

Fostering a Growth Mindset for K–12 Student Success

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Understanding Mindset

In order for educators to develop and practice culturally relevant pedagogy, they must first understand the theory of mindset. Even further, it is crucial that they comprehend how a fixed or growth mindset can affect their own interactions with, and reactions to, students, as well as a mindset's impact on how students see themselves as learners.

“Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in.”

Isaac Asimov

Dr. Carol Dweck, one of the world's leading researchers in the field of motivation and the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, has done extensive research in the area of mindset. Her findings on the growth mindset support AVID's philosophy of individual determination and its relationship to student success. Developing a growth mindset begins with a look at what the fixed and growth mindsets encompass.

In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck (2006) explains that people with a fixed mindset believe that their talents and abilities are fixed traits (i.e., they have a certain amount and can do nothing to change it). Dweck contends that people with a fixed mindset limit their success: “They become over-concerned with proving their talents and abilities, hiding deficiencies, and reacting defensively to mistakes or setbacks—because deficiencies and mistakes imply a (permanent) lack of talent or ability. People in this mindset will actually pass up important opportunities to learn and grow if there is a risk of unmasking weaknesses.” Alternatively, Dweck describes people with a growth mindset as “believing that their talents and abilities can be developed through passion, education, and persistence. For them, it's not about looking smart or grooming their image. It's about a commitment to learning—taking informed risks and learning from the results, surrounding yourself with people who will challenge you to grow, looking frankly at your deficiencies and seeking to remedy them.”

Dweck's website, Mindset Works, highlights the following findings from the research listed below:

- **Mindsets predict motivation and achievement** (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).
- **Growth-mindset training boosts motivation and achievement** (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).
- **Growth-mindset training narrows the gender gap in math** (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003).
- **Growth-mindset training narrows the racial achievement gap** (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002).
- **Intelligence is malleable** (Ramsden, Richardson, Josse, Thomas, Ellis, Shakeshart, Seguiet, & Price, 2011).

In a 2015 commentary that revisits her mindset work, Dweck reviews her findings and addresses popular misconceptions on fixed and growth mindsets. She states, “Perhaps the most common misconception is simply equating the growth mindset with effort. Certainly, effort is key for students' achievement, but it's not the only thing. Students need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck. They need this repertoire of approaches—not

just sheer effort—to learn and improve.” Dweck also addresses praise, clarifying that educators should not just praise the effort, but also praise the learning and help students “thrive on challenges and setbacks on the way to learning.” Additionally, Dweck voices concern that educators may sometimes use mindsets to justify why some students are not learning, blaming the lack of growth on a student’s fixed mindset. She says, “The growth mindset was intended to help close achievement gaps, not hide them.” Dweck also suggests that, in order to adopt a deeper, truer growth mindset, educators must “legitimize the fixed mindset.” She states, “Let’s acknowledge that (1) we’re all a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets, (2) we will probably always be, and (3) if we want to move closer to a growth mindset in our thoughts and practices, we need to stay in touch with our fixed-mindset thoughts and deeds.” Knowing and understanding our fixed mindset triggers guides the path to a true growth mindset. We have to know which of our actions and characteristics are rooted in a fixed mindset if we want to transform them into actions and characteristics of a growth mindset. Simply put, a growth mindset is more than a proclamation, it is a journey.

Part of that journey involves educators evaluating their own mindset and seeing themselves as learners before they can develop and foster growth mindsets in their students. Administrators who possess a growth mindset seek out learning opportunities, support teachers’ learning, are willing to learn from their teachers, and are responsive to, not defensive of, feedback. Growth-minded teachers collaborate with colleagues and work to strengthen their practice. They believe that students can learn and succeed, and don’t blame them for failure, instead teaching them to persist and learn from their failure. Rather than saying, “These kids can’t learn. They won’t even try,” educators with a growth mindset say, “How are my assumptions about these kids getting in the way of their learning? What do I need to change in order to reach them?”

Dr. Marilee Adams (2013), author of *Teaching That Changes Lives: 12 Mindset Tools for Igniting the Love of Learning*, states, “Mindset represents the set of beliefs and assumptions that we hold about ourselves, others, and the world... it affects how you connect or don’t connect with each child, and in turn how they connect with you.” Adams ascertains that mindset is not a constant; rather, it is continually changing depending on things inside and outside of each person, such as thoughts, feelings, and circumstances. She contends that people are not always able to control which mindset they are in, but they can choose how they react to it. Reacting with what Adams calls a “learner [i.e., growth] mindset” focuses the mind on growth through thoughtful choices, seeking solutions by questioning, and developing a win-win situation. Reacting with a “judger [i.e., fixed] mindset” focuses the mind on placing blame, creates automatic rather than thoughtful reactions, and develops a win-lose situation. The question then for educators is, “Am I in learner mindset or judger mindset right now?”

