

Transforming Fixed Mindsets into Growth Mindsets

WHEN BRAINOLOGY received CHADD's Innovative Program of the Year award back in 2008, far fewer educators were aware of the benefits of a "growth" mindset. "That's no longer the case," says Ed Briceño, CEO of Mindset Works, the web-based company that develops and distributes Brainology and other growth mindset programs to schools and families in the United States and abroad. "Today, entire schools are embracing a growth mindset." Mindset Works was created to provide them direction, guidance, and support.

Fixed versus growth mindsets

According to Stanford University psychology professor Carol Dweck, PhD, most students define intelligence in one of two ways: either as something that exists in a fixed amount or as something malleable.

Those with fixed mindsets view mistakes as a reflection of how smart they are. As a consequence, they often refuse to persist at academic or other related tasks once mistakes occur, all in the name of feeling and looking smart.

Those who believe that intelligence is malleable see mistakes, failures, and setbacks not as experiences to fear, but rather as ones to learn from and grow. Students with these growth mindsets view their potential not as something that is predetermined, but as something that can be expanded by working hard and effectively, and actively working to become better.

Brainology was designed to help transform fixed mindsets into growth mindsets. While the program was intended primarily for middle school students, Briceño indicates that schools have also successfully adapted its lessons to lower and higher grades as well. In addition, the company now offers online teacher training resources for educators at all grade levels.

Brainology

Drawing upon advances in our understanding of brain plasticity, Brainology's fun, animated, interactive lessons teach students how the human brain physically changes itself when exercised. Students develop a new understanding of brain functions, including how thinking occurs, how learning and memory work, how they can develop and change their own brains, and most importantly, how they can use

knowledge of the brain and its functions to improve their study habits and grow their skills in and out of school.

According to Briceño, students who complete Brainology are more growth mindset-oriented. But when it comes to translating their new awareness into day-to-day practice, it is helpful for their environment to be growth mindset-oriented as well, with considerations such as whether tests are constructed in ways that support a malleable view of abilities, whether teachers value and celebrate effort and struggle throughout the school day, and whether teachers themselves model growth and lifelong learning versus fixed mindsets.

Tests as opportunities to learn from mistakes

Several articles appear in the Mindset Works newsletter and on the website providing guidelines to teachers on how to structure tests through a growth mindset lens.

Among the recommendations:

- Ensure that students don't view tests as a measure of how smart they are or of their future potential but rather as what they've learned so far. Also ensure that they know what they can do to learn more.
- Remind students that we want to spend most of our time learning and improving, not showing how good we are.
- Help students focus on test items that were confusing or that resulted in incorrect test responses. Then provide students opportunities to learn more in these areas, and to demonstrate their growth on a retest. And be sure that students recognize their growth. This communicates the importance of working hard, not giving up, and learning from mistakes—key features of a growth mindset.

The Mindset Works website offers downloadable test-taking reminders for students, such as:

We take standardized tests...

1. To show how much you are learning.
2. To show how much more growth you could make—that's exciting!
3. To show if you know the material that is on the test.

Other test-taking reminders include:

- A test does not show how smart you are.
- A test does not show your potential. (No test can measure that.)



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- Relax, focus, use your best effort. This is a great chance to dig in and find out what you know. Then use the information when you get your test back to grow.

Valuing and celebrating effort and struggle

According to Dweck's research, those who praise students for their intelligence when they complete tasks successfully may be inadvertently fostering a fixed mindset. After all, if we're smart when we succeed at something, it can mean we're not when we fail. Students who believe this might now avoid trying things that are too hard for fear of failing and appearing unintelligent.


Ed Briceño says it's important instead to value and celebrate effective effort. And it's especially important to value and celebrate "stretch" mistakes—the ones we make when taking on difficult tasks that stretch us beyond our abilities. Stretch mistakes are signs that we're taking on challenges, which is necessary for learning, growing, and strengthening our abilities.

Modeling a growth mindset

After several years of studying practices that help students embrace a growth mindset, Briceño

has become acutely aware of the power of adult modeling. Students are more likely to embrace a growth mindset when their teachers do the same. As a result, Mindset Works has developed training packages to help teachers transform fixed mindsets into growth mindsets as well. There's even a training and resource package for creating a growth mindset schoolwide.

For school-aged children impacted by ADHD and other learning differences, the thought of making mistakes in front of their teachers and classmates is a very scary proposition. It doesn't have to be this way. Research shows that *all* children can learn to embrace a growth mindset. Mindset Works can provide the tools, resources, and direction to help bring this about.

Learn more at www.mindsetworks.com or e-mail Mindset Works directly at info@mindsetworks.com. 

*A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego. He is a contributing editor to Attention magazine and a member of its editorial advisory board, a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board, and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.*