

# Teaching and Reaching Our Youngest Learners



Our programs recently experienced a surge in enrollment from younger learners. What are these students looking for in our classrooms and how can we help them navigate the path to success? Join this session to learn the answers to these questions and more!

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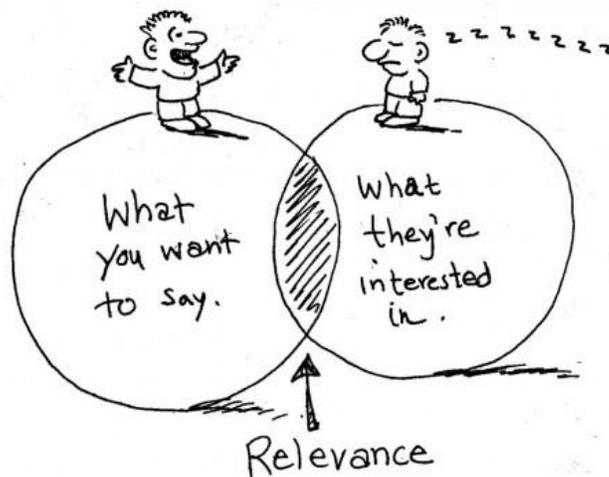
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# Today's Objectives

At the end of today's workshop, I will be able to:

- Explain factors that help younger students succeed in adult basic education programs
- Describe classroom techniques that help younger students learn in adult basic education classrooms



## Create Personal Relevance

“The idea that we can put anything in people's heads without addressing motivation is crazy.”

- Jeff Goodman, Appalachian State University

Research shows that we can create personal relevance in several ways:

**Choices** - Give students' choices about what and how they learn.

**Use Real-Life Examples** – Some of the most powerful lessons come from when students ask for help with real-life challenges they face.

**Relate Theory to Practice** – Show how the area formula is used in painting walls or how carpenters use the Pythagorean theorem.

**Use Current Events** – How can we relate lessons to what is happening right now in the world or our own country?

**Discuss Local Examples** - How does a subject relate to what is going on in your community?

## Use Metaphors and Analogies

“When you are trying to learn something new, the best way to learn it is to connect it with something you already know” (Dr. Barbara Oakley). Metaphors and analogies allow new learning to piggy back on existing neural pathways (“neural reuse”) making new concepts easier to understand. Metaphors “rapidly on-board” new ideas. As we teach, we can say things like

"It's just like ...", "It's the same as ...", "Think of it as ...".

Some examples are:

- The Declaration of Independence is like a breakup letter (Dear John letter)
- Sound waves are like the ripples spreading out from a stone dropped in water



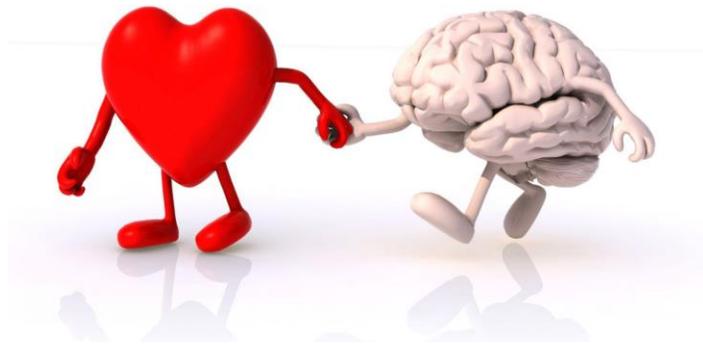
## Cultivate Classroom Community

“When students come to us, many are scared and unsure. Some have had horrible experiences in school. I want them to feel safe and know that I care about them. I tell them: ‘It’s going to be hard, but we are going to do it together.’ I may not have the most knowledge about every subject, but I deeply care about my students and their successes and would do anything to help them succeed” (Kitty Head, 2015 COABE Teacher of the Year). Here are some other ideas:

### Celebrate . . .

- Life victories in the classroom such as birthdays, GED tests passed, making parole, special days in a student’s culture, and “everyday victories” discovered during class discussions. “Strides outside the classroom lead to triumphs inside the classroom.”
- Students’ cultures by developing social studies lessons plans around students’ home countries.
- Students’ lives by teaching about things students’ face in their lives. “When students feel part of the lesson, they take ownership of it.”
- Students’ work by bringing the workplace to the classroom by using examples from students’ jobs.

Buy coffee cups at the dollar store for students to use during break time. Have students put their names on their cups with a Sharpie marker.



## Win the Battle for the Heart, the Mind will Follow

	<b>Fixed Mindset</b>	<b>Growth Mindset</b>
<b>Challenges</b>	Avoids challenges	Embraces challenges
<b>Effort</b>	Effort is fruitless	Effort leads to mastery
<b>Feedback</b>	Ignores feedback	Welcomes feedback
<b>Success</b>	Threatened by others' success	Inspired by others' success
<b>Result</b>	<b>Failure</b>	<b>Success!</b>

