

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERIES

LEADING GROWTH MINDSETS

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS



JAMES ANDERSON



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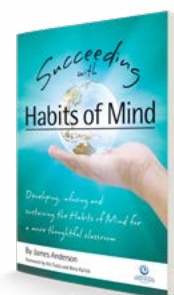
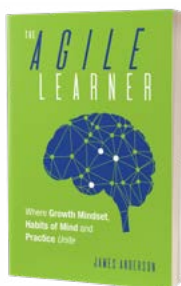
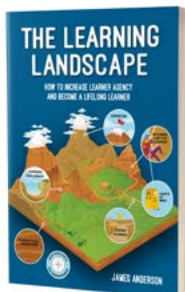
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ABOUT JAMES ANDERSON



James Anderson is an Australian-based international speaker, author and educator who is passionate about helping fellow educators develop students as better learners.



Originally a teacher and school leader, for the past 20 years, James has been working with schools to make classrooms more thoughtful places. He challenges teachers to think deeply about their own Mindsets and how their beliefs are communicated to students in often subtle and unintended ways.

James's work combines Growth Mindset with Habits of Mind and Practice to create Learning Agility. He puts the growth back into Growth Mindset! And, through creating and describing the Mindset Continuum, he provides the cornerstone for effective Growth Mindset interventions.

James values the relationships he builds with the schools and teachers he works with, providing the “follow-through” that’s so often lacking in teacher professional development. His speaking, workshops and online resources provide not only the deep understandings required to do this work meaningfully, but also the tools and ongoing support needed to sustain it in your school and make a real difference to student learning outcomes.

James will show you how to create your school-based Growth Mindset Style Guide to ensure your school consistently “nudges” all students towards an increasingly growth-oriented Mindset.

James is a Certified Speaking Professional and regularly speaks at conferences around the world. His previous publications include *Succeeding with Habits of Mind*, *The Agile Learner* and *The Learning Landscape*, as well as a host of e-books and other teacher resources. His online course,



“Transforming Teaching and Learning with Growth Mindsets,” supports thousands of educators in schools around the world. He is an international affiliate of Art Costa and Bena Kallick’s Institute for Habits of Mind and the creator of www.habitsofmind.org.

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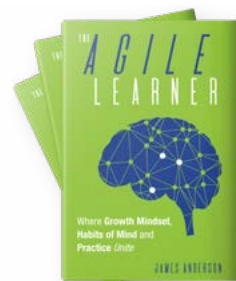
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Order your copy of James Anderson's book **THE AGILE LEARNER** today!

The Agile Learner combines three powerful ideas: Growth Mindset, Habits of Mind and Virtuous Practice. It shows teachers not only how to create the Growth Mindset, but how to translate that Mindset into actual growth in their students' abilities.



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- Go beyond social media hype to a deep understanding of Mindsets.
- Stop treating the symptoms of a Fixed Mindset and learn how to address the underlying causes.
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- Much more ...

"Anderson weaves together a rich tapestry of possibilities for increasing the power and potential for all of our students. He does away with the myths that limit growth, and so opens the door for unlimited learning."

– Art Costa and Bena Kallick, co-authors Habits of Mind

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INTRODUCTION

This collection of articles is intended for your school's Growth Mindset leadership team. I outline key research you need to be familiar with, as well as many of the pitfalls you'll want to avoid, as you adopt Growth Mindsets as part of your whole-school initiative. Importantly, I outline how to prevent Growth Mindsets becoming "last year's initiative" at your school.

I invite you to share these articles as professional reading for your school's Growth Mindset leaders. All the articles were originally published as blog posts. For regular updates, you can subscribe to my blog at www.jamesanderson.com.au.

If you're going to start working with Growth Mindsets in your school, let's start by not making things worse! In the first article, I introduce the idea of "**Schlimmbesserung**". This is a German word that means to make things worse in an effort to make them better. In English, we refer to this idea as a "backfire" or "the cobra effect".

Unfortunately, there are many examples of schools that have enthusiastically jumped on the idea of Growth Mindsets, but with little understanding and no real planning. These schools often adopt social media solutions to Growth Mindsets that oversimplify psychologist Carol Dweck's ideas. The result is often the exact opposite of what they intended: they create more fixed-oriented Mindsets in their students instead of growth-oriented ones!

This article highlights some of the traps for unwary schools and invites you to go beyond the catchphrases and social media hype to develop a deeper understanding of Growth Mindsets.

(By the way, if you're interested in the idea of Schlimmbesserung, you can read about 10 of history's greatest backfires [here](#),¹ including how the cobra effect got its name and why 10 boxes of TNT is too much if you want to blow up a whale carcass!)

In the second article, "**Mindsets Matter – But That's Only Half the Story**," I introduce data that explains why we should take a serious look at Growth Mindsets in the classroom. Importantly, I clarify that although the data shows Growth Mindsets are important, they are only useful if our Growth Mindset interventions are effective! I also introduce the concepts of Motivation Calibration and Learning Agility, central ideas that should be introduced alongside your work with Growth Mindsets.



The third article, “**Setting the Record Straight on Growth Mindset**,” is a longer, more thoughtful article. It looks closely at some of the Growth Mindset criticisms that have been published. This is an excellent article for leaders who are rightly sceptical about how schools are implementing Growth Mindsets, and for those who have suspicions about the “Power of Yet”. This article also sets the direction for more purposeful and effective Growth Mindset interventions.

The fourth article, “**How Growth Mindsets Become ‘Last Year’s Initiative’ – A Cautionary Tale**,” is a warning for schools that don’t heed the lessons above. I wrote this article as I began to observe schools enthusiastically adopting social media solutions to Growth Mindsets and seeing little enduring impact. Schools don’t have the time or resources to waste on initiatives that are swept away every time something new comes along. It’s crucial you heed the lessons of this article.

The fifth article focuses on perhaps the biggest misunderstanding about Mindsets: the idea that there are just two. In “**Why Are We Still Talking Fixed vs Growth Mindsets**,” I introduce you to the Mindset Continuum. Recognising that in the real world our Mindsets lie somewhere along a continuum opens the door to meaningful dialogue and realistic school-based interventions.

The final article is about “**Making Mindsets Meaningful**” in your school. It advocates for a more measured and meaningful whole-school approach to Growth Mindsets. It’s an approach that doesn’t involve catchphrases or slogans. It requires leadership rather than posters. The approach I advocate involves developing a Growth Mindset Style Guide for your school and supporting teachers in developing their own more growth-oriented Mindsets.

FURTHER READING

Motivation Calibration: “How hard can it be?”

<https://mindfulbydesign.com/how-hard-can-it-be/>

“Growth Mindset and Positive Education”

<https://mindfulbydesign.com/growth-mindset-positive-education/>



HOW TO USE THESE ARTICLES

These resources are intended as professional reading for teachers and school leaders with the responsibility of leading Growth Mindset initiatives in their schools. As such, I invite you to share copies amongst your leadership team, then discuss the key ideas as you plan your whole-school Growth Mindset strategy.

One of the most critical steps to successful implementation is to break free of the Fixed versus Growth Mindset dichotomy and start talking about the Mindset Continuum. You might like to print a copy of the Mindset Continuum for each member of your leadership team. As you discuss where you find yourselves on the continuum, reflect on the nature and tone of your conversations. How much easier is it to recognise the need for growth rather than talk about having a Fixed or Growth Mindset? Does the continuum invite conversations about your Mindset and the Mindset of students and colleagues? Would these conversations be less likely to happen if you were talking about Fixed versus Growth Mindsets?

