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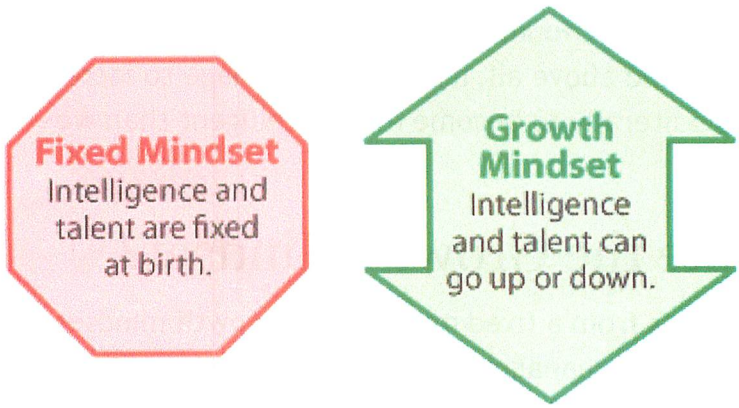
Creating a Growth Mindset in Your Students

Submitted by King on Mon, 2012-03-26 23:00

Belief that you can become smarter and more talented opens the doorways to success. That's what twenty years of research has shown Carol Dweck [1] of Stanford University. She has identified two opposing beliefs about intelligence and talent, beliefs that strongly impact our ability to learn.



Though the fixed mindset has traditionally held sway, many recent studies show that the growth mindset better represents our abilities. Our brains are much more elastic than previously thought, constantly growing new connections. IQ and talent are not fixed, but are mutable based on experience and attitude.

In her book *Mindset* [2], Dweck outlines the dramatic effect that these opposing beliefs have on learners:

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Wants to **prove** intelligence or talent.	Wants to **improve** intelligence or talent.
Avoids challenges for fear of failure.	Engages challenges to improve.
Gives up in the face of tough obstacles.	Persists in overcoming obstacles.
Avoids hard labor.	Sees labor as the path to success.
Treats criticism as an attack.	Treats criticism as an opportunity.
Feels threatened by others' success.	Feels inspired by others' success.

As you can see from this chart, the fixed mindset leads to many of the learning and discipline problems in school, while the growth mindset leads to optimal learning. Recent articles in *Scientific American* [3], *Wired Science* [4], and the *New York Times* [5] cite numerous studies that support Dweck's conclusions.

In one such study, urban Milwaukee students who were at risk for mental retardation were entered into an intensive education program prior to first grade. After the program, a control group scored an average of 83 on the Stanford-Binet IQ test, but the students who had worked in the program had an average IQ of 110. That's an average gain of 27 points, moving from borderline retardation to "bright" intelligence.

Alfred Binet [6] created the IQ test for a very similar application—to raise the intelligence of Parisian schoolchildren. In *Modern Ideas About Children*, he wrote the following:

> "Never!" What a strong word! A few modern philosophers seem to lend their moral support to these deplorable verdicts when they assert that an individual's intelligence is a fixed quantity, a quantity which cannot be increased. We must protest and react against this brutal pessimism. We shall attempt to prove that it is without foundation.
> . . . With practice, training, and above all, method, we manage to increase our attention, our memory, our judgment and literally to become more intelligent than we were before.

How Can I Create the Growth Mindset?

Clearly, if we can shift students from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, we can eliminate many learning challenges and classroom-management issues. But how can we make this mental shift?

5 Steps to Growth

Here's an easy 5-step process to fostering a growth mindset in your classroom:

1. **Believe it.** You can't instill a growth mindset in students until you have it yourself. Start by recognizing your current mindset. It determines the way that you interpret experience.
    - **The fixed mindset is focused on judgment.** Positive experiences mean that you are smart or talented or both. Negative experiences mean that you are dumb or talentless or both.
    - **The growth mindset is focused on improvement.** Positive experiences mean that you are on the right track. Negative experiences mean you have a chance to make changes and grow.

    These mindsets manifest most clearly in the self-talk in your head. Whenever you hear a judging bit of self-talk such as "I'm just no good at this," stop it and replace it with improvement talk: "I want to become better at this."
2. **Teach it.** Now that you are shaping your own mindset toward growth, you can teach your students to do so as well. Tell students they can improve their IQs and talents—which are not fixed. Present the evidence you find in this article and in other resources. Teach students that education is not something someone else gives to them. Education is something they must grab for themselves.

3. **Model it.** Show students how to recognize judging thoughts, how to stop them, and how to replace them with growth thoughts. Make the rule that judging thoughts spoken aloud in your class will be stopped, and the student will need to rephrase the idea as a growth thought. By doing so with external dialogue, you help students recognize judging thoughts in internal dialogue. You also help students monitor each other and shift their thoughts toward growth.

Don't Say	Do Say
I'm so stupid.	What am I missing?
I'm awesome at this.	I seem to be on the right track.
I just can't do math.	I'm going to train my brain in math.
This is too hard.	This is going to take some time.
She's so smart, she makes me sick.	I'm going to figure out how she's doing it.
It's fine the way it is, and yours isn't any better.	That's an interesting idea for improvement.

4. **Nourish it.** Mindsets exist within a larger classroom culture. In your classroom, shift the focus from proving to improving, from product to process. An inquiry-based approach to learning facilitates the growth mindset by embracing challenges, obstacles, and criticisms as chief drivers of learning. Failure can be a great teacher if it is approached not as judgment but as opportunity. That mental shift frees you up as well. If you take some missteps as you are trying to shift the classroom culture, don't be embarrassed. Be empowered to improve.

