



Academic Mindsets

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Academic mindsets are the psycho-social attitudes or beliefs one has about oneself in relation to academic work. Each of the four academic mindsets is briefly described here.

- 1. I belong in this academic community.** The first mindset involves a sense that one has a rightful place in a given academic setting and can claim full membership in a classroom community. Educational theorists have long held that learning is a social activity and that understanding is constructed through interactions with others. Accordingly, students need to feel as though they belong to a community of learners and that their academic self is a “true” self. A long line of research evidence shows that having a sense of belonging in a school or classroom improves a student’s academic performance.
- 2. My ability and competence grow with effort.** The second mindset rests on the belief that one’s academic ability can improve in response to one’s efforts, rather than being fixed at a given level and outside of one’s control. Notably, across the empirical literature, one’s beliefs about intelligence and attributions for academic success or failure are more strongly associated with school performance than is one’s actual measured ability (i.e. test scores).
- 3. I can succeed at this.** A third mindset that impacts the degree to which students persevere in academic work and exhibit strong academic behaviors relates to beliefs about their abilities to succeed at a given task. Individuals tend to engage in activities that they feel confident in their ability to complete and to avoid those in which they lack such confidence.
- 4. This work has value for me.** A fourth mindset involves a student’s sense that the subject matter he or she is studying is interesting and holds value. Value can be variously defined as the importance of doing well on a task (attainment value); gaining enjoyment by doing a task (intrinsic value); or serving a useful purpose or meeting an end goal that is important by completing a task (utility value).

Overall, the evidence clearly demonstrates that the four academic mindsets outlined above each increase students’ academic perseverance and improve academic behaviors, leading to better performance as measured by higher grades. When a student feels a sense of belonging in a classroom community, believes that success is possible and within his or her control, and sees school work as interesting or relevant to his or her life, the student is much more likely to persist at academic tasks despite setbacks and to exhibit the kinds of academic behaviors that lead to learning and school success.