Reflect on the key messages in these articles and discuss the actions you might take to ensure your “early adopters” are on the right track as they begin their work with Growth Mindsets.

As you plan your Growth Mindset whole-school strategy, it’s imperative you stay focused on the *growth* part of Growth Mindsets. This means recognising the importance of Learning Agility – not only so students understand they are capable of growth, but also to ensure they are capable of achieving it. Consider purchasing copies of *The Agile Learner* or *The Learning Landscape* for each member of your leadership team to use for your next shared professional reading.

“The number-one thing you can do to change student Mindsets is to change teachers’ Mindsets.” If you haven’t already done so, access your free trial of “Transforming Teaching and Learning with Growth Mindsets”. This resource is designed to support school leaders in challenging and changing teachers’ Mindsets. As a leadership team, discuss how getting staff to engage with this resource might help challenge their Mindsets.

The development of a school-wide Growth Mindset Style Guide is key to your successful implementation. A style guide helps “nudge” well-intentioned teachers to create positive Mindset Movers in their day-to-day practice. As school leaders, where might you start to create policy, culture and practices to generate these nudges?



If you'd like to learn more about Growth Mindsets, Learning Agility and how I can support you in your work with teacher workshops, whole-school professional development or ongoing support and mentoring, please contact me at james@jamesanderson.com.au, [book a time in my calendar](#) or call me on +61 423 778 008.

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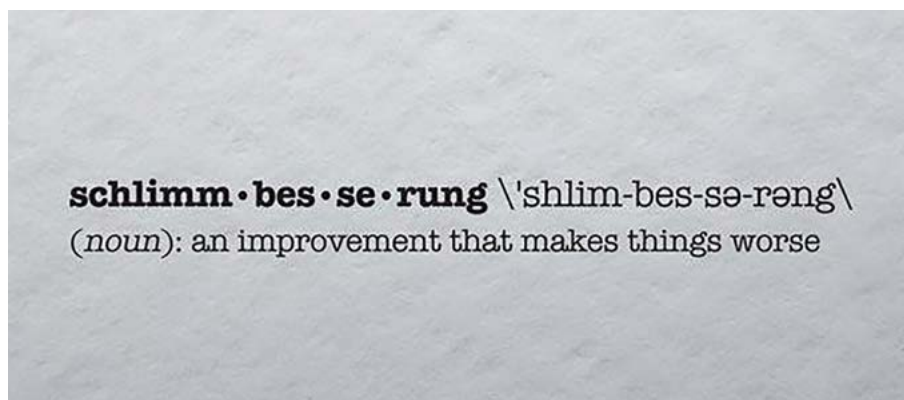
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SCHLIMMBESSERUNG

No, that's not a typo. Schlimmbesserung is a German word that means “to make things worse through an effort to improve”.

What if our efforts to improve students' Mindsets were schlimmbesserung? What if they were backfiring and creating Fixed Mindsets instead of Growth Mindsets?



This is exactly what teachers risk doing when they jump on the Growth Mindset bandwagon without a deep understanding of their own Mindsets. They adopt Growth Mindset strategies, but often superficially, and this can have unintended consequences.

For example, many teachers have adopted “praise effort” as a Growth Mindset strategy. Unfortunately, in some cases, “praise effort” has unintentionally become “praise struggling students for effort”. Instead of the intended growth message about effort, this sends the highly fixed message that effort is only required for some students.

A similar schlimmbesserung came from a principal I met a few years ago. He told me that during his whole career, he had been telling students “hard work will beat talent, when talent doesn't work very hard”. He thought he was sending a Growth Mindset message to students about the importance of hard work and effort. In fact, the opposite was true. Implicit in his statement was that hard work was necessary to make up for a lack of talent – and, by implication, his students weren't talented. To make things worse, it suggested to these students they needed to hope that the talented people didn't start working hard!



In a similar way, I worry about the number of teachers adopting “not yet” as a mantra in the classroom. Many of these teachers have let “not yet” become “still not yet”. They have failed to adopt the pedagogies that teach students how to achieve growth. The promised “not yet” that is never achieved, turns into a negative Mindset Mover when students fail to grow, leading to a form of learned failure.

The result of these misapplied strategies is *schlimmbesserung*. Our attempts to develop Growth Mindsets backfire and create Fixed Mindsets in students. Why does this happen? Because our Mindset is part of our unconscious bias. It guides our actions when we are not paying attention. And, although we might want a Growth Mindset and perhaps even believe we have one, unless we’ve spent the time carefully nurturing a Growth Mindset in ourselves, our actions, over time, will reflect our true Mindset. As Professor Carol Dweck puts it, “A Growth Mindset is not a declaration. It’s a journey.” It’s something we must continually reflect on and work at.

So, although our intention is to *praise all students for effort*, we may end up only *praising the struggling students*.

Things as subtle as our tone of voice when praising one student compared to another can communicate volumes about our beliefs about their abilities. Perhaps we may unconsciously direct all the most challenging questions to a few students who we perceive as more able. In our reports, we may even describe one student as “a capable student” and another as “a very capable student” – revealing our unconscious belief that the second student is inherently smarter than the first.

Each of the above subtly but consistently communicates and reinforces to students our underlying beliefs about their fixed abilities and intelligence. Our efforts to create a Growth Mindset have exactly the opposite effect. A *schlimmbesserung*.

This is what Dweck and her colleague Susan Mackie have identified as a False Mindset. Someone with a False Mindset intellectually understands Fixed and Growth Mindsets. They may even advocate for a Growth Mindset and attempt to implement Growth Mindset strategies. But because they haven’t spent the time to deeply examine their own Mindset and nurture a more growth-oriented Mindset, their actions communicate more fixed messages.



So, what's the lesson here for school leaders?

When it comes to Mindsets, doing nothing may well be a better option than doing a little, badly.

We need to avoid the superficial approaches and quick fixes. If changing Mindsets was easy, we would have worked out how to do it long ago. To prevent *schlimmbesserung*, our approaches need to be grounded in a deep understanding not only of what a Growth Mindset is, but how to achieve growth through Learning Agility.

Original Article

Anderson, J., 2018, *Schlimmbesserung*, mindfulbydesign, accessed 17th July 2019, <<https://mindfulbydesign.com/schlimmbesserung/>>

OUR MINDSET IS OUR UNCONSCIOUS BIAS.

IT IS WHAT GUIDES OUR ACTIONS
AND DECISIONS WHEN WE ARE NOT
PAYING ATTENTION.

JAMES ANDERSON





MINDSETS MATTER – BUT THAT’S ONLY HALF THE STORY

There is no doubt that Mindsets matter.

Research clearly shows that a student’s Mindset is extremely important. For example:

- [A study of all 10th-grade students in Chile](#)¹ (more than 160,000 students) showed that holding a Growth Mindset predicted academic achievement across every socioeconomic level.
- In California, data from [more than 100,000 middle schoolers](#)² found that students’ Mindsets were reliable predictors of their test scores.
- [A meta-study of 113 studies](#)³ showed that Growth Mindset was a significant factor in people’s self-regulation towards goals.
- [A study of 15-year-old students across 39 European countries](#)⁴ showed that Mindset explained a greater proportion of their PISA scores than their home environment. And in Latin America and North America, Mindset had double or triple the effect of home environment.

