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## **Why a 'Growth Mindset' Won't Work**

By Peter DeWitt on July 17, 2015 9:35 AM

Stanford professor Carol Dweck's work is being used all over the world. When we look at what school should epitomize...the growth mindset should be at the center. Many adults who work in schools say we need to get away from a fixed mindset, because a student's intelligence and future are not set. There is always room for growth.

But what if our actions in school contribute to the reason why a growth mindset has a low effect size?

Recently, John Hattie gave a keynote at the Annual Visible Learning Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Over 1,000 attendees from all over the world sat in the audience when Hattie gave a keynote focusing on *The Science of How We Learn*, which is the title of his book that was published 2 years ago.

As Hattie was going through the Skill, the Will and the Thrill of learning, he put up a slide that said, "Growth vs. Fixed mindset - .19." For those of you who don't know, and for full disclosure, I work with John as a Visible Learning Trainer. I gave up being a school principal in a community I loved to work with him. I write about his work from time to time because it provokes some of my best thinking. And because I'm such a huge fan of the growth mindset (I barely graduated from high school and was retained in elementary school), this slide poked my own hornet's nest.

We usually look for effect sizes that are .40 or above, which is what Hattie refers to as the Hinge Point. The Hinge Point provides a year's worth of growth for a year's input. A .19 is concerning because it is so much lower than the Hinge Point. The beauty of Hattie's work is that an influence with a low effect size (ex. Growth vs. Fixed Mindset) doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. The low effect size may be due to how the adults in the classroom or school building approach the influence, and we may have to change how we approach it.

As Hattie continued to speak, he said the reason why growth vs. fixed mindset has a low effect size is due to the fact that adults have a fixed mindset and keep treating students accordingly, so right now the effect size is low, and will continue to stay low unless we change our practices in the classroom. We put students in ability groups, they get scores on high stakes tests that help label them, and then we place them in Academic Intervention Services (AIS) which adds to their fixed mindset. Once students enter into AIS or Special Education, very few leave.

Students are conditioned to have a fixed mindset, and it's due to us.

What can we do differently?

First and foremost, we have to get away from having a fixed mindset because it has terrible implications for how we treat students. We do not have a crystal ball, and we shouldn't treat students who struggle like they will struggle for the rest of their lives. It's like a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we treat students like they will always struggle...they may always struggle.

Besides...

If students aren't doing well in our classrooms it may not be due to them and may require that we change the way we teach. "Change the environment and not the child." When we use ability groups, categorize students by test scores, and do not instruct in a variety of ways, we will continue to treat students with a fixed mindset. Our fixed mindset puts them at a greater risk of having a fixed mindset. We need to try to do the following:

Less Testing - Yes, I know. We don't feel like we have control over this but we do have control over parts of it. We can continue to speak up about the harmful way that high stakes testing is being used, but we can also change the way we use the tests we create and use in our classrooms. First of all, use less summative testing. Formative assessment is the sweet spot. Be less concerned about grades and more concerned about formative assessment. Join Teachers Throwing Out Grades and read this blog by Shirley Clarke.

More feedback - If we want things like class size to matter more, than we need to change the way we provide feedback. Reflect on the feedback you provide to students. Does the feedback go deeper as the students gain more expertise in the topic? Or do we just slap a grade or a sticker on a paper and say "Great job!" Praise, although great to hear, does not move learning forward.

Flexible Grouping - When we put students in ability groups like Lions, Tigers and Bears, something I was guilty of, they know which group has the high achieving students and others who are not as gifted in the curricular area. Students, no matter their academic level, can provide effective feedback to each other if it has been modeled correctly.

Different Questioning - 95% of questions stay in the surface level. According to Hattie's research, Experienced teachers ask 75% surface and 25% deep. Expert teachers ask 75% that are deep and 25% that are surface. Check out SOLO Taxonomy for alternatives.

Stop talking so much - "Teachers ask more than 200 questions per hour," which means wait time is low and students are not getting the opportunity to talk with one another. Try to do a Think, Pair, Share or cooperative conversations.

In the End

We talk a lot about the growth mindset but our actions may be counterproductive to putting it into action. A growth mindset is so vitally important for adults and students. Adults need to have that mindset for their own growth but more importantly for the growth of their students.

Talking about the growth mindset is not good enough. Our actions are where the rubber hits the road. If we believe the growth mindset is important, and believe that it should have a higher effect size, then we need to follow up with the actions to make it happen.

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