

Subject: Realistic Optimism

Date of Release: 16th November 2012

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NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

Realistic Optimism

We are coming close to the end of the examination period, and nearing the time where students will be receiving exam results and their reports, both of which provide feedback on their learning and progress: what they have achieved, their level of understanding, knowledge and abilities, and what areas they may need to work on for further understanding or skill mastery.

While some students will be happy with their results, there may be some that will be disappointed. For those who may not have achieved the results they had hoped for, it is important to not dwell on what may seem to be a 'negative' big picture, but rather take time to focus on and celebrate what achievements were made, and also on what strategies can be used to achieve the results they had hoped for.

Having this perspective is what is known as having 'realistic optimism'. A quote that sums up this concept is: *'The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realistic optimist adjusts the sails.'*

It is not viewing a disappointing result (or other 'bad event') with the perspective of 'this always happens to me' (the pessimist), or a viewpoint of 'I'll do better next time' without actually putting in place any strategies for these improvements to occur (the optimist). Realistic optimists believe they will succeed, but also believe they have to *make success happen* — through things like sustained effort, careful planning, persistence, and choosing the right strategies and accessing the necessary support.

It is therefore important that students reflect upon their exam/assessment preparation and results as a tool for learning:

- What strategies were effective?
- What alternate strategies can be used or what can be modified? I.e. Time management/prioritisation, study techniques, study space, removal of potential distractions, having appropriate study 'de-stress' breaks
- What support is available? I.e. study resources (such as practise exams and revision guides), peer, parent, tutor and/or teacher assistance

As motivational scientist Heidi Grant Halvorson advocates, you can cultivate your realistic optimism by combining a positive attitude with an honest assessment of the challenges that await you. Don't visualize success — visualize the steps you will take in order to make success happen... and then take them!