The research clearly shows that having a Growth Mindset is associated with better performance. But this is NOT what educators should be concerning themselves with.

Simply knowing that a Growth Mindset is associated with higher performance isn’t particularly helpful, unless we can change Mindsets to improve student outcomes. So, the key question educators should be asking is: can we change a student’s Mindset? And if we can, what is the most effective way of doing it?

TEACHING ABOUT MINDSETS IS NOT THE ANSWER

Many educators have tried to change students’ Mindsets by teaching ABOUT Mindsets.

This approach is based on the theory that if you teach students what a Growth Mindset is, tell them what people with a Growth Mindset do, then ask students to have one, they’ll adopt a Growth Mindset and better results will follow.

Social media is full of “teach ABOUT Mindsets” approaches. But there is little evidence that this type of approach works.



I've commented on many of these strategies before. For example, the Mindset moment of [“not yet” becomes “still not yet”](#)⁵ if students are not also taught the strategies they need to overcome what they are stuck on. [Praising effort backfires](#)⁶ when effort is confused with time and energy. Students who engage in ineffective effort fail to grow. Consequently, more Fixed Mindsets are created as students see their investment in time and energy failing to pay off.

TEACHING FOR GROWTH MINDSETS

The strategies that work best do not focus on teaching ABOUT a Growth Mindset. Rather, they focus on teaching FOR a Growth Mindset.

One successful strategy is to teach children about brain plasticity. This is what [Mindset Works'](#) “Brainology” course focuses on. This strategy helps students understand the fundamental truth that underlies the Growth Mindset – that your brain is capable of developing new abilities by rewiring itself.

But it's important for students to understand that for this rewiring to take place, they must take specific actions. They must be told not only that they can rewire their brains, but also how to effectively do this.

MOTIVATION CALIBRATION & LEARNING AGILITY ARE WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Understanding that growth is possible (a Growth Mindset) and at the same time also understanding what has to be done to achieve that growth is what researchers call “motivation calibration”. According to the McKinsey study cited above, motivation calibration was “the most important factor for both EU and non-EU students”.

This makes sense when you recognise that psychologist Carol Dweck didn't invent a Growth Mindset. She *identified* it.

People have always differed in their beliefs about their ability to change their basic characteristics – their abilities, talents and intelligence. In the past, people didn't develop a Growth Mindset because they were taught about it. Rather, they developed a Growth Mindset because they *came to understand how to achieve growth* and, as a result, they experienced growth. They had good “motivation calibration” – they understood not only that hard work was necessary, but specifically what sort of hard work was required to achieve that growth!

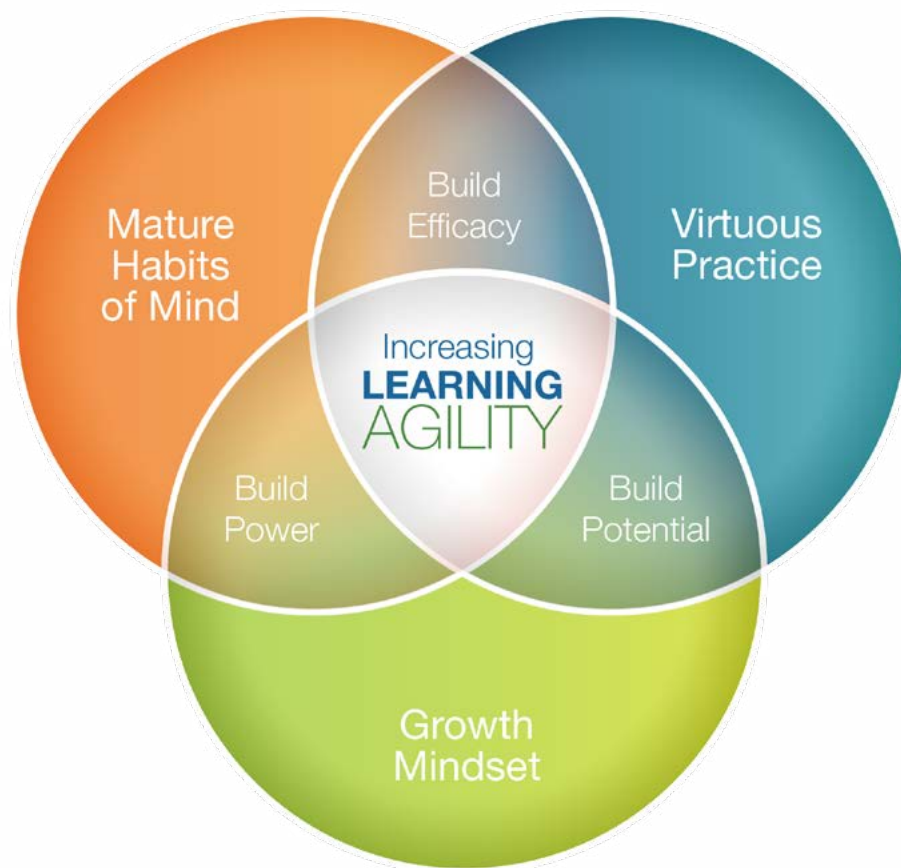


When students understand what they must do in order to grow, and are able to achieve that growth, we observe what Dweck described as a Growth Mindset.

LEARNING AGILITY

This is why Learning Agility is so important. It's why I've declared this year to be [a year of action](#)⁷, and why my focus is about [putting the Growth back into Growth Mindset](#)⁸.

LEARNING AGILITY



The Agile Learner not only understands they are capable of growth but also how to achieve that growth. They have been taught the importance of Virtuous Practice and how to engage in it, and they are developing powerful Habits of Mind that allow them to achieve growth.



After all, at the end of the day, this work is all about achieving the growth – we want students to be able to develop their talents, abilities, and intelligence and then be able to do more difficult things. The Growth Mindset is just the invitation to achieve that growth. Learning Agility is the way to achieve the growth!

Original Article

Anderson, J., 2018, *Mindsets Matter – but that’s only half the story*, mindfulbydesign.com, accessed 17th July 2019,
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MOTIVATION CALIBRATION



UNDERSTANDING THAT
YOU ARE CAPABLE OF
GROWTH

— and —

ACCURATELY JUDGING
WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE
REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE
THAT GROWTH.

JAMES ANDERSON

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 *James Anderson*
From Not Yet To What's Next



NOTES

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON GROWTH MINDSET

Several [recent studies](#)¹ have unfairly thrown doubt on the importance of the Growth Mindset. To respond accurately to this criticism, two crucial points must be understood:

1. The Growth Mindset is not growth.
2. The Growth Mindset existed before Carol Dweck.

THE GROWTH MINDSET IS NOT GROWTH

It's important to remember a Growth Mindset is not growth, it is simply the *belief* that growth is possible. Think of it as an invitation to grow.

Professor Dweck defines the Growth Mindset as the *understanding* that your most basic characteristics – such as your talents, abilities and intelligence – are malleable. She does not describe it as the actual growth of these characteristics. In fact, Dweck points out that some people with a Growth Mindset don't change their abilities much, yet some people with a Fixed Mindset do.

Ultimately, it's the **actions** you take that determine **whether you achieve growth**.

If you take the right sort of actions, you will grow. If you take the wrong sort of actions, you will not grow, even if you have a Growth Mindset.

