

# *What is a Growth Mindset and why is it important in our Federation?*

*For twenty years, my research has shown that the view we adopt of yourself profoundly affects the way we lead your life. – [Carol Dweck](#)<sup>1</sup>*

Research has found a very simple belief about ourselves that guides and permeates nearly every part of our lives.

## THE FIXED AND GROWTH MINDSETS

**Much of who we are on a day-to-day basis comes from our *mindset*.** Our mindset is the view we have of our qualities and characteristics – where they come from and whether they can *change*.

These following two mindsets represent the extreme ends on either side of a spectrum.

**A *fixed mindset* comes from the belief that our qualities are carved in stone** – who we are is who we are. Characteristics such as intelligence, personality, and creativity are fixed traits, rather than something that can be developed.

**A *growth mindset* comes from the belief that our basic qualities are things we can cultivate through effort.** People differ greatly – in aptitude, talents, interests, or temperaments – but everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

### **How does this simple mindset change our behaviour?**

Having a fixed mindset creates an urgency to prove oneself over and over – criticism is seen as an attack on our character, and to be avoided. Having a growth mindset encourages learning and effort. If we truly believe we can improve at something, we will be much more driven to learn and practice. Criticism is seen as valuable feedback and openly embraced. The hallmark of the growth mindset is the passion for sticking with it, *especially* when things are *not* going well.

## SMALL BELIEF, BIG INFLUENCE

*How can one belief lead to all this – the love of challenge, belief in effort, resilience in the face of setbacks, and greater (more creative!) success?<sup>2</sup>*

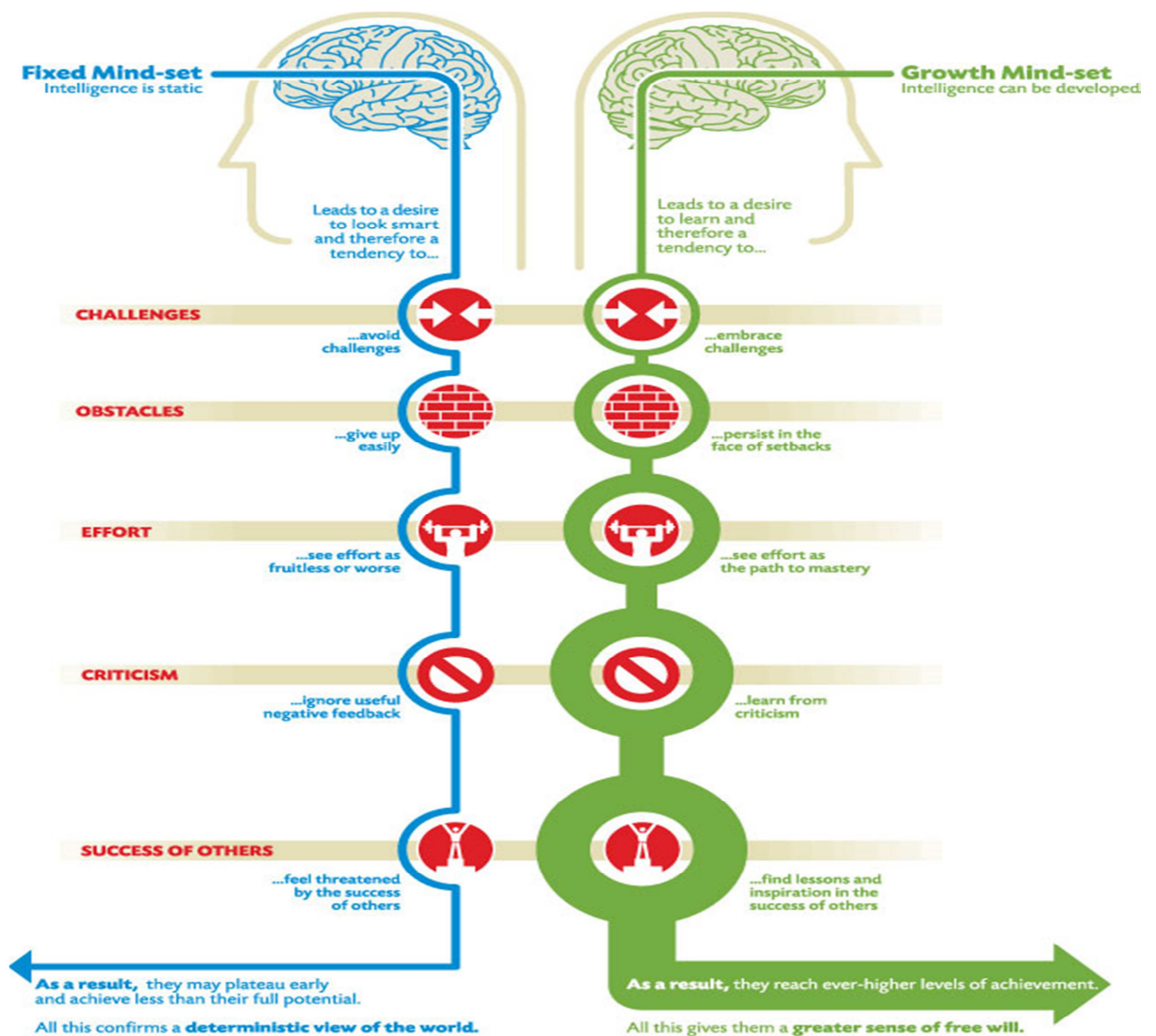
*“Smart people succeed,”* says the fixed mindset. Therefore, if we succeed, you’re a smart person. Therefore, pick the easier problem so success is more likely, and we validate our smartness. Pick a hard problem and we may fail, revealing our stupidity.