Once educators develop a growth mindset that embraces the belief that each student can learn and succeed, they can then begin to foster growth mindsets within their students. This book provides activities, reflections, resources, and experiences to assist educators in creating a growth mindset within themselves and their students.

Growth Mindset : What Can I Say to Myself? Example

Instead of...	Try Thinking...
I'm not good at this.	I'm not good at this yet, but I'll be much better with practice.
I'm awesome at this.	I'm on the right track.
I give up.	I'll use some of the strategies that we've learned.
This is too hard.	This may take some time and effort.
I can't make this any better.	I can always improve, so I'll keep on trying.
I just can't do math.	I'm going to train my brain in math.
I made a mistake.	Mistakes help me learn better.
She's so smart; I'll never be that smart.	I'm going to figure out how she does it, so I can try it.
Plan A didn't work.	Good thing the alphabet has 25 more letters.
It's good enough.	Is it really my best work?

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Mindset Scenarios

Read each scenario and think about whether it is most connected to growth-mindset or fixed-mindset thinking. Be able to justify your decisions.

<p>James' teacher knows that he likes history, so she asks him to design a project to enter in the district's History Fair. James can't wait to get started because he likes a challenge.</p>	<p>Janelle has always struggled with math. When her teacher starts to introduce a new concept involving geometry, Janelle doesn't listen because she knows that she will never get it. She thinks, "Why listen, I am no good in math."</p>
<p>Jose wants to make the basketball team. He has spent 15 hours each week this summer practicing free throws and playing in pick-up games in his neighborhood. When school starts, the coach allows him to try out, and then tells him that he didn't make the team. Jose is very disappointed and tells his family, "I'm no good at basketball. No matter how hard I work, I will never make the team." His father responds, "I was never any good at it either; it must be genetic."</p>	<p>Tyrone likes to write and has just received peer feedback about his latest story from his writing group. They like his story, but are confused about the ending—some things just didn't make sense. Tyrone asks them a few questions to get more information, and then develops a plan to revise his story to make it better.</p>
<p>Jordan plays the saxophone in the school band. He has always liked music and wants to earn first chair. He comes close, but never seems to make it. He knows that he will need to keep practicing and talks to his music teacher for some tips so that he can improve.</p>	<p>Sheena studied hard for her biology exam and was shocked to learn that her grade was much lower than she expected. Her best friend didn't study at all and got an A. Sheena is angry with her teacher and thinks that the teacher doesn't like her.</p>
<p>Ling enjoys her ballet class, but lately, she has been making lots of mistakes. She doesn't like to mess up in front of others and is afraid that they will think she is clumsy. She tells her mom that she wants to quit ballet.</p>	<p>Mrs. Jackson is monitoring her students during silent reading. She sees that Nathan has stopped reading and has his head on his desk. When Mrs. Jackson asks Nathan to sit up and keep reading, he slams his hand on the book and says, "I hate reading. I am too slow and will never be able to read all of this."</p>

4.1 My Mindset

k-3

4-6



Student Objective

Students will develop an understanding of the concepts of fixed and growth mindsets and begin to focus on developing growth-mindset thinking.

Overview

In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck's (2006) research showed that intelligence is malleable, and teaching students about how the brain works, along with the concepts of fixed and growth mindsets, is the first step toward developing their own growth mindset. This activity involves three class periods, but educators may choose to complete it in two sessions.

Materials/Set-Up

- Educator Resource:
 - 4.1a: Growth Mindset: What Can I Say to Myself? Example
- Student Handouts:
 - 4.1b: My Brain
 - 4.1c: Mindset Scenarios
 - 4.1d: Growth Mindset: What Can I Say to Myself?
 - 4.1e: Growth Mindset: Frayer Model
- 5x7" index cards, with either *Agree* or *Disagree* written on them (one pair for each student)

Instructional Steps

Day 1:

- Conduct a pre-assessment to see what students already know about their brain and how it works. Distribute the My Brain handout on page 121 and direct students to draw a picture within the outline of the head, showing what they think their brains might look like. At the bottom of the page, students should write down all of the information that they already know about their brain.
- Collect and review the student responses in order to give feedback the following day.
- Tell students that you are going to read three sentences (from a Carol Dweck workshop on www.mindsetworks.com), and they should show if they agree or disagree with each of them. Students can use agree and disagree cards, raise or lower hands, or signal thumbs-up or thumbs-down to show their responses. This provides the educator with additional information about the current beliefs of their students.
 - Everyone can learn new things. (Growth-mindset belief)
 - Some kids are born smarter than others. (Fixed-mindset belief)
 - We can change how smart we are. (Growth-mindset belief)