A Growth Mindset does not guarantee growth. It will encourage you to stretch beyond your current abilities and take on challenging tasks in your Learning Zone. It will also help you recognise that the mistakes you make in your Learning Zone don't define you, they simply point the way forward. However, a Growth Mindset does not correct your mistakes.

This is why in my conversations about Growth Mindset I talk about [Learning Agility](#)². Learning Agility is understanding you're capable of growth and knowing how to achieve that growth. An Agile Learner understands growth requires more than simply believing they can grow. They know they must engage in a set of actions – namely, engaging their Habits of Mind through the process of Virtuous Practice.



It's not a case of "believe and you can achieve". It is more accurate to say: "Believe and you will act. Act effectively and you can achieve!"

Recent research suggests that while a Growth Mindset is a good predictor of student performance, an even greater predictor is "[Motivation Calibration](#)"³. Motivation Calibration is a measure of a student's belief in their ability to grow and their understanding of the actions required to achieve that growth. I suspect that as time goes on, we'll be talking more and more about the interventions that develop this type of understanding.

Critics do a great disservice to education when they talk about "sounding the alarm bells". They point to the small effect size of current interventions and try to dissuade educators from getting caught up in the "hype" surrounding Growth Mindset. Clearly, a [Growth Mindset](#)⁴ is important.

The problem is our *current interventions aren't effective*
– they only do half the job!

Is it surprising that teaching children "about" a Growth Mindset or simply reading an article about changing intelligence have little effect on their academic growth? Are we surprised that catchphrases such as "[not yet](#)"⁵ fail to have a significant impact on student learning outcomes?

I believe the type of Mindset that results from these interventions is a "Learned Growth Mindset". Students are taught to act as though they have a Growth Mindset, which has far less impact than if they developed an "authentic Growth Mindset" through real-life experiences.

The interesting question is: What are the more effective interventions? Where do students get an "Authentic Growth Mindset" from? Can we create Authentic Growth Mindsets and ensure students enjoy the benefits of truly achieving growth?

The second point we need to understand to set the record straight is this:

The Growth Mindset existed before Professor Carol Dweck.

Dweck did not invent the Growth Mindset. She observed it, often in people who had achieved great growth.



Growth Mindsets existed well before the current “hype” and will endure regardless of whether the term survives the present wave of excitement. Growth Mindsets are real.

The fact is, many people understand they are capable of changing their most basic characteristics and they act accordingly. They understand it because their lived experience has been one of growth – they don’t need Dweck or their classroom teacher to tell them they are capable of growth!

George Bernard Shaw, who died in 1950, perfectly captured the Growth Mindset when he said, “Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.” I’m sure if Dweck could apply her Growth Mindset tests to Shaw, she’d quickly recognise he had a Growth Mindset!

So, for me, the interesting question is: How did Shaw and countless others develop their Growth Mindset before the term had even been coined? What type of “intervention” resulted in their Growth Mindset?

TWO TYPES OF GROWTH MINDSET?

I’m starting to believe there are two types of Growth Mindset. I call them the Authentic Growth Mindset and Learned Growth Mindset.

The authentic Growth Mindset is what Dweck originally observed. This type of Mindset was developed, probably over a long period of time, through an individual’s lived experience. These people experienced growth and came to understand the types of actions that helped them grow. They “knew” they could change.





The learned Growth Mindset is what many of our current interventions produce. It occurs when we simply ask students to believe they are capable of growth *before they experience the growth* for themselves.

This is why, for many students, “not yet” becomes “still not yet”. They trust they’ll be able to change, but don’t know what actions to take to achieve that change. It’s also why we are seeing such a low effect size for our Growth Mindset interventions. These interventions change beliefs, not actions.

The most **recent criticism** of Growth Mindset focuses on the fact our current interventions **have not been effective** at improving **student learning outcomes**.

In my opinion, that’s because these interventions have largely focused on the “believing” rather than the “achieving” of growth.

To make our Growth Mindset interventions more successful, we need to take the lead from those with an authentic Growth Mindset and ask, “How did these people develop their Growth Mindsets? How do we develop Growth Mindsets without using the term ‘Growth Mindset’?”



The most successful Growth Mindset interventions will look like [Motivation Calibration](#).⁶ They will focus not only on “you can grow”, but on “this is how you achieve growth”. This is where authentic Growth Mindsets came from.



And, of course, it is exactly what Learning Agility is all about – achieving growth through Habits of Mind and Virtuous Practice.

Reflecting on how real people developed authentic Growth Mindsets, I suspect our most successful Growth Mindset interventions will have these qualities:

- **TIME:** We shouldn't expect student Mindsets to change quickly. As Dweck points out, a Growth Mindset is not a declaration, it's a journey. We should nurture Growth Mindsets, not "teach" them.
- **ACTIONS:** While interventions that focus on belief invite students to take action, we must also explicitly focus on the actions required to achieve growth.
- **CONSISTENCY:** The more our interventions can align with other aspects of our school system, the better. If we say we value growth and process but only reward standards and achievements, we send mixed messages.

The learned Growth Mindset focuses on the need to believe. The authentic Growth Mindset focuses on the need to *achieve*. Let's put the growth back into Growth Mindset.

There is much to be learnt from recognising that Dweck did not invent the Growth Mindset. It's real. There are circumstances that create it. It does make a difference to life outcomes. Our challenge is to not get caught up in the "Growth Mindset interventions don't work" stories. Rather, we need to search for the interventions that do work. We need to recreate in our schools, as best we can, the circumstances that create a Growth Mindset so our students can achieve even greater growth.

Original Article

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Believe and you
will act.

Act effectively
and you
can achieve.

JAMES ANDERSON



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HOW GROWTH MINDSETS BECOME “LAST YEAR’S INITIATIVE” – A CAUTIONARY TALE

As the 2020 school year starts, I find myself reflecting on the past few years and asking why the Growth Mindset has become “last year’s initiative”.

It seems like only a few years ago that you couldn’t do anything in education without hearing about the Growth Mindset. Conferences weren’t complete if the keynote speakers didn’t mention the importance of a Growth Mindset. It was one of the top-trending topics on Pinterest. And schools were rapidly branding themselves “Growth Mindset Schools”.

Today, of course, things are different. The pendulum has swung, the page has turned, and we’ve quietly moved on. A Growth Mindset is yet another unfulfilled promise.

What went wrong? Why weren’t we able to make this important work stick?

I’ve identified the top 5 reasons why Growth Mindsets have become one of last year’s initiatives:

1. WE STARTED DOING GROWTH MINDSETS

Our first mistake was a failure to recognise that educators had *always* played a significant role in shaping students’ beliefs about abilities. We’d been creating Growth (and Fixed) Mindsets since before we started sending children to schools!

Psychologist Carol Dweck didn’t create the Fixed and Growth Mindsets – they already existed. She simply identified them, and helped focus our attention on their importance.

The problem with “starting” was that it was disrespectful to the teachers who’d already done great work helping students build positive beliefs about their abilities. Instead of asking, “How do we do this?”, we should have asked, “How do we do this *better*?”