*“People can get smarter,”* says the growth mindset, *“and do so by stretching themselves and taking on challenges.”* Therefore, pick the hard problem – who cares if we fail, because we can try again and learn from the mistakes.

These mentalities can be seen as early as four years old. In one of Dweck's studies:

We offered four-year-olds a choice: They could redo an easy jigsaw puzzle or they could try a harder one. Even at this tender age, children with the fixed mindset – the ones who believed in fixed traits – stuck with the safe one. Children who are born smart “don't make mistakes,” they said.

The growth-oriented children welcomed the harder puzzle, finding a safer puzzle to be boring.



What do we want to see for our pupils and what impact does this research show a change in mindset can have on lives?

### **Not to be afraid**

To enjoy learning new things that are difficult – welcoming challenge. The fixed mindset would make us shun a new challenge, thinking that we might be 'embarrassed'. The growth mindset says "who cares?" and lets us enjoy ourselves.

### **Relationships:**

Those with a fixed mindset want an ideal friend or partner and a fixed mindset can cause partners/friends to think they should be able to read each other's mind, or that the two of them should never disagree on anything. Those with a growth mindset, however, want a friend to see their faults and help them to work on them, challenge them to become a better person, and encourage them to learn new things. This makes for a healthier and happier relationship.

### **Not Feel Stupid When Learning**

People with a fixed mindset give answers like "It's when I don't make any mistakes." In other words, you're supposed to be perfect. People with a growth mindset, however, give answers like "When I work on something for a long time and I start to figure it out." **In other words, when we are learning. This is what we want for our children.**

### **Never Stress About Being Perfect**

If we believe that any test, at any time, will measure us for our whole life, we will feel the need to be perfect, all the time. The children with a growth mindset don't think tests measure how smart they are, or how smart they will be when they grow up. The children with the fixed mindset, however, think the exact opposite, again so if they fail at anything they think that is what they will be like throughout their life.

### **Strengthen Our Confidence**

Those in a fixed mindset do not have less confidence than those in a growth mindset. The problem is that their confidence is more fragile and easily undermined by setbacks and effort. All our children need to develop a resilient confidence to face life in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Lower Our Risk of Depression

In a study performed by Baer, Grant, and Dweck (2005), students in the fixed mindset had higher levels of depression because they ruminated over problems and setbacks. In another report from researchers at Duke University, there was a strong link found between anxiety and depression among females who aspire to “effortless perfection.” We have observed an increase in the levels of anxiety and depression amongst some pupils – a growth mindset will help children cope with this.

## See Setbacks As Useful

It’s easy to be frustrated by setbacks. Yet they are *useful* because they provide information in the form of feedback. A setback indicates that something went wrong, and we now have the opportunity to figure out *why*, learn from it, and prevent it from happening again. The growth mindset sees setbacks as useful, whereas a fixed mindset sees them as annoying hurdles and cause motivation and effort to drop. We want our pupils to find out what went wrong and what they need to do about it and not lose heart.

## Avoid Feelings of Superiority

The fixed mindset creates an urgency to prove oneself over and over. The very act of ‘succeeding’ requires that we show ourselves to be better than others. So if we focus on succeeding and ‘achieving’ things, you’re always in a frame of mind where we compare ourselves to others—often by applauding ourselves for being superior. The growth mindset doesn’t care about being superior. In fact, the success of others can be inspiring and a source for learning, whereas a fixed mindset sees the success of others as a threat.

What are the kind of dispositions we wish to see in our pupils – what will you be looking for on your visits to the schools.

Resilience to cope with obstacles

Perseverance, determination and practice

Having a go and self-belief.

Trying a different approach.

Constructive feedback being acted upon.

Self discipline.

Giving something up in order to get better.

Interest and engagement.

In our schools we strive to ensure that our pupils leave us open to all the opportunities that life will offer them and with an attitude that will welcome these challenges.

