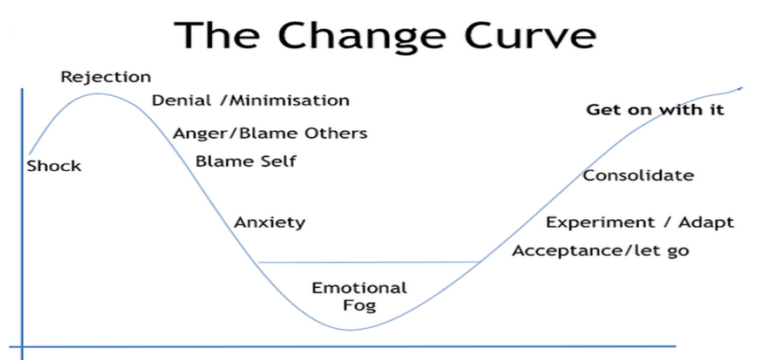


Study Skills : Attitudes and Psychology of Learning

'The Man who **says he can**, and the man who **says he can not**.. are both correct' (Confucius)

Our attitudes and thinking affect what we do or choose not to do. If students are not doing well quite often something is amiss in terms of their beliefs and attitudes to themselves and learning. Here is some basic psychology for students

1. Resilience (Kubler-Ross on Change)



The change curve above was first suggested by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross as a way of explaining how people dealt with a trauma such as bereavement or the loss of a limb. It also broadly mirrors how we process more minor difficulties and changes in our lives

During the course of your studies you will have setbacks and difficulties. Resilience is about whether you keep going or give up when faced with difficulties. It is important to recognise that the stages or feelings that you will go through above are completely normal but it is important that you get through it. Your teachers and fellow students will help you.

Researchers (Holdsworth et al – 2017) found that resilient students tend to have a sense of perspective: they don't tend to over-dramatize the problem and they focus on what they can control as they move forward. They also have better health habits in terms of exercise and sleep. They also enjoy connect to others rather than isolating themselves when difficulties occur.

2. Dweck on Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck's work focuses on students beliefs about intelligence and effort (see separate sheet for more information). Some students believe that intelligence is fixed and that some people are innately better than others. Other students have a growth mindset believing that intelligence is something that can be developed and that effort leads to real growth. There is good evidence that whilst we may not be able to do everything we want, a positive growth mindset leads to better achievement

	Fixed mind-set - a desire to look smart	Growth mind-set - a desire to learn
Challenges	avoid them	embrace them
Obstacles	give up easily	persist
Effort	fruitless	the path to mastery
Criticism	ignore, even if useful	learn from it
Success of others	feel threatened by it	be inspired by it

3. Imposter Syndrome

“I just look at all these people, and I think, what the heck am I doing here? They’ve made amazing things. I just went where I was sent.” (Neil Armstrong – the first man on the moon in conversation with Neil Gaiman)

Imposter syndrome is the belief that you are not as talented as others, that your success is down to luck and at some point your lack of ability is going to be exposed and you will be found out for the fraud that you are. It is thought that at least 20% of people suffer from this. (It may even be far higher!) They are often, like Neil Armstrong, high achievers in their field. (Vergauwe et al 2015)

4. Dunning-Kruger effect

The Dunning-Kruger effect is to some extent the opposite of imposter syndrome. The two researchers after whom this is named became interested in this phenomenon after a bank robber McArthur Wheeler robbed a bank in broad daylight after covering his face in lemon juice. (he believed this made people invisible to CCTV cameras and was shocked to be arrested!). Whilst this may be an extreme case, Dunning and Kruger discovered that the majority of us when surveyed about our abilities at certain things tend to lack self-awareness and overestimate our abilities. This effect is more pronounced when we are beginners or are relatively low ability at something. As you start out on A levels your overconfidence may well be your undoing. As you get better you become more realistic and gain a better sense of your own abilities.

5. The Spotlight Effect

Researchers at Cornell University got students to wear an embarrassing T-shirt for the day. Students predicted that over half the students they interacted with would notice the T-shirt. Wrong! It was less than a quarter. The experiment was repeated with a cool and trendy T-shirt producing similar results. This shows that as much as we stress about our appearance and all manner of other things, people think about us and notice our actions far less than we realise. Our sense that we are in the spotlight and that teachers and fellow students are noticing everything and judging us is in fact largely wrong.

6. Victim Mindset

Victim Mindset or Victim Mentality is the belief that we have no control over future events because things outside of our control have happened. This may be due to genuine horrible stuff that has happened in the past (in which case I’m not necessarily talking to you here) or it may be a pattern that we find ourselves in after various minor setbacks. Victim mindset, rather than taking responsibility for our own actions, seeks to cast blame eg) I was late because my dad’s alarm didn’t go off, I didn’t do well in science because each of my science teacher’s picked on me. Where this strategy is successful in gaining sympathy or avoiding punishment it becomes learned behaviour. A healthy response would reflect differently and consider that the events may have some link to our past choices. We are not just objects at the mercy of forces beyond our control, we have the freedom to choose how to respond most of the time.

Bibliography

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