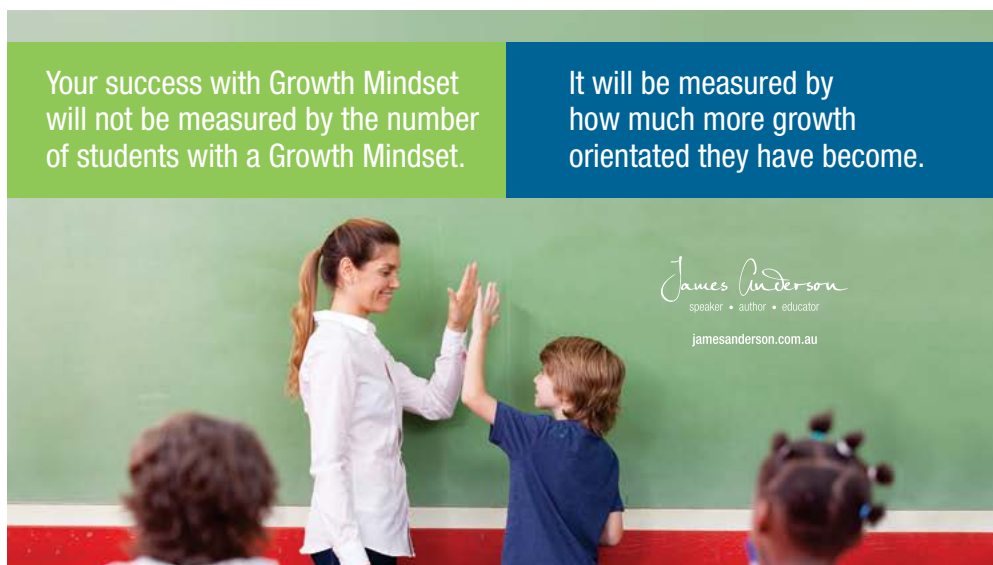
The truth is that we never started working with students' Mindsets, and we'll never stop. It's simply stopped being a "thing". We've stopped paying attention to our work with Mindsets, and have lost an opportunity to get better at it.

2. WE PROMISED TEACHERS THAT STUDENTS WOULD HAVE GROWTH MINDSETS

The notion of Fixed versus Growth oversimplified things. It led us to believe that if we did something, students would stop having a Fixed Mindset and have a Growth Mindset instead. This set unrealistic expectations for teachers.

Our work was never going to lead to students *having* a Growth Mindset – at least, not in the timeframe most people expected.

Fixed and Growth are two ends of a continuum. The reality is that our long-term goal is to help move students along this continuum to become increasingly growth oriented. Making a significant change to a student's Mindset usually happens over years, not minutes.



So, by believing their work would result in students "having" a Growth Mindset and all the behaviors associated with it, teachers felt as though they'd failed. Our success with Mindsets should not have been measured by the number of students "with" a Growth Mindset. It should have been measured by how growth oriented our students had become.

As Dweck went to pains to point out in 2017: "A Growth Mindset is not a declaration, it's a journey." Most of us missed that.



3. WE TREATED THE SYMPTOMS, NOT THE CAUSE

A Mindset is your set of beliefs about your most basic characteristics – your talents, abilities and intelligence. These beliefs create what psychologists call your *unconscious bias*: how you behave when you're not paying attention. Your actions, then, can be thought of as the symptoms of these underlying beliefs.

Social media began circulating lists of the behaviours (the *symptoms*) of the Growth Mindset. And that's what teachers wanted: students who behaved in a Growth Mindset way! The temptation was to short-cut the beliefs and simply instill the behaviours.

Strategies that essentially asked students to act as if they had the underlying beliefs of a Growth Mindset proliferated. Students were asked to choose those actions consciously. Instead of saying, "I can't", they were asked to say, "I can't yet." Basically, they were asked to pretend that they had a Growth Mindset.

The quick-fix promise of these strategies was seductive, and they were widely adopted. Unfortunately, they did little to address students' underlying beliefs. So, when students weren't in the "Mindset moment", their actions often reflected a more fixed set of beliefs.

Of course, there were strategies that did seek to change students' underlying beliefs about their abilities. Dweck's Brainology program was one. This aimed to teach students how the brain can rewire itself to create new abilities. However, the easy "adopt-these-behaviours" techniques dominated – and, ultimately, failed to create enduring change. Teachers were left feeling disillusioned.

4. WE STOPPED AT MINDSET AND DIDN'T MOVE ON TO GROWTH!

Many teachers didn't understand that a Growth Mindset is the *invitation to grow*, not growth itself. While a student with a Growth Mindset is more likely to take actions, it doesn't mean these actions are effective!

For many students, "I can't do it yet" simply became "I *still* can't do it yet!" Teachers witnessed the Growth Mindset, but not the growth!

To be fair, the dramatic increase in student performance most teachers expected as a result of a Growth Mindset wasn't realistic. With only modest gains (at best) in student performance, it's understandable that many teachers abandoned Growth Mindsets and moved on to something else promising



more growth. After all, we are in the business of *achieving* growth, not *believing* you can achieve growth.

It was not enough to simply teach students they were capable of growth. We also had to teach them how to grow. We needed to shift our attention to the processes and behaviours that would allow them to achieve growth – something I talked about in my book, [*The Agile Learner*](#),¹ which is as relevant today as it was when it was released in late 2017!

5. WE THOUGHT IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE STUDENTS

Dweck and her colleague Susan Mackie described the emergence of the False Mindset – someone who advocates a Growth Mindset, but whose actions (guided by their unconscious bias) reflect a more fixed set of beliefs. John Hattie pointed out that the effect size of Fixed versus Growth Mindset was small because adults had a Fixed Mindset, and treated students accordingly.

The signs were all there. So why didn't we pay attention? The biggest contributor to a student's Mindset was never going to be the Mindset lesson, the posters, the catchphrases, or the praising of effort. The number-one thing we could have done to change students' Mindsets was to address teachers' Mindsets. In doing so, we would have influenced the thousands of Mindset messages sent unintentionally every day!

Teachers have *Mindsets*, too!

The same types of messages and experiences that influence their students have influenced them. When we presented teachers with the polarised and stigmatised Fixed versus Growth dichotomy, we almost forced them to declare they "had" a Growth Mindset. In doing so, we robbed them of the opportunity to reflect, change and move towards an increasingly growth-oriented Mindset.

So here we are, at the start of 2020, and this essential aspect of learning has been relegated to the ever-growing pile of "last year's initiatives".

Of course, there will always be "hot topics" in education that serve a purpose and, when that purpose has been served, we should move on.

But the Growth Mindset wasn't one of those things. What Dweck did was identify a set of beliefs that significantly impact students' learning. And not just in the classroom, but throughout their lives. This was not something that should have been left on the educational shelf, the latest fad. This should have



become a mainstay. I'd go as far as saying that one of education's primary purposes is to instill a robust and enduring Growth Mindset in students, so they can become life-long learners.

