

## Learning Through Failure: Experiential Learning and the Growth Mindset



Junior  
Achievement™



## Failure as a Teaching Tool

Author James Joyce once wrote: "Mistakes are the portals of discovery."

Failure is an everyday part of life, yet it is often overlooked as an opportunity for learning and growth. Culturally speaking, the fear of failure is commonplace in the U.S., [especially with young people](#) learning to navigate the world. [However, unchecked](#), such fear can contribute to procrastination, stagnation, and, ultimately, the inability of affected individuals to reach their potential in life.

With academic performance being measured by grades, it's not surprising that students wishing to minimize the potential for failure [are apt to choose easier subjects](#), procrastinate with more difficult ones, or [find shortcuts](#) that undermine the educational experience altogether. However, there is [ample research](#) that shows failure is a valuable teaching tool for long-term growth and achievement, even if it isn't always rewarded in traditional education settings.



A "[growth mindset](#)" is the belief that one can work through challenges and failures to increase their abilities and improve their outcomes. Research shows that [managing through failure](#) can be an important aspect of developing a growth mindset. Nevertheless, the experience of failure without proper support, mentoring, and guidance can actually contribute to students' fear of failure and failure avoidance, since they may not understand their role in the failure versus circumstances outside their control. That's why a supportive learning environment is so important.

## Experiential Learning, Failure, and Growth Mindset

Learning from experimentation and the potential of failure is a foundational principle of [Experiential Learning Theory](#). By establishing a structured learning environment where trial and error are not only expected but even encouraged, experiential learning settings create a scenario where young learners can begin to cope with the implications of failure and use it as an opportunity to improve and, over time, foster a growth mindset.

## Our Response

Junior Achievement is a global leader in experiential learning. Since its founding in 1919 in the United States, JA has utilized a “learn by doing” approach in its learning experiences. This began with the original “[JA Company Program](#)”, where teens started their own student-run business, to today where students have the opportunity to experience what it is like to be an adult in one of our [Experiential Learning Centers](#) (ELCs) or how to tie what they’ve learned academically to real-world outcomes via the use of case methodology at a [3DE school](#).



Junior Achievement learning experiences aren't just about learning by doing, though. They are [tested and proven experiences](#) that align with [national, state, and local educational standards](#). JA is also unparalleled in its scale of reach, impacting 4.5 million students in the U.S. each year through the support of JA operations in nearly 100 communities nationwide.

## What the Research Says

Our approach is demonstrated to have a positive impact on student mindset. According to [research by Ipsos](#), nine in ten JA Alumni report that the program played an important role in shaping their belief they can achieve goals (89%), their personal development (88%), career path (88%), professional development (86%), or their decision to pursue further education (86%).

Nine in ten JA Alumni agree that the program exposed them to different ways of thinking (91%), made them think of new work opportunities or career paths (89%), motivated them to succeed in their professional life (88%), or that it widened their horizons (87%). Nearly all JA Alumni (98%) would say that because of their involvement with the program, they perceive education as important for future success.

Thirty-six percent would say they perceive education as extremely important, 43 percent as important, and 19 percent as somewhat important as it relates to future success.