

Kim Marshall's Summary of Article Entitled (source: Marshall Memos)

## **Carol Dweck on Fixed and Growth Mindset Thinking Among Teachers**

"Teachers' Mindsets: 'Every Student Has Something to Teach Me'" by Carol Dweck in *Educational Horizons*, December 2014/January 2015 (Vol. 93, p. 10-14), [www.edhorizons.org](http://www.edhorizons.org)

In this article in *Educational Horizons*, Stanford professor Carol Dweck applies her "mindset" theory to the problem of teacher attrition – almost half of new teachers leave the classroom within five years. All too many teachers, she says, have a "fixed" mindset about the profession – either you're born to be a great teacher or you're not. Here are some of the agree/disagree statements Greg Gero of Claremont Graduate University used with teachers to ascertain their mindset:

- The kind of teacher someone is, is something very basic about them and can't be changed very much.
- Teachers can change the way they teach in the classroom, but they can't really change their true teaching ability.
- Some teachers will be ineffective no matter how hard they try to improve.
- No matter how much natural ability you may have, you can always find important ways to improve.
- Every teacher, no matter who they are, can significantly improve their teaching ability.
- The value of trying new teaching methods outweighs the risk of making a mistake.
- I discuss problems in my classroom teaching with others in order to learn from them.

Teachers who agreed with the first three statements had a "fixed" mindset and often got discouraged when they encountered difficult students and learning problems in their early weeks in the classroom. "So," says Dweck, "instead of rolling up their sleeves, using every resource at their disposal, and assuring themselves that they could only get better, they probably concluded that they didn't really have the talent in the first place or that the kids were intractable – and fled."

Teachers who agreed with the last four statements had a "growth" mindset. They cared more about learning than about having a good reputation as a teacher. They didn't believe that a perfect, error-free lesson defined them as a good teacher. These teachers behaved in strikingly different ways than those with a fixed mindset:

- They engaged in more professional development, read more professional literature, and constantly picked up ideas and teaching techniques.
- They observed other teachers and volunteered to have well-regarded teachers teach demonstration lessons with their students.
- They confronted their teaching problems head-on and asked for feedback from supervisors and colleagues.

Teachers with a fixed mindset feared being judged negatively and were reluctant to be observed by others or collaborate with colleagues. They assumed it was their job to go it alone and that innate talent was the most important factor in success.

Dweck tells the story of one of her Stanford students who started teaching in a tough New York City school and had a horrible first year. "I naively thought that since I was young, energetic,

educated, and driven, I would be a rock star,” this teacher wrote to Dweck. Working “maniacally long hours” and seeing no progress in her students, she thought about quitting. But she remembered growth mindset thinking and set small, measurable targets. “Instead of a goal of ‘an amazing classroom with remarkable academic gains,’ I had to set goals like, ‘this week, everyone will line up safely for the bathroom’ or ‘today, the green group will identify a triangle.’ The class excelled at accomplishing these little goals, and slowly, our big goal of ‘an amazing classroom with remarkable academic gains’ started to materialize.” She began to video herself, flinching at what she saw but making daily improvements in how clearly she gave directions and how often she smiled. By her fifth year of teaching, every one of her fourth-graders passed the state math test, with 90 percent of them earning the top score of 4.

Dweck says that teachers stuck in the fixed mindset see underachieving, unmotivated, disruptive students as threats to their self-concept as good teachers. “But in a growth mindset, those students are challenges,” she says; “they’re opportunities to hone your skills, increase your understanding, and become a better teacher.” Growth mindset teachers believe, “Every student has something to teach me” and some even tell their students, “Every time you make a mistake, become confused, or struggle, you make me a better teacher.”

Is the fixed mindset fixed? No! says Dweck: “Research has shown that it’s never too late to develop a growth mindset about your abilities. The first step is to get in touch with your fixed mindset. We all have some of it tucked away somewhere, and it’s important to acknowledge that.” It says things like:

- *You’d be able to do this easily if you were a good teacher.*
- *You’ll never be as good as that teacher.*
- *You’ll never be able to get these students to learn this.*
- *If you take that risk and it doesn’t work out, you’ll lose your status/control/respect.*
- *You see, you took a risk and failed; don’t try that again. Stick to what you know.*
- *Why not face the facts; you’re just not cut out for this.*

These are thoughts from the fixed-mindset perspective. Hear them out, maybe share them in a discussion group with colleagues, and realize you’re not alone. Then start talking back with growth-mindset thinking:

- *Nobody is good at this right away. It takes experience.*
- *I really admire that teacher. Maybe I can ask her to observe my class and give me feedback.*
- *Maybe other teachers have some good ideas about how to teach this material more effectively.*
- *Maybe I need to find some new strategies or set different goals.*

Dweck suggests taking the mindset test <http://bit.ly/MindsetTest> to get a handle on the specific areas where you can change your thinking about growth and achievement. “[U]nderstand that you have a choice,” she concludes. “Even when you feel anxious or discouraged, you can choose to act in a growth-mindset way... You recognize that the growth of your skills is in your hands, and you choose to make that happen.”