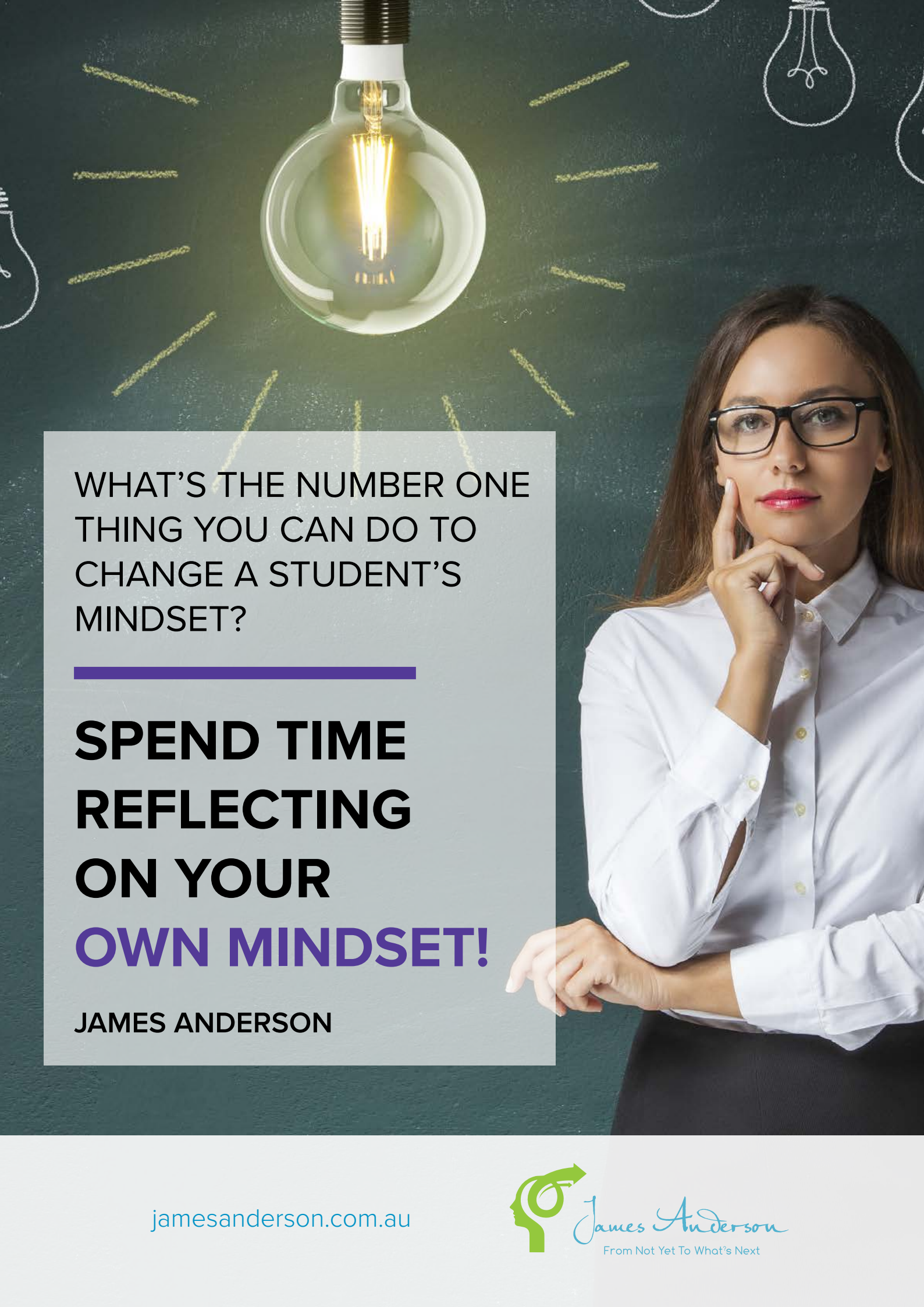
If only we'd recognised and acted on these lessons years ago ...

Original Article

Anderson, J., 2017, *How Growth Mindsets become "last year's initiative" – A cautionary tale*, mindfulbydesign.com, accessed 18th July 2019,
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<<https://www.jamesanderson.com.au/TheAgileLearner>>



WHAT'S THE NUMBER ONE
THING YOU CAN DO TO
CHANGE A STUDENT'S
MINDSET?

**SPEND TIME
REFLECTING
ON YOUR
OWN MINDSET!**

JAMES ANDERSON



WHY ARE WE STILL TALKING FIXED VS GROWTH?

So much of what you read about Mindsets these days considers that there are only two opposing Mindsets. That is, the Fixed Mindset versus the Growth Mindset.

Looking at Mindsets this way has helped us understand psychologist Carol Dweck's work. It has also highlighted the importance of developing a Growth Mindset.

However, an *over-emphasis* on Fixed versus Growth has left us with a *combative, disjointed* and *incomplete understanding* of Mindsets.

In fact, there are more than two Mindsets.

The reality is that there are many Mindsets and our own Mindset lies somewhere along the Mindset Continuum.

The **Mindset Continuum** recognizes that people can't be categorized as either Fixed or Growth. In the real world, our Mindset spans a continuum from Low Growth to High Growth. Recognizing this allows us to move to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Mindsets. It opens the door to more practical, powerful ways of nurturing our Mindset to become more Growth oriented.

Here are four reasons why we need to shift the conversation away from Fixed versus Growth to an understanding of the Mindset Continuum:

1. FIXED VS GROWTH STIGMATISES THE FIXED MINDSET

You only need to look at the way social media portrays Mindsets to see how they have become polarised and stigmatised.

Fixed is RED. Growth is GREEN. Positive images are associated with the Growth Mindset, while negative images are associated with the Fixed Mindset. We are left with a combative way of thinking where Growth Mindsets win and Fixed Mindsets lose.



The truth is that the Mindset you have is neither good nor bad. It's not something you choose. It just is. Your Mindset is the sum of all the Mindset messages you've received throughout your life. What's important is that you're able to recognise your Mindset and work towards making it even more Growth oriented.

The Mindset Continuum allows you recognise that simply because you don't have a Growth Mindset, you don't necessarily have a Fixed Mindset. In fact, everyone has a Growth Mindset. However, some people are more highly Growth oriented than others. Where you find yourself along the Mindset Continuum today is not "wrong" or a deficit – it is the foundation upon which you can build an even stronger Growth-oriented Mindset.

2. THE MINDSET CONTINUUM REFLECTS THE REAL WORLD

We often overlook the fact that Dweck's research recognises that people fall along a Mindset Continuum. It's true that to highlight the importance and impact of Mindsets, she tends to compare the behaviours of people at each end of the continuum: Fixed and Growth. But in her work, there is always the recognition that many people fall somewhere between, and even those grouped into the Fixed and Growth ends of the continuum vary in their beliefs.

We often see comparisons made between Fixed and Growth Mindsets. For example, people with a Growth Mindset understand they can change their most basic characteristics, such as talents, abilities and intelligence. On the other hand, people with a Fixed Mindset believe they can't change.

The trouble is, *people aren't like that*. People *don't* fall into two distinct groups: those who *believe they can change* and those who *believe they can't*.

In reality, some people think they can change a lot, whereas others see the amount of change they can achieve is limited. Very few people see themselves as completely unchanging.

Another benefit of the Mindset Continuum is that it shines a light on the middle ground. It reflects the reality that most people experience being somewhere between the two extremes of Fixed and Growth, allowing us to more accurately identify what our Mindset is at any given time.



3. THE FALSE MINDSET

When I'm presented with the false choice of having either a Fixed or Growth Mindset, I face a dilemma. I know I'm not truly Growth. But I'm not Fixed, either. And because Fixed is stigmatised as a bad thing, I'm left with one choice: I must have a Growth Mindset!

This is what Dweck and her colleague, Susan Mackie, call the False Mindset. We have a False Mindset when we declare that we have a Growth Mindset and consider that there's no more work to be done. But because we haven't taken the time to deeply reflect on the reality of our Mindset, our actions may be more aligned with a Fixed Mindset.

The Mindset Continuum is the *perfect tool* for combating the False Mindset.

