Chapter 1: The Mindsets

Chapter 1 presents the two different mindsets—fixed and growth. Ms. Dweck reveals that she came upon the idea of researching mindsets by stating, “I never thought anyone loved failure.” Failing and continuing to attempt are cornerstones of the growth mindset. It is important for educators to discuss this mindset as it relates to the presence of failure and perseverance in education.

The growth mindset is the belief that you can cultivate and improve upon your abilities through practice and effort. Someone with a fixed mindset believes these abilities are predetermined and largely unchangeable.

Activity:
Complete “Evaluate Your Mindset” on the Mindset website: www.mindsetonline.com
What is your mindset? What do you think your mindset says about you and your work?

Discussion Questions:
1. Is there a talent or ability you would like to have but don’t? How do you know you don’t have it—what’s the evidence? What are one or two things you might do to develop that talent or ability?

2. Think of a time when you faced an important opportunity or challenge with a fixed mindset. What were your thoughts and worries (about your abilities, about other people’s judgments, about the possibility of failure, etc.)? Now think of that same opportunity or challenge using a growth mindset. How might the situation have been different? Can you use a growth mindset to assist with plans and strategies you’re thinking about now?

3. Think about students you have (or had in the past) with both fixed and/or growth mindsets. How has this chapter helped you better understand these students?
Chapter 2: Inside the Mindsets

In learning about the two mindsets it is crucial to remember that you have a choice. Even if your mindsets are fixed in some areas, they are beliefs and can be changed. If you can change your mind you can change your mindsets. This is important because mindsets affect many aspects of life—how you view success and failure, the effort you put into what you do, how you approach a challenge, how you communicate with your students, and more.

Views of Success, Interest, and Intelligence

Everyone is born a learner—that is, with a growth mindset. Babies push themselves to do incredibly challenging tasks like learning to walk and talk, and they don’t give up but plow ahead. So what changes when these same children later stop following their natural desire to learn? Dweck maintains they become afraid of not being “smart” and develop a fixed mindset which hinders their ability to want to learn challenging things. They are afraid that struggling means they are not smart and stop doing things that are challenging. This chapter gives numerous examples of studies and instances that illustrate how differing mindsets affected people’s interest, attentiveness, and ability to learn.

The Mindsets and Failure

The mindsets also affect how people view failure. When you have a fixed mindset, failure defines who you are. Failure gets transformed from an action (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure). Of course failure can be painful if you have a growth mindset as well, but it doesn’t completely define you. It’s a problem or a setback to be faced and learned from. Those with the growth mindset often use the failure to improve themselves. So, how do those with fixed mindsets respond to failure? Dweck found that these responses were often negative (apathy, blaming others, making excuses, depression) because the people did not believe they were able to change their situation. When people were taught the growth mindset, it changed the way they reacted when they got depressed. Mindsets are an important part of who you are, and they can be changed.

Activity:

How do schools sometimes encourage fixed mindsets? List school structures, practices, or labels that foster fixed mindsets then identify ways to shift thinking towards a growth mindset using those same structures or practices. Complete What Does Mindset Look Like (handout) to support your thinking.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think of something you’ve always wanted to learn or do but didn’t because you weren’t sure you would be successful. What steps could you take to learn the skill or overcome your fear of failure?

2. Do you ever feel superior to other people? If so, understand that you are one failure away from feeling inferior. Using the growth mindset, discuss ways of feeling confident and worthy without feeling superior.

3. Re-read the section about the teacher’s reaction to having to judge a student based on one score (p. 28-29). Consider the ways in which educators make decisions based on fixed thinking. How could we use the same information in a growth mindset?
Chapter 3: The Truth about Ability and Accomplishment

There are many myths about ability and achievement. This chapter is about the real ingredients of achievement and what makes some people achieve less and some more. Many people think achievement comes effortlessly to talented people, but that is not typical. The fixed mindset limits achievement, fills people’s minds with interfering thoughts, and turns other people into judges instead of allies. The same is often true of praise and positive/negative labels. When people are praised for their ability, they may be afraid of damaging that perception if they struggle and stop challenging themselves. Conversely, when people are praised for their hard work, they often embrace future challenges. Overall, a growth mindset encourages people to develop their minds fully by embracing challenges and avoiding limiting thoughts which might hold them back.

