

Minutes of the Derby Medical Society Open, Meeting 15th January 2019
Derby Medical School Lecture Theatre
“Reconsidering learning” - Dr Kate Denning

Apologies

Tony Henry
Keith Dodd
Drs Nicholson

Introduction

Miss Hewitt opened the meeting with a welcome to all attendees and also a tribute to Dr Jefferson who was a neurosurgeon at Derby.

She then introduced the speaker for the evening, Dr Kate Denning.

Dr Kate Denning has 20 years experience in supporting educators and shares innovative methods of teaching in an effective and supportive debrief.

She is the lead educator for ALS, has been all over the world and observed all kinds of teaching. She is interested in how we facilitate learning and enable us to be the best teachers that we can be.

She has a MSc and PhD in theory of learning and how this can be applied.

Presentation

Dr Denning opened the presentation with an interactive element to make us think about learning.

The task was something “really difficult” and it was to unscramble the anagrams of various occupations. At the end of the task, the audience was asked for their thoughts when she introduced the task and how it made them felt.

There were various answers of feeling challenged, “raring to do”, “focused mind”.

The response we have to a task defines how we deal with the task. Dr Denning then introduced the “Mindset theory” - fixed and growth mindset.

The responses most people had with the task was an example of growth mindset: then you relish challenges and work to overcome the challenge. In contrast, when faced with a difficult task a fixed mindset would feel worried about it.

Carol Dweck tested this theory with children and gave them “smart” vs “hard work” labels. They were given a task and at the end they were either smart or hard workers. These groups were then given another task of similar difficulty, but the smart group struggled with different tasks and the latter did better. When the first task was reassessed the first had worse outcomes compared to the latter.

Looking more at a fixed mindset; this group of learners want to be reassured, want to prove themselves and not challenge themselves. They won't push themselves out of their comfort zone. They have a poor understanding of their own abilities and prove themselves rather than test themselves.

In contrast, the growth mindset people believe they can overcome problems with solution seeking and continued development.

When things go wrong, the two mindsets react in different way too. Growth mindset people perceive that as a nice challenge whereas the fixed mindset group see the problem as a reflection as their whole self rather than looking at the problem itself.

When equal numbers of these groups are brought together and given a general knowledge quiz with the answers at the end, their responses were different as well. The growth mindset people wanted to know what the right answer was whereas the fixed mindset people would look at whether they were right or wrong.

Dr Denning then summarised the differences in a table.

When are we more likely to have a fixed mindset?

The question was posed to the audience and ideas included being tired, emotions can push us into fixed mindset, higher stakes, learning zones vs performer's zones, if not interested in the particular task, stress levels being high.

How can we foster a growth mindset?

Being in a supportive environment is key as well as being in a no-blame culture and also having an informal or formal peer support group.

Dr Denning then gave a Carol Dweck quote: "If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, and keep on learning. That way, their children don't have to be slaves of praise. They will have a lifelong way to build and repair their own confidence."

With learners it is thinking about how to shift a fixed learner into a growth learner if they give a wrong answer.

How can the educator facilitate the wrong answer given by a learner to foster a growth mindset?

Ways to do this include giving an open answer; thank them for their answer and giving them opportunity to think about the thought process which led to that answer.

"That's interesting, that's not the answer I was expecting"

For educators, it about trying to have our own words which would work to allow the learner to think of the correct answer.

In a mixed group of learners, there will be some fixed and growth mindset people.

If the learner says "I don't know" - then explore what they do know.

"I can't do it" - yet! Shift them into a growth mindset and employ skills in getting the best out of people.

On the other hand, if giving feedback, if a facilitator says “It’s great” - it is too vague for a learner and doesn’t shift someone into a growth mindset.

If the mentor says do more of the same - it is too fixed and makes the learner a fixed mindset rather than growth. Mentors should say “I want you to practice this skill more” - this makes learners push themselves.

If as parents or mentors we say “You’re the clever one, he/she is the sporty one” - fixed mindset people think they can’t change themselves so won’t push themselves. Growth mindset people have plasticity and make changes in their mind to overcome any perceived difficulties.

In conclusion, effortful, challenging learning is more effective. If something is easy, no effort is required therefore it is not remembered. As educators we need to ensure learning is effortful. It is ok to challenge our learners.

Be explicit about why the task or the question is hard so that they can think about what they have learnt because of the effort that is needed to get something from it. This will allow fostering of the growth mindset from our learners and from ourselves.

As educator, ask questions which don’t have a single correct answer and ask questions which encourage them to do thinking so that they learn more. Fixed mindset causes fear of failure and doesn’t get the best out of learners. By adapting our styles, we can shift people more into growth mindset by the way we encourage their learning.

Questions from the floor before the meeting was closed.

Summary:

Dr Kate Denning gave a fascinating talk about the two different mindsets that we encounter in ourselves as learners but also as educators of other people.

- 1) There are two mindsets: fixed learners and growth learners.
- 2) We can adapt our teaching styles to encourage a shift from fixed learners to growth learners to allow people to enjoy the challenge of a task
- 3) By giving effortful, challenging learning tasks, the learning itself is more effective because the learner is able to recall the difficulty with which the task was undertaken.

Attendance:

Full members 14
Guest members 3
Junior Doctors 2
Students 19