Day 2:

- Give students feedback on the pre-assessments by sharing common themes that resulted.
- Utilizing the research and work of Dweck (2006), introduce the concept of mindset and explain to students, with the following talking points, that there are two types of mindsets: fixed and growth.
 - A mindset is comprised of “beliefs about yourself and your most basic qualities.”
 - “In a fixed mindset, people believe that their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort.” Dweck’s research suggests that students who have adopted a fixed mindset have the belief that they are either “smart” or “dumb,” and there is no way to change this.
 - “In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.” Dweck’s research suggests that students who embrace growth mindsets have the belief that they can learn more or become smarter if they work hard and persevere.
- Distribute the Mindset Scenarios handout and ask students to work in pairs to categorize the scenarios into either fixed- or growth-mindset thinking. Students may cut the scenarios apart and group them or write them in a two-column chart—use whatever process works best.
- Debrief by having students share their justifications for how they grouped their words.

Day 3:

- Explain to students that in this classroom, they are going to work on developing growth mindsets.
- Distribute the Growth Mindset: What Can I Say to Myself? handout and explain that the sentences on the left are examples of things that a person with a fixed mindset might say.
- Utilizing the Growth Mindset: What Can I Say to Myself? Example resource, model with students how to change the first sentence on the left (the fixed-mindset thinking) into a sentence that shows growth-mindset thinking and write it on the right. Ask students to share other ways that they might change it and why their changes are examples of growth-mindset thinking. Explain that there are many ways—not just one right answer—to change the original thinking into a growth-mindset statement.

- Direct students to pair up and work to complete the rest of the sentences together.
 - Students may put more than one response in the right-hand column.
- After completing the right-hand column, have pairs group with another pair to form a quad. Within the quad, students should share their responses.
- Add student responses and the growth-mindset scenarios to a Growth Mindset Wall.
 - Creating a space that displays words, phrases, quotes, visuals, and scenarios that relate to growth-mindset thinking provides a visual reminder for both the students and educator to think with a growth mindset.
- Have students keep their completed handouts in their notebooks as a reminder and reference for using growth-mindset thinking.
- As a summative activity, have students complete the Growth Mindset: Frayer Model handout by developing their own definition of growth mindset, creating a visual representation for growth mindset, and sharing examples and non-examples of growth-mindset actions or thinking.

Extension

- To increase rigor, spend extended time teaching students about the brain and how it works. Advocates of fostering growth-mindset thinking, such as Carol Dweck, Zaretta Hammond, and Mary Cay Ricci, promote teaching students about the brain as a critical step in developing growth mindsets, as students must learn that their brain is malleable and can change and grow. The following resource list offers ideas to engage younger students in activities for learning about the brain:
 - The Learning Brain [How Does My Brain Work? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgLYkV689s4>)]
 - The Learning Brain: Neuroscience [series of online videos about the brain (<http://www.bioedonline.org/lessons-and-more/resource-collections/the-learning-brain-neuroscience>)]
 - Neuroscience for Kids (<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/interr.html>)
 - Brain Jump (<http://www.kizoomlabs.com/products/brain-jump>)
 - *Your Fantastic Elastic Brain: Stretch It, Shape It*, by JoAnn Deak, Ph.D. (<http://www.deakgroup.com/our-educators/joann-deak-phd/your-fantastic-elastic-brain>).