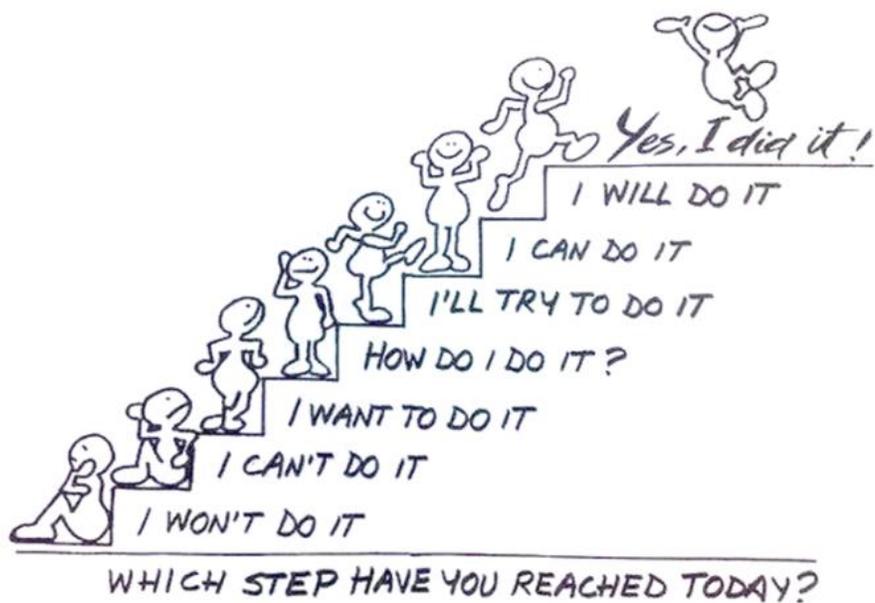
“Researchers have known for some time that the brain is like a muscle; that the more you use it, the more it grows. They have found that neural connections form and deepen most when we make mistakes doing difficult tasks rather than repeatedly having success with easy ones. What this means is that our intelligence is not fixed, and the best way that we can grow our intelligence is to embrace tasks where we might struggle and fail.

“However, not everyone realizes this. Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University has been studying people’s mindsets towards learning for decades. She has found that most people adhere to one of two mindsets: fixed or growth. Fixed mindsets mistakenly believe that people are either smart or not, that intelligence is fixed by genes. People with growth mindsets correctly believe that capability and intelligence can be grown through effort, struggle and failure. Dweck found that those with a fixed mindset tended to focus their effort on tasks where they had a high likelihood of success and avoided tasks where they may have had to struggle, which limited their learning. People with a growth mindset, however, embraced challenges, and understood that tenacity and effort could change their learning outcomes. As you can imagine, this correlated with the latter group more actively pushing themselves and growing intellectually.”

- Salman Khan, Creator of Khan Academy

## Viewing Guide: Carol Dweck - [The Power of Believing That You Can Improve](#)

1. What is the difference between a growth and fixed mindset?
2. How do we praise wisely?
3. What is the power of yet?
4. What would developing your students' growth mindset look like in your classroom?



## Dealing with Students' Emotions

"The emotions students bring to class are real and can make a huge difference in whether students learn successfully or not. Deal with your own emotions and help your students cope with theirs.

"An important strand of my teaching philosophy is to deal with emotions, my own and the students', so they don't get in the way of the learning . . . it will probably take less than a minute to acknowledge the emotions that come up in the moment; that if you leave it for an hour, it might take two minutes to deal with them; if you leave it until the next day it might take half an hour, and if you leave it for longer, who knows how long it will take?"

"How does expressing our feelings help? It helps us keep control of our emotions, helps us identify problems, and helps us maintain clarity in our relationships with other people.

"Saying 'I'm frustrated' or 'I'm mad' or 'I'm happy,' releases the hold the emotion has on you a little, so that you can concentrate on other things, and think and act rather than just emote. Maintaining control over emotions is helpful in the classroom where so many people are working in a public space . . . I'd much rather someone say, 'I'm really frustrated when I keep getting these questions wrong,' instead of slamming his books down and stamping out, swearing under his breath, or out loud. Furthermore, a student who can say what is bothering him may be able to go on working, or ask for help, or use some strategy he has for dealing with stress or anger."

(Nonesuch, 2006)



## Inspirational Videos

Share these inspirational videos with your students:

- [How to Make Stress Your Friend](#)
- [Honda the Power of Dreams Failure: The Secret to Success](#)
- [Richie Parker Drive](#)
- [Inspiring Man Born without Arms or Legs Nick Vujicic 60 Minutes Australia](#)
- [Never Give Up - Advice From The Most Successful People On The Planet](#)
- [How You Can Be Good at Math, and Other Surprising Facts about Learning Jo Boaler](#)

## Reflection

Think about what we have done today. Write (or discuss) one best practice or activity for each of the following:

What is something that:

1. Reinforced something good that I already am doing?
2. Reminded me of something I used to do and will try again?
3. Gave me a new idea that I plan to try?

## References

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

Nonesuch, K. (2006). *Changing the way we teach math: a manual for teaching basic math to adults*. Duncan, B.C., Canada: Malaspina University-College.

## About the Presenter

Steve Schmidt is an adult education consultant and moderator of the LINCS Reading and Writing Community of Practice. He has worked in adult basic education for more than 29 years as an instructor, program director, professional developer, and author. From 2010 to 2019, Steve served as a professional developer at Appalachian State University. He has delivered hundreds of workshops on a variety of topics including at COABE (2012 through 2022). He can be reached at: [schmidtconsulting4@gmail.com](mailto:schmidtconsulting4@gmail.com)