Because we aren't forced to choose between the two extremes of Fixed and Growth, it allows us to be more accurate and honest about our Mindset. This, in turn, allows us to be more effective in shifting our Mindset. We know there is more work to be done.

4. RECOGNISING THE JOURNEY

"A Growth Mindset is not a declaration, it's a journey."
— Carol Dweck

When we see our Mindset as a declaration, we see it as something we can simply adopt. When it's done, it's done. We move on with our shiny new Mindset, giving it little attention.

But life is not like that. Our Mindset is not like a switch we flip between two states. Our Mindset is something we need to continually nurture and develop. It requires regular attention and constant effort. Change doesn't happen overnight. Nurturing and sustaining a Growth Mindset is a lifelong commitment.

The Mindset Continuum helps us recognise this slow, incremental change. We must constantly work on our Mindset so we don't go backwards. This is especially important if we are raising children who we want to develop more Growth-oriented Mindsets. We can't expect a single action to have an enormous effect on their Mindset. Rather, it's constant action that will make slow, cumulative and effective change.



The Growth Mindset Continuum opens the door to a deeper understanding of Mindsets. It paves the way for nurturing more Growth-oriented Mindsets in ourselves and others. It reflects the reality that we are neither Fixed nor Growth, but that we need to work towards becoming increasingly Growth oriented.

Original Article

Anderson, J., 2017, *Why are we still talking Fixed vs Growth Mindsets?*, mindfulbydesign.com, accessed 18th July 2019, <<https://mindfulbydesign.com/fixed-vs-growth-mindsets/>>



	FIXED	LOW GROWTH	MIXED	GROWTH	HIGH GROWTH
 WORLD VIEW	Sees themselves as UNCHANGING AND UNCHANGEABLE . Life is about discovering yourself and searching for where you fit into the world.	Change and GROWTH IS VERY LIMITED . See themselves as "not cut out for" some domains. Amount of growth possible in other domains is limited.	Limited Growth Mindset – believes they are capable of GROWTH IN A LIMITED NUMBER OF DOMAINS . Life offers only limited choices.	Sees themselves as CAPABLE OF SIGNIFICANT GROWTH in most domains. Sees great choice in life. May see themselves as restricted from significant growth in some domains.	Understands they can CHANGE THEIR MOST BASIC CHARACTERISTICS . Life is about deciding what you want to be and creating the abilities required to reach goals.
 CHALLENGES	AVOIDS CHALLENGES . Sees them as a potential threat.	Takes on EASY CHALLENGES that they believe they are likely to succeed at.	PREFERS CLEAR, IMMEDIATE GOALS that aren't too far out of reach, or in an area they find difficult.	ENJOYS BEING CHALLENGED by more open-ended tasks, even if not always immediately successful.	EMBRACES CHALLENGES even when path to achievement is not immediately clear.
 ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTY & OBSTACLES	GIVES UP IMMEDIATELY when they encounter difficulty.	TRIES FOR A WHILE , but gives up if not progressing easily. May try a few alternatives when encountering obstacles.	PERSISTS WHEN SEEING PROGRESS . Is developing a repertoire of strategies for getting past obstacles.	EXPECTS EVENTUAL MASTERY . Understands new learning is meant to be difficult so sticks at tasks for long periods.	PERSISTS FOR LONG PERIODS even in the face of setbacks and when new skills need to be learnt to achieve mastery.
 EFFORT	EFFORT IS ASSOCIATED WITH FAILURE and inability, so is seen as bad. Expects things you can do to come easily.	Recognizes that effort is sometimes required. SUSTAINED EFFORT IS A BAD THING . Misunderstands that not all types of effort produce growth.	EFFORT IS NECESSARY , but usually not enjoyable. Likely to prefer to do it easily. Recognizes when effort is being ineffective.	EFFORT IS A GOOD THING . Has experienced success as a result of effort in the past. Associates Effective Effort with growth.	Understands EFFORT AS PATH TO MASTERY . Actively works on developing strategies for more Effective Effort.
 FEEDBACK & CRITICISM	IGNORES useful negative feedback. Sees feedback as a list of their faults.	Accepts some direct feedback when corrections can be made quickly and easily. TENDS TO FOCUS ON POSITIVE FEEDBACK .	FORMATIVE FEEDBACK IS SEEN AS USEFUL , as long as it is targeted and achievable.	Accepts and LEARNS FROM FEEDBACK . Positive feedback is seen as recognition of the effort and process that led to the achievement.	REQUESTS CRITICAL FEEDBACK from targeted expert sources in order to improve both process and outcome.
 SUCCESS OF OTHERS	FEELS THREATENED by comparisons to others and avoids competitions, as these may highlight perceived deficits.	MAY MIS-ATTRIBUTE SUCCESS of others to luck or natural ability rather than growth achieved through effort.	ENJOYS PERSONAL SUCCESS , so will engage in competition and comparison when these make them look good.	FINDS LESSONS AND INSPIRATION in the success of others. Admires excellence. Enjoys the challenge posed by competition.	SEEKS OUT MASTERS AND EXPERTS in an effort to "learn their secrets". Competition is seen as a way for both competitors to push themselves to improve.
 MAKING MISTAKES	Actively HIDES OR IGNORES mistakes.	MAKES EXCUSES for mistakes. Looks for quick fixes. May attribute blame to others.	Expects to make mistakes and understands MISTAKES CAN BE CORRECTED .	Recognizes mistakes made are SIGNPOSTS FOR LEARNING opportunities.	Deliberately stretches themselves so errors have HIGH LEARNING POTENTIAL to facilitate further growth.
 OFFERED HELP AND SUPPORT	URNS DOWN help and support. Feels requiring help highlights their own deficits.	TOLERATES help when given. Disinclined to ask for help. Doesn't like to be seen to need help.	ACCEPTS HELP and support when offered. May not continue to seek help, if difficulties are persistent.	Expects feedback and recognizes it as DESIRABLE to help them grow.	SEEKS OUT help and support from specialized sources.



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MAKING MINDSETS MEANINGFUL

There are many different approaches to developing Growth Mindsets in schools. Some approaches are more successful than others.

In this article, I'm going to walk you through five different approaches to working with Growth Mindsets in schools.

First, we will look at the three most common approaches – your current Mindset, catchphrases and rules – and explain why they are unlikely to have the meaningful impact we are looking for.

Next, we'll look at how the most powerful and enduring methods for making Mindset meaningful rely on developing a style guide that “nudges” teachers to make more growth-oriented decisions. Ultimately, it is a teacher's own deeply authentic Growth Mindset that has the greatest impact on students.

**Making Mindset
MEANINGFUL**
in your School and Classroom
James Anderson
speaker • author • educator
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	GROWTH MINDSET	IS YOU	UNCONSCIOUS AND ACCURATE	AUTHENTIC
	STYLE GUIDE	NUDGE YOU	DRIVEN BY PRINCIPLES. FLEXIBLE AND TAILORED.	FOCUS ON THE BACKSTORY
	RULES	DIRECT YOU	OFTEN TOO BROAD, OVER GENERALISED OR MIS-APPLIED.	"PRAISE EFFORT" "CELEBRATE MISTAKES"
	CATCH PHRASES	TELL YOU	PARROTED. OFTEN CONTAIN HALF TRUTHS.	"NOT YET!" "BELIEVE AND YOU'LL ACHIEVE"
	CURRENT MINDSET	DEFAULT YOU	UNCONSCIOUS AND MIXED.	"HIGH ACHIEVING STUDENTS" V'S "STUDENTS WHO ARE ACHIEVING HIGHLY"

1. YOUR CURRENT MINDSET

Teachers can't help but influence students' Mindsets. We do it every day, whether we want to or not.

