

Organic adoption of one classroom technology leads to a seamless way to share other ideas

by [NICHOLE DOBO](#), May 25, 2016

When Jessica Schon decided to start using a new method for managing classroom behaviors, no one in the district had told her to do it.

Instead, Schon started using a free program to track behavior and get children excited about things like staying in line. The children soon became enamored with a plump, green cartoon character sporting a ninja mask, which serves as the program's mascot.

"The kids really get attached to their monsters," said Schon, who teaches first- and second-grade students at Campus Charter School in Brevard County, Florida.

So when the makers of this program started offering [bite-sized video lessons](#) on something called "growth mindset" that she could weave into the day, Schon decided to try it. These lessons featured the same cartoon characters as the behavior management tool.

It wasn't long before the children started mimicking behaviors modeled by the characters, Schon said. Students would watch videos where the characters would work through problems – such as trying and failing – to show students how to respond.

"I had a lot of Negative Nancys at the beginning of the year. They would start something and give up," Schon said. "When [the idea of growth mindset] comes from me, it's like they try to forget it, because I am an adult and they are seven years old. But when they see a little green monster doing it they are like 'Oh!'"

This is the first time ClassDojo has used its application in this way. Before this year the program – which is now in use in so many schools that a map charting all the users looks like a map of McDonalds locations – served simply as a behavior management tool. But its wide adoption by teachers makes it an ideal vehicle for shuttling information and lessons directly to teachers.

The concept of "[growth mindset](#)" has become so talked about and celebrated in education circles that the jargon is hard to escape – and difficult for anyone outside of a school to understand. The idea originated with Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck. Generally speaking, Dweck's research found that children are more

likely to succeed in school if they believe that intelligence is developed rather than fixed at birth. In other words, rather than telling a girl she is gifted in math, an adult ought to praise her for her hard work. (Take a [“growth mindset” quiz](#) developed by Dweck.)

But in a fate suffered by many promising ideas in education, in some places the idea spread in a faddish way. Use of the jargon sometimes outpaced the time taken to think about how to accurately apply the concept. Earlier this year the professor responsible for a similar idea, called “grit,” wrote [an op-ed for The New York Times warning](#) that the some schools had gone so far off course that it threatened to undermine any good it might do for students.

That’s what makes the videos affiliated with the ClassDojo program so interesting. The company worked directly with Dweck’s lab at Stanford to ensure that the videos and lessons they offer are in line with “growth mindset” research.

And it’s given the researchers a lifeline directly to classrooms. They can reach an estimated seven to 10 million students without bushwhacking through the red tape of school boards or superintendents. The creators of ClassDojo, who say they are in two out of three schools nationwide, say they carefully developed the first iteration for growth mindset. For instance, they figured out that most teachers say they have downtime of 10 to 15 minutes that they sometimes need to fill, and that’s about how long each growth mindset lesson lasts.

And in the future they plan to offer additional lessons on other topics – but they are being choosy about what they push out to their audience, said Liam Don, a co-founder of ClassDojo. “We are going to mostly look at well-proven concepts that haven’t reached the scale that they could,” Don said.