> "I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."
> —Thomas Edison

5. **Assess it.** A classroom that focuses on summative assessment fosters an environment for a fixed mindset—assessment is all about judgment. A classroom that focuses on formative assessment fosters an environment for the growth mindset—assessment is about learning. That's not to say that summative assessments should be eliminated. Rather, when you focus on the formative side, the summative side becomes a rubber stamp that certifies the learning that students have been doing all along.

Making Yourself Brilliant

In "Learning to Read [7]," Malcolm X tells how, as a young man in prison, he started to acquire "some kind of homemade education." He got a dictionary and copied every word on the first page, down to the punctuation. It took a day. On the next morning, though, he was proud of all the words he'd learned. So he copied the next page. And the next. And eventually, the whole dictionary. That dogged act helped Malcolm X to train his brain and to become one of the most literate and articulate people of the 20th century.

How many Malcolm Xs are you teaching? Help them see their potential. Make it clear to your students

that they are responsible for their own intelligence and talent. They are even responsible for the mindset that helps them develop both. Help them to stop the thoughts that are stopping them, and to open their minds to a wide-open future.

We want to hear from you. What have you noticed about the growth mindset and the fixed mindset? How are you fostering thinking for success? Please write your comments below.

Contact us at
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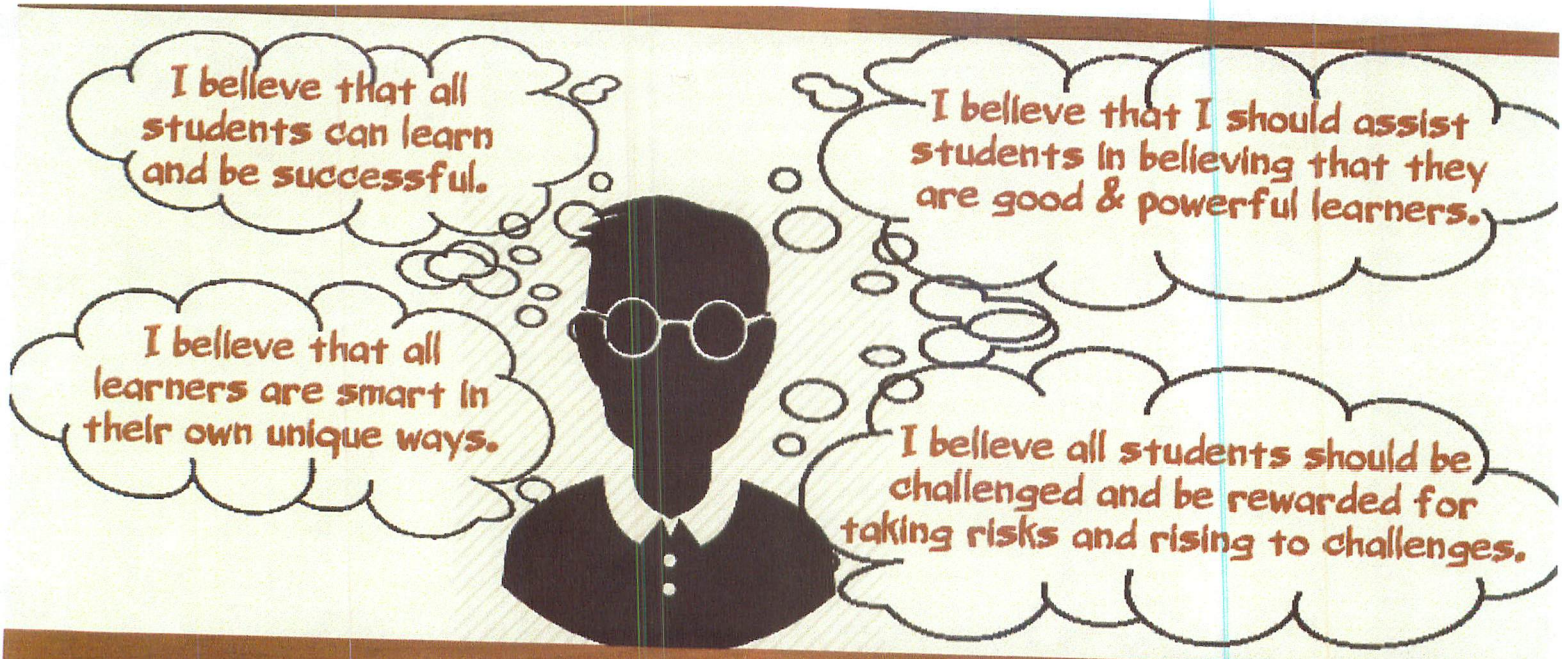
Source URL: http://www.thoughtfullearning.com/blogpost/get-smart-become-talented

Links:

[1] http://mindsetonline.com/abouttheauthor/index.html
[2] http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/index.html
[3] http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/literally-psyched/2012/02/18/hamlet-and-the-power-of-beliefs-to-shape-reality
[4] http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/10/why-do-some-people-learn-faster-2
[5] http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/opinion/16kristof.html
[6] http://www.indiana.edu/~intell/binet.shtml
[7] http://www.smccd.net/accounts/bellr/ReaderLearningtoRead.htm



Growth Mindset Reflection Questions for the Educator

Were my expectations clearly presented to learners?

Did I set and maintain a climate to learn from mistakes and failure?

Did I set a forum for learners to receive authentic feedback from me, peers, and experts?

Did I provide the resources and scaffolding if and when needed?

Did I provide the time and resources to address learner questions and confusions?

Did I praise effort, resourcefulness, and resilience?

Did I ensure that learners were engaged in and motivated by the work?

Did my learners and I consider and use best practices for similar work?