



Maths is about learning, not performing!

Many students think that their role in maths class is not to learn but to get questions right – to perform. It is important for them to know that maths is about learning, and to know that maths is a growth subject, it takes time to learn and it is all about effort.

Some strategies for making maths a learning, not a performing subject:

1. Grade and test less. Maths is the most over-graded, over-tested subject in the curriculum. Neither grades nor tests have been shown to increase learning, from research, and both make students feel they are performing and not learning. Grades often make students think they are a reflection not of what they have learned but who they are. There is a video reflecting this at <http://youtu.be/eoVLBExuqBO>
2. Instead, give diagnostic comments. These take longer but are extremely valuable and can be done less often. We have worked with teachers who have moved from daily grading to weekly comments with huge improvements from students. Here is an article by Ruth Butler about a study comparing the impact of grades and diagnostic feedback you might want to read: <http://bit.ly/2mpjBZN>
3. Use “assessment for learning” strategies (see sidebar).
4. If you have to grade, then give grades for learning, not for narrow performance eg for asking questions, representing ideas in different ways, explaining work to others, making connections. Assess the multidimensionality of maths, not just a single aspect of it – this is all explained in more detail in my book: Mathematical Mindsets.
5. You may have to give grades to your administration but that doesn’t mean you have to give them to the students. Grades communicate fixed messages about learning and are often counter-productive for students.



Assessment for learning (A4L) teaching strategies have been shown to drastically increase student achievement, if they are used instead of summative tests and grades. It has been estimated that if teachers in England used A4L strategies the achievement of their students would increase so much the country would move, in international comparisons, from the middle of the pack to the top 5 (Black and Wiliam, 1998). <http://www.youcubed.org/resource/assessment-grading/> shares our favorite A4L strategies.