Activity:

Mindset Questioning Sort. In groups or pairs, divide the slips in the bag into two columns—Growth-Minded Responses and Fixed-Minded Responses. Discuss how to foster a growth mindset in your classroom through your words.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you always assume that success came from innate talent or ability? Discuss people you know who are brilliant or talented but not necessarily successful. Also discuss people who are not so brilliant or talented but who are highly successful. How did they do it?

2. Have you ever trusted someone’s negative evaluation of your ability or talent? Think about it now. How were they able to judge your potential?

3. How does your mindset about your students affect how you teach?
Chapter 4: Sports: The Mindset of a Champion

This chapter gives background information on numerous sports successes and talks about what made each successful. While physical attributes and natural ability might make it easier for someone to become a successful athlete, it takes character (or a growth mindset) to remain successful. Sports researchers have come up with three important findings. First, those with the growth mindset found success in doing their best, in learning and improving, and in the process of preparing for competition. Secondly, they found setbacks motivating—if they discovered a weakness they would work to overcome it, or develop other skills to minimize the weaker area. Finally, athletes with a growth mindset took charge of the process that brought and maintained success. Character and heart are words used to describe champions and come from the growth mindset, with its focus on self-development, self-motivation, and responsibility.

Activity:
Think of a favorite or interesting athlete. Do you assume he or she is successful because they are a “natural?” Find out about this athlete’s background, practice habits, or training regime then ask yourself the same question.

Discussion Questions:
1. How are teaching and coaching similar? How can mindsets of athletes and students affect their performance on the field and in the classroom?

2. Is there a sport you’ve always wanted to try but haven’t because you believe you would not be successful? What is the sport and how could you start to learn it?

3. Does your joy in sports or other competition come from playing your hardest or from winning? Do you take losses really hard? Why? What do losses mean about you, your ability, or your image of yourself?

I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.

- Michael Jordan
Chapter 5: Business and Leadership
Successful business leaders typically possess a growth mindset. Rather than trying to prove they are better than others, they focus on trying to improve. Leaders with a fixed mindset believe that some people are superior and others are inferior and their companies are a reflection of their own superiority. These leaders don’t bother building strong, collaborative teams because they may see themselves as geniuses who only need helpers to implement their ideas. A danger this type of business leader faces is the development of “groupspeak” within the organization which can discourage creativity and limit improvement. Business leaders who have a growth mindset are more likely to encourage similar mindsets among employees, thereby encouraging innovation, hard work, and productivity.

Discussion Questions:
1. Do you think leaders are born rather than made, as in “a born leader?” Why?
2. Break up business/educational leadership into its separate parts—knowledge of the organization, management skills, negotiation skills, planning for the future, and any others you can think of. Are each of these traits learnable or not? What does this tell you about becoming a better leader?

Chapter 6: Relationships: Mindsets in Love (or not)
This section deals with personal relationships and is not summarized for this educational book study.

Discussion Questions: (optional)
1. Think of a time when you felt rejected. Did you ruminate and harbor ill or revengeful feelings? What could you take from an especially painful rejection that might be useful or constructive for current or future relationships?
2. Do you close yourself off to certain relationships because you need perfection/total alignment in every way? Is this desirable or even possible? Think of people who are wonderful additions to your life in spite of their imperfections. Think of people who include you in their circle despite your imperfections.
3. How do you handle criticism or perceived criticism? Are you able to hear and consider it or do you make excuses for why it’s not your fault? What do you think criticism means? How might you handle it differently in the future?
Chapter 7: Parents, Teachers, and Coaches: Where do Mindsets Come From?

This chapter focuses on the people who impart, often inadvertently, a certain mindset to children and students. Every day teachers send messages to students about how to think of themselves. These can be growth-mindset messages: you are developing and I am interested in your growth. Or they can be fixed-mindset messages: your traits are permanent and I'm going to judge them. Of course no one sets out to do the latter. This is why it's important to learn to distinguish between these two types of messages and purposefully help students develop growth mindsets. Praising ability or intelligence often harms motivation and performance because students become afraid of making mistakes or appearing less than smart. The best thing we can do is to teach students to love challenges, see mistakes as opportunities, and enjoy effort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fixed Mindset</th>
<th>Comment from Teacher</th>
<th>How Student Might Internalize</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You learned that so quickly—you're really smart!</td>
<td>If I don't learn something quickly I must not be smart.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're brilliant—you learned that without even studying!</td>
<td>I should be able to learn without studying and if I can't there's something wrong with me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math is not your strong suit but you are a great reader.</td>
<td>I should give up on learning math because it's hard and I can't do it very well.</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth Mindset</th>
<th>Comment from Teacher</th>
<th>How Student Might Internalize</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wow, you tried all kinds of strategies on that math problem until you finally got it. Good for you!</td>
<td>It's ok to make mistakes and struggle—just keep working until you get it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You took on a really challenging science project. It will take a lot of work and you're going learn a lot of great things.</td>
<td>Engaging in challenges is worthwhile and results in learning new things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That homework was so long and involved. I really admire the way you concentrated and finished it.</td>
<td>I can complete challenging tasks if I concentrate and keep working.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Everyone learns in a different way. Let's keep trying to find the way that works best for you.</td>
<td>I'm not stupid, I just need to keep working until we find what works best for me.</td>
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Activity:
Think of a specific instance where a student failed or was not successful learning what you were attempting to teach. Write down at least 3 things you could have said to foster more of a growth mindset in that student to keep them from giving up. Use examples from the book to help.

Discussion Questions:
1. Do you praise your students to make them feel smart? How could you give growth-oriented praise instead?
2. Do you excuse your child or student’s failures so you won’t harm their self-esteem? Think of how you might use these occasions to teach a growth mindset and help them succeed.

Learning Support Services, Austin ISD. From Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, by Carol S. Dweck; mindsetonline.com; and themainidea.net
3. What are some ways you can put the growth-mindset strategies into practice in your classroom?
Chapter 8: Changing Mindsets: A Workshop

Mindsets frame the running account that constantly takes place in people’s heads. These mindsets guide the whole interpretation process. A fixed mindset creates beliefs focused on judgment. A growth mindset creates beliefs focused on change. It is possible to help people/students replace the judging going on in their heads with a growth mindset in which they ask, “What can I learn from this? How can I improve?” Simply teaching about the mindsets helps people to shift their thinking about intelligence and talent. The brain does not have a fixed amount of intelligence. Instead, it is more like a muscle in that it changes and gets stronger when used. The more you challenge yourself, the more the brain grows. When students learn this they end up feeling empowered to know they can be in charge of the growth of their own brains. Changing your mindset doesn’t occur by learning a few tricks, however. The goal is for students to change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Students benefit when adults model this mindset, make comments that reflect a growth mindset, and who reward student behavior that aligns with a growth mindset.

Activity:
In pairs or groups, complete Fostering a Growth Mindset in the Classroom (handout) by creating a list of questions and statements that reflect what a growth mindset would sound like in the classroom. To extend this activity, consider collecting these examples and creating a master list to be distributed at a later date to help participants remember their words are important.

Discussion Questions:
1. Think of a time when you had a major setback, failure, or rejection in your life. Did you hear the fixed mindset voice in your head? What did it say? Now, how would you answer with a growth mindset voice?

2. Think of something about yourself or in your life that you’ve wanted to change. Has a fixed mindset prevented you from making the change? Think about it from a growth mindset and develop a concrete plan for change.

3. What steps can you take in your classroom to change the mindset of your students?

4. What are two important concepts or ideas you can take away from this book?