

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE LEARNING ATTITUDE THROUGH RESEARCH



READING ABOUT the latest educational trends in research is a very important part of our work as teachers and administrators. One key figure in the field is Carol S. Dweck, Stanford University psychology professor, and author of the recently published book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Last year, she spoke at the National Association of Independent School's annual conference, and she has also written numerous articles, including "Brainology: Transforming Students' Motivation to Learn." That illuminating article highlights how praise affects students' confidence and their willingness to take risks. Dweck's findings show that students who are praised for their intelligence lost confidence as problems became more challenging, while students praised for their *effort* maintained confidence, motivation, and focus.

In a recent interview, Dweck noted that students "need to learn to welcome hard tasks and to know what to do when they encounter them." What is so important about Dweck's thinking is that she shows how it is possible to encourage students to persist despite failure by helping them to think about learning in a way that emphasizes growth. We need to develop ways to push students to not necessarily view failure or setbacks in a negative light, but to realize and become excited by the prospect of improving themselves. At ECF, I see this approach within the classroom, on the stage or athletic fields, and within the discipline process.

Another great way for students to experience this excitement is through research. After all, doing research is all about improving oneself or at least refining one's skills as a researcher, overcoming challenges, and making discoveries. In many ways, we begin research in a state of failure, as we confront a literally infinite amount of information and whittle it down in order to address specific questions regarding the given topic at hand. Research

is a process where effort truly pays off and opens up a wonderful opportunity for teachers to praise students for those efforts. In other words, the act of research has the power to positively change students' motivation to learn.

As you will read in this issue, across the divisions, students and teachers are reaping the benefits of this classic way of learning by doing research. At Ethical Culture and Fieldston Lower, the research process begins by learning the layout of the buildings and interviewing the inhabitants, then conducting experiments in the laboratories, and holding discussions in the classrooms. Fieldston Middle students become well-versed in all that the Tate Library has to offer them. They immerse themselves in the book collection and the new technological tools that will serve them well throughout their years at our school, and develop their sense of what constitutes appropriate library research methodologies. In the upper school, in addition to many projects and papers, there's the long-term research project of self-discovery that is the college application process. Unsurprisingly, many of our alumni also engage in research in a variety of capacities in their professional lives—from think tanks to Hollywood, from investigative journalism to the practice of law, medicine, business, or to overt research careers in the applied sciences or social sciences. No matter the age, our students come to understand that research is all about identifying precise questions and figuring out the ways to answer them (or often, how not to answer them). These indeed are noble efforts of becoming a better, even more active learner.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark J. Stanek". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mark J. Stanek
Head of School