvement has given me a real sense of achievement"

"It feels like teaching used to feel like. We are working towards getting better and becoming more knowledgeable for the sake of it rather than performing for an inspector or imposing something contrived on our teaching"

"I found it works a lot easier with the lower sets who are naturally more open. I think that is because they have probably already experienced failure and overcome it more than those in higher sets. The more able seem to find it an insult that people who are not as bright can become as good as them through effort and time and it makes them defensive."

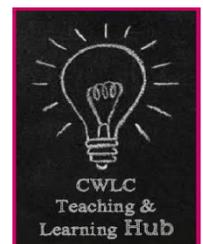
"It is a really positive approach; there is always room to get better. The students at first are very cynical and mock the language of it. But after time they get used to it and see that it works and they see the value in it."

"When do people with a fixed mindset thrive? When things are safely within their grasp. If things get too challenging- when they're not feeling smart or talented- they lose interest"

Carol Dweck

- Using mindset language and thinking makes a noticeable and measurable impact in our school
- If the system is not re-enforced by the teacher the students will slip back into old habits.
- Students in the higher sets feel that they have more to lose and so resist adopting the methods.
- This resistance holds them back from achieving the best results.
- The teachers who have used this method have really enjoyed it and all feel it is worth the effort to make the adjustments to their own views and their practice.

**What next for growth mindset at CWLC? It is something we will continue to explore and reinforce both in the T&L group and across the school. Do take a look at our resources and information in the T&L Hub on the website.**



# How was it for us?

## Sharing best practice

Members of the Teaching & Learning group share *What Went Wells and Even Better Ifs* about their practice this year and plans for the next one.

**WWW:** With my year 9 set 4, I have insisted on their best work. I have challenged them by insisting on them editing their own work and it always improved the quality.

**EBI:** I need to model editing with some groups to help them to understand *how* to edit.

Jodie Jordan, English

**WWW:** Some of my year 8s did not make enough progress in year 7 due to lack of basic knowledge. This year, I started every lesson with reinforcement of basic skills: mini-tests and times tables. They have all made more progress this year 😊

**EBI:** More of the same!

Iglika Gillam, Maths

**WWW:** My year 7 maths group have been paired boy/girl for their work. This was very unpopular at the start but has now led to much more collaborative work and more focused lessons.

**EBI:** I should have done this at the start of the year and considered the ability pairings more carefully.

Kate Hayes, Geography

**WWW:** Encouraging my year 9s to be more reflective about their own work resulting in students being more comfortable discussing their work.

**EBI:** Consistency with homework tasks. I want to establish better routines – perhaps use the RAG trays to demonstrate effort and/or quality when they hand work in?

Andy Morrison, English

**WWW:** With my mixed ability year 10s, I got them to talk to each other more constructively so they were more willing to share ideas and interact with one another.

**EBI:** Encourage more independence and growth mindset attitudes towards tests when they say 'I don't get it!'

James Cosh, P.E.

**WWW:** I set year 7 set 5 weekly homework sheets using similar question types that got progressively harder each week, promoting repetition and practise. We also spent more time in class discussing answers and students explaining how they worked an answer out.

**EBI:** ALL students had completed homework every week and had worked more independently!"

Zoe Aris, Maths

**WWW:** Never accepting 'Don't know' as an answer and asking for three levels of answers for everything.

**EBI:** A more consistent approach to marking books and providing feedback. Give more time to respond to the marking."

James Canning, History

**WWW:** I've included more practice of examples of 6 mark questions, using hint word lists to help as skills develop.

**EBI:** Make a homework booklet with more examples to do after lessons, pre-prepared for the module."

Ruth Hollier, Science

**WWW:** Presentation for my set 4s – I have insisted on high standards of presentation and their books look great now. Students have taken pride in their achievement as a consequence.

**EBI:** Insist on headings and dates for homework done in their books."

Tess Thomas, Maths

**WWW:** My year 10s needed more challenge so I introduced some more difficult work which made a difference to both their interest and their progress.

**EBI:** I still need to direct questions and answers better to ensure all students get involved, rather than only the students asked."

Fabienne Levett, MFL

**WWW:** Individual support for year 11s that has enabled them to achieve higher grades and raised aspirations. This had a knock-on effect on their positivity and work ethic.

**EBI:** I want to build on these methods in my teaching next year.

Katie White, English

**WWW:** Modelling of complex of questions – I did this with year 11 but will do it with all KS4 next year.

**EBI:** Do more of the above! And not just in terms of the questions that have longer answers. Encourage use of red pens more to highlight key words and thought-processes."

Hannah Conan, Music

**WWW:** Using reflection sentences.

**EBI:** Mark books more regularly and shortlist students who are not self-marking and reflecting well enough."

Chris Taylor, ICT

**WWW:** Expecting students to draft and redraft and not just accept the first effort.

**EBI:** Better student feedback; be more consistent."

Karen Cunningham, English

**WWW:** Insisting on better standards in basic literacy and presentation; improved recap questions.

**EBI:** More and better quality peer marking."

Paul Nickholds, V&E and R.E.

Next T&L newsletter:  
November 2015

Join us at  
**PEDAGOO WORCESTER**  
on  
Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September  
at Kings School, Worcester  
11.00am – 4.00pm  
You are invited to bring a cake  
for the Pedagoo tea party  
afterwards!  
#PedagooWorcs <http://www.pedagoo.org/local/worcs>