



Ways to Learn Through Mistakes in the Classroom

www.kidsacademy.mobi

Think back to when your children were just infants on the verge of learning to walk; did they succeed on their first attempt? Or did they stumble and fall a number of times before learning to be steady on their feet? If your kids are like most, the latter probably sounds more familiar.

The truth is, when our toddlers make mistakes, they are considered cute and endearing. As educators and parents, we help them up and guide them to learn from their failure. But when kids grow older and gain more responsibilities, we tend to be more unforgiving. In fact, the traditional grading systems we have in place at many schools throughout the country pit failure against passing, making it into something much more negative than it really should be.

As a result, kids are downright afraid of making mistakes. Children naturally strive to please their parents and teachers, and in our society, they tend to avoid failure at all costs. But if babies are allowed to learn from their mistakes, shouldn't kids be extended that same grace? Join us as we take an in-depth look at how teachers and students view failure and how to shift the paradigm to encourage failure-based learning experiences. Finally, stick with us as we reveal 4 solid strategies for learning through mistakes.

Cultural Conundrum: How We View Failure

Search for failure quotes on a search engine, and you'll find no shortage of inspirational sayings that encourage people to embrace their mistakes and learn from them. However, when it comes to kids, we sometimes hold them to a higher standard, considering that we grade students based on their performance, and penalize them with low marks on assignments when they make errors.

Though the original intent of grades was to provide feedback on skill mastery, many parents and students look at them in a much simpler manner: that high grades are good, and low grades are bad. In America, this notion is rampant; consider the fact that many auto insurers even reward parents of student drivers with rate discounts when their high school students earn "good grades", and it's easy to see how pervasive this idea truly is within our society.



In the classroom, teachers tend to avoid pointing out student mistakes. This is understandable, as no educator wants to make a child feel bad about themselves or hurt their self-esteem. Moreover, teachers don't want to draw attention to student mistakes to avoid calling him or her out in front of his or her peers. For students who struggle with class participation and discussion, pointing out their error might even discourage those students from speaking up again. All said, what teacher would even want to risk such negative outcomes by calling out a student's mistake instead of focusing on what they did right?

It's clear that failure is viewed negatively in our schools. But imagine for a second that making errors isn't bad at all, but instead could serve as a means to an end. In truth, we all have the capacity to learn from our failures. In theory, normalizing mistakes in school culture could potentially shift how students learn, and the very lessons they complete in class each day.

[Kids shouldn't feel afraid to make mistakes. Our Talented and Gifted app offers learners immediate feedback in an uplifting and positive way. Give your students meaningful practice in skills across the curriculum!](#)

Failure-Focused Lessons as an Effective Learning Model

In today's classroom, lessons tend to focus on direct instruction, as opposed to problem-based instruction. This means that many educators turn to teaching a topic or skill directly, instructing children what to do, and giving assignments based upon what they have learned. While there is nothing wrong with this model when used in combination with other types of teaching techniques, recent research suggests that allowing students to work through tough problems and learning from their mistakes may be a more effective strategy. The teacher then, becomes more of a coach that guides students through coursework, encouraging kids to become more reflective.

To make the shift to problem-based instruction, it's important to minimize lecture, and allow students to grapple or experiment with challenging content. It can be uncomfortable for teachers to watch students struggle, but it's rewarding to watch students use their problem-solving skills to find solutions on their own. Moreover, the teacher is there to gently guide student learning, offering assistance when needed.

Making the shift to problem-based learning can be tricky given our society's culture and views of failure. To make the transition, teachers need specific strategies to keep in mind to transform their classroom into one that values and learns from mistakes.

Ways to Embrace Mistakes and Learn from Them

When children think they are failing, it can be tough to deal with emotional meltdowns, especially in the classroom environment. Try the following ideas to help your little learners look at failure in a much different, and more positive, light:



Modelling coping skills and self-compassion

One popular and ever-enduring myth in the heads and hearts of students is that teachers know everything and never make mistakes, but this can't be farther from the truth! A critical component of normalizing failure is to model mature reactions to failure in everyday life.

Everybody, no matter their education level or profession, makes errors from time to time. As adults, sometimes we try to cover them up, but it's important to let students see our errors or shortcomings. If students ask you a question that you don't know the answer to, simply admit it and promise to seek out the answer to let them know the following day. Thank students for correcting you if they notice you wrote the wrong date on the whiteboard. Whatever it is, show kids that adults are not perfect, and make mistakes, just like them.

Moreover, many children lack the necessary self-compassion to forgive themselves for their own failures. Model self-compassion strategies with think-alouds so kids can see an adult's perspective and coping skills when faced with mistakes. For example, when working on a math problem, talk to the student about how you struggled with the same skill as a child, and how it's okay to make errors when learning. Then share the thought process that goes through your head as you solve the problem now.

Plan for immediate feedback

Students should never be left struggling with a problem without support for too long! Plan ways that you can communicate immediate feedback in your classroom when kids are working on problem-based work.

Some examples of techniques to use include mini, informal conferences with students during worktime, writing notes on Post-It notes, or asking students leading questions that allow them to explain their thought process so instructors can encourage or redirect their thinking depending on their progress. No matter which strategy you use, it's important to offer feedback while the work is happening in your classroom, so students may find other solutions, if needed.

Make room for mistakes

If kids can't make errors in the classroom while they're learning something new, when can they make them? One step towards normalizing mistakes is to allow them to happen in the first place. To do this, it might be worthwhile to reexamine how work is graded. If kids feel threatened by the pressure to perform, they will not feel comfortable to make errors during their work time in class. There is a time and place for graded assignments and assessment, but during problem-based learning lessons, ensure that students know that failure is allowed, and they won't be punished by an "F" during that time.

Reframe, don't remind

A source of frustration for many students is that when they ask teachers for help after making a mistake, the instructor simply repeats the same thing they said when the information was taught. When coaching students to learn from their mistakes, say something more like, "Let's try another way...". Encourage kids to think of other possibilities by asking questions that guide them in the right direction.

It probably goes without saying that educators should always encourage kids to be patient with themselves as they learn, and persistent in solving problems. Gone are the days of teachers standing in the classroom, front and center, imparting information to students directly. Research shows that problem-based learning is much more effective, and that our culture of fearing failure must end. Start transitioning your classroom climate to one that embraces mistakes to encourage learning. Begin with the tips above and watch as your students blossom into capable and confident learners!