Growth Mindset : What Can I Say to Myself? Example

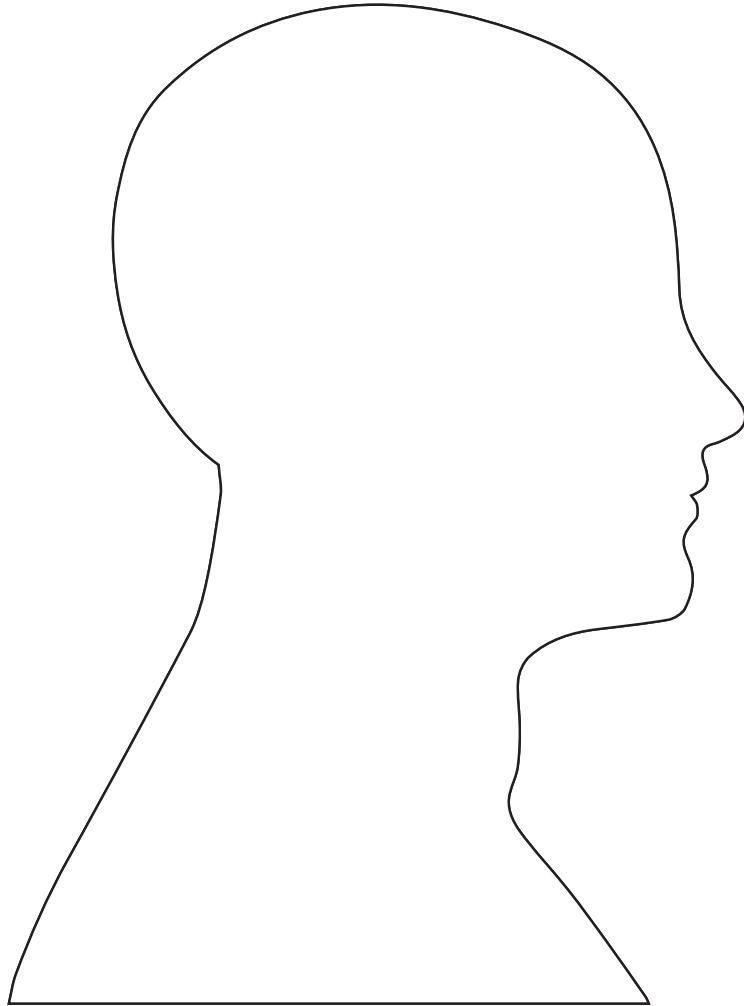
Instead of...	Try Thinking...
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I give up.	I'll use some of the strategies that we've learned.
This is too hard.	This may take some time and effort.
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I just can't do math.	I'm going to train my brain in math.
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She's so smart; I'll never be that smart.	I'm going to figure out how she does it, so I can try it.
Plan A didn't work.	Good thing the alphabet has 25 more letters.
It's good enough.	Is it really my best work?

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My Brain

Name: _____ Date: _____

Draw a picture of how you envision your brain appearing inside of your head. At the bottom of the page, write down all of the information that you already know about your brain.



Mindset Scenarios

Read each scenario and think about whether it is most connected to growth-mindset or fixed-mindset thinking. Be able to justify your decisions.

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<p>Jose wants to make the basketball team. He has spent 15 hours each week this summer practicing free throws and playing in pick-up games in his neighborhood. When school starts, the coach allows him to try out, and then tells him that he didn't make the team. Jose is very disappointed and tells his family, "I'm no good at basketball. No matter how hard I work, I will never make the team." His father responds, "I was never any good at it either; it must be genetic."</p>	<p>Tyrone likes to write and has just received peer feedback about his latest story from his writing group. They like his story, but are confused about the ending—some things just didn't make sense. Tyrone asks them a few questions to get more information, and then develops a plan to revise his story to make it better.</p>
<p>Jordan plays the saxophone in the school band. He has always liked music and wants to earn first chair. He comes close, but never seems to make it. He knows that he will need to keep practicing and talks to his music teacher for some tips so that he can improve.</p>	<p>Sheena studied hard for her biology exam and was shocked to learn that her grade was much lower than she expected. Her best friend didn't study at all and got an A. Sheena is angry with her teacher and thinks that the teacher doesn't like her.</p>
<p>Ling enjoys her ballet class, but lately, she has been making lots of mistakes. She doesn't like to mess up in front of others and is afraid that they will think she is clumsy. She tells her mom that she wants to quit ballet.</p>	<p>Mrs. Jackson is monitoring her students during silent reading. She sees that Nathan has stopped reading and has his head on his desk. When Mrs. Jackson asks Nathan to sit up and keep reading, he slams his hand on the book and says, "I hate reading. I am too slow and will never be able to read all of this."</p>

Growth Mindset: What Can I Say to Myself?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instead of...	Try Thinking...
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I'm awesome at this.	
I give up.	
This is too hard.	
I can't make this any better.	
I just can't do math.	
I made a mistake.	
She's so smart; I'll never be that smart.	
Plan A didn't work.	
It's good enough.	

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Growth Mindset: Frayer Model

Name: _____ Date: _____

Definition:	Visual Representation:
Examples:	Non-examples:

Growth Mindset

FOCUSED NOTES



TOPIC/OBJECTIVE:

NAME:

CLASS/PERIOD:

DATE:

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

SUMMARY/REFLECTION: