

## Mindsets and Motivation as the Keys to Academic Success

March 27, 2015

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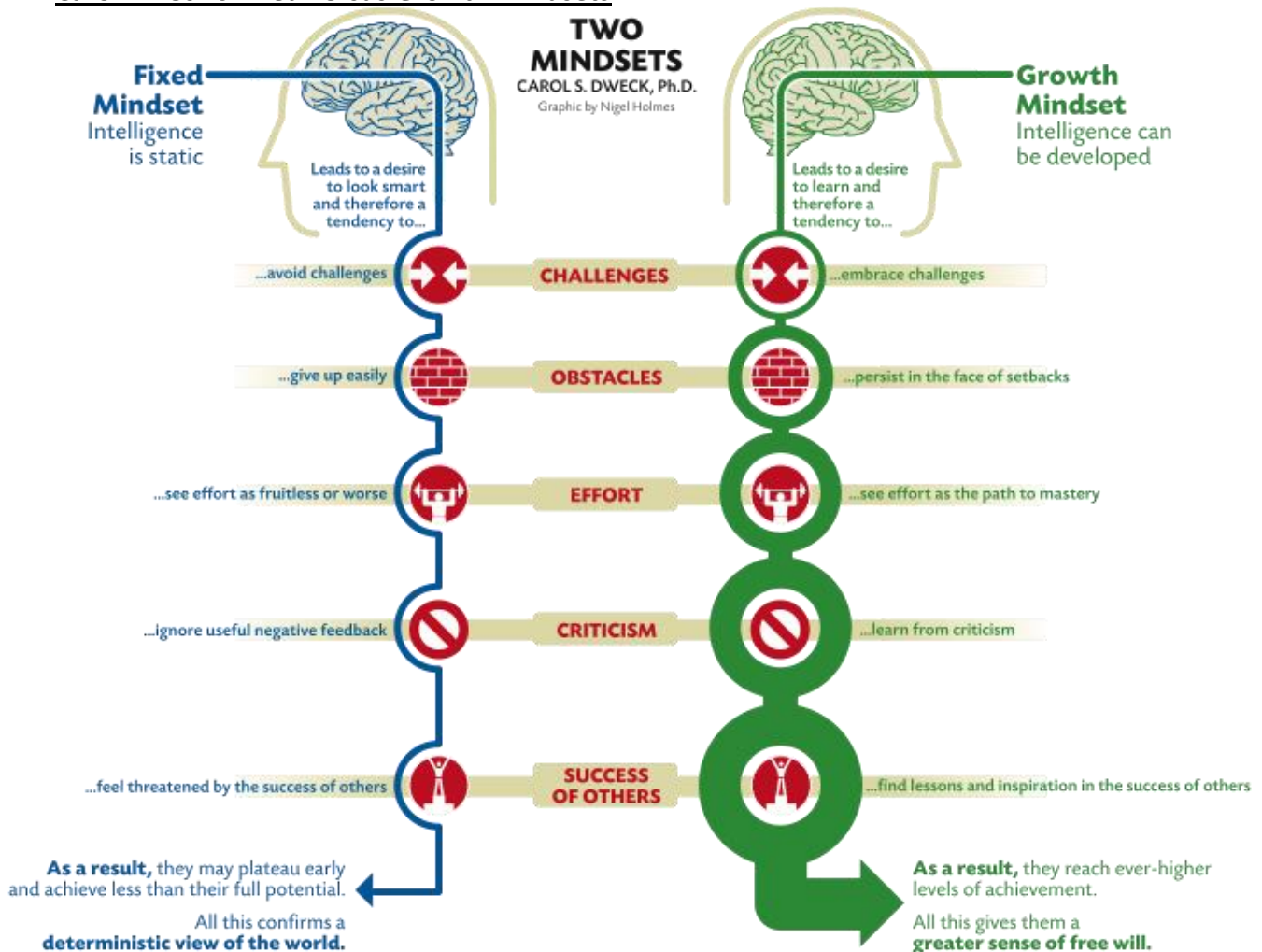
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### Messages that influence motivation

- Motivating students to do well in school involves more than just providing encouragement.
- Messages that we intend as helpful may have effects we did not intend
  - Praise can be harmful, comfort or offers of help can imply lack of ability
- The key is to understand how students interpret our messages, verbal and nonverbal, intentional and unintentional
- Teachers’ responses of pity, anger, praise, or blame communicate the teachers’ assumptions about the child’s ability
  - Younger children see high effort as indicating high ability, but see effort as indicating low ability when they get older

### Carol Dweck’s Fixed versus Growth Mindsets



### Messages that encourage a fixed mindset:

- *You have a certain amount of math intelligence and you can't really do much to change it.*
- *It's OK, not everyone is a "math person."*
- *You must be smart at these problems.*
- *You're so smart!*
- *This must be your lucky day.*
- *Maybe this just isn't something you're good at. Let's try something else.*
- *He's a bully.*
- *She's so bright. She does well and doesn't even have to study.*
- Interpret a student's performance as indicating who they are as a person.

### Messages that encourage a growth mindset:

- Praise the specific process or actions a student used to accomplish a task by commending effort, strategies, focus, persistence in the face of difficulty, and willingness to take on challenges.
- *You must have worked hard at these problems.*
- *Why don't you practice and try again?*
- *Let's find some new study strategies that might help you.*
- Tell stories about achievements that resulted from hard work.
- *Mistakes are so interesting. Here's a wonderful mistake. Let's see what we can learn from it.*

### Intervention studies

- Changing a student's mindset to a growth mindset has a greater positive impact on later performance than does building confidence or creating opportunities for success.
- Carefully planned interventions that teach students about the malleability of the brain, the capacity to get smarter when we try new things and persist in the face of difficulty improve the academic achievement of children and adults.
  - The key is that students must *believe* what they are learning. The message must be internalized to become the students' mindset.
- Interventions that work to change academic mindset also can change mindset in areas related to social adjustment and understanding changes in personality traits.

### What else is needed?

- Learning study skills without also learning a growth mindset does not motivate students to apply those skills.
- Once a student has learned a growth mindset, the next step is to develop *metacognition*, or understanding their own thinking and learning processes.
- We also must be careful not to use the concept of mindset as an excuse to blame students.
- We must remember that mindset refers to a system of beliefs. It can't be taught as just another worksheet or classroom exercise.
- Focusing on mindset does not replace paying careful attention to how we teach or what we teach. Increasing students' motivation to learn only will be helpful when opportunities to learn also are available to students.

### What should we do?

- Only tell students to try harder if they believe they did not try hard already.
- Praise the processes students use to be successful rather than the qualities students possess.
- Teach the power of "yet."

### Helpful Resources

- Briceño, E. (2015). Growth mindset parenting: <http://gettingsmart.com/2015/03/growth-mindset-parenting/>
- Carey, B. (2014). *How we learn: The surprising truth about when, where, and why it happens.*
- Dweck, C. S. (2000). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development.*
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success.*
- Project for Education Research that Scales: <https://www.perts.net/>