Most of these influences are unintended; they are part of your default. For example, we don't usually consciously choose our words – we just speak. The specific words and tone and inflection we use are driven by our subconscious and are a reflection of our Mindset.



Because most teachers haven't deeply reflected on their Mindset, these default actions often send mixed messages. Sometimes, we create positive Mindset Movers. At other times, we create negative Mindset Movers.

For example, describing students as "high-achieving students" creates the negative Mindset Mover of categorising a *type* of student. On the other hand, describing students as "achieving highly" identifies something the students are *doing* – something any student might be able to do. This is a positive Mindset Mover. At school, students are likely to hear both terms used, so they get mixed Mindset messages.

Sticking with current practice is unlikely to result in students developing more growth-oriented Mindsets.

2. CATCHPHRASES

Catchphrases pay lip service to the real work of developing Growth Mindsets. The assumption is that if a person changes their words, they'll change their Mindset.

Your Mindset is the underlying beliefs you have about the nature of your abilities. Changing your words doesn't necessarily change those beliefs; it only makes it sound like you've changed those beliefs.

Problems arise when a student or teacher adopts a catchphrase like "not yet". This is essentially a promise that the student will, in time, achieve. However, if, after a while, the student hasn't achieved growth, their experience becomes one of "still not yet". The promise of growth is broken, and they learn that they don't grow.

Posters that purport to "Change your words. Change your Mindset" get the message back-to-front. Our words will only change when our beliefs change – not the other way around.

Changing your words might give the illusion of a Growth Mindset, but it may have the opposite effect.

See "[Change your mindset THEN change your words](#)"¹ for more on this idea.



3. RULES

A rule-based approach to Growth Mindset is intended to direct and guide our actions, so we create more consistent, positive Mindset Movers in our classrooms.

The problem is that while the rules do work in some instances, they are often too broad. This means they are frequently misapplied and over-generalised.

For example, the Growth Mindset rule of “praise effort” is appropriate when the praise recognises the effective actions that lead to growth. However, as psychologist Carol Dweck has pointed out, this rule is often used as a consolation prize for students who don’t achieve.

Similarly, the often-repeated “celebrate mistakes” was intended to encourage students to take risks and stretch themselves into their Learning Zone. However, not all mistakes should be celebrated. Some should be avoided. And while mistakes are part of the learning process, ultimately, it is correcting them that is the evidence of learning.

Without a highly growth-oriented Mindset, a rules-based approach is often misapplied. Like catchphrases, it may have a negative impact.

4. STYLE GUIDE

A style guide is based on the principles underlying a Growth Mindset. As such, it is far less prescriptive and far more flexible than a rule-based approach. A style guide creates what behavioural scientists call “nudges”.

Nudges help *reframe our choices*.

In this case, they make it more likely that teachers will create a positive Mindset Mover when there’s a chance they could create a negative Mindset Mover.

For example, a school’s style guide might include the statement, “When celebrating achievements and abilities, always recognise the backstory that leads to the achievement.”

This “nudge” can be applied in many situations – school awards, comments made on student work and recognising the achievements of experts in a field. It draws attention to the positive Mindset Mover of the process of *becoming*. It also avoids the negative Mindset Mover of praising achievements, talents and abilities in the absence of acknowledging the processes that created them.



Similarly, a school might create a nudge that says, “When describing groups of students, base the groups on verbs, not adjectives.” In this way, teachers create a positive Mindset Mover by describing groups of students who are “achieving highly” or “learning music”. The classification is based on *actions*. This is in contrast to categorising students as *being* high-achieving or being music students, which creates the negative Mindset Mover that there are different *types* of students, some who are high-achieving and others who aren’t, some who are musical and others who aren’t.

5. A TEACHER’S GROWTH MINDSET

Ultimately, the most powerful way to influence students’ Mindsets is through the consistent application of the teacher’s own highly growth-oriented Mindset.

Teachers don’t have time to think about their every word and action. Most of what we say and do comes from our subconscious – the set of beliefs and assumptions we carry with us every day.

When we see the world through the Growth Mindset lens, our actions authentically and consistently reinforce the Growth Mindset and act as positive Mindset Movers.

Our Mindset is like our own **personal Growth Mindset style guide** that we carry with us all day, every day.

This reinforces why the number-one thing you can do to develop a Growth Mindset in students is to reflect deeply on your own Mindset, then take action to establish an even more highly growth-oriented one.

Original Article

Anderson, J., 2019, *Making Mindsets Meaningful in Your School and Classroom*, mindfulbydesign.com, accessed 18th July 2019, <<https://mindfulbydesign.com/making-mindsets-meaningful-school-classroom/>>

Resources

1. Anderson, J., 2018, *Change your Mindset, THEN change your words!*, mindfulbydesign.com, accessed 18th July 2019, <<https://mindfulbydesign.com/change-mindset-change-words/>>



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TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH GROWTH MINDSETS

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JAMES ANDERSON'S NEW BOOK

THE LEARNING LANDSCAPE

In *The Learning Landscape*, James Anderson outlines a powerful metaphor for visualising learning. Mapping the abstract concept of learning onto a physical journey in the real world, the learning process is made tangible and accessible to learners.

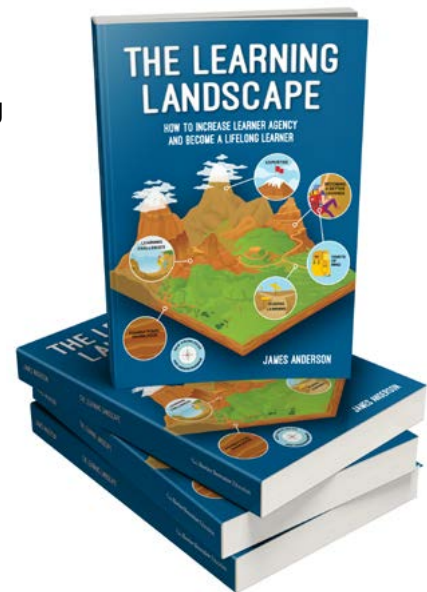
Students will be guided across the plains of the Learning Landscape, passing over the foundational knowledge that has come before them, while overcoming pits of challenging learning in an effort to climb to the peaks of expertise.

In the Learning Landscape, challenges are represented by four different types of Challenge Pits:

- The Learning Challenge
- The Performance Challenge
- The Downhill Challenge
- The Aspirational Challenge

Only by equipping students with powerful learning tools, such as the Habits of Mind, will they be prepared for the climb out of these Challenge Pits, as their Mindsets determine how far they can travel and how high they can climb.

Drawing on the work of Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Art Costa and Bena Kallick, Anders Ericsson, and Carol Dweck, *The Learning Landscape* provides teachers with a tool to develop Learner Agency, creating more effective learners, improving engagement and, ultimately, learning outcomes.



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James Anderson

SPEAKER | AUTHOR | EDUCATOR

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James Anderson is an educator, author and keynote speaker who supports schools and teachers to enable students to thrive in a rapidly changing, increasingly complex world.

The foundation of James's work is Growth Mindsets. Having worked with schools around the world, James knows how to take teachers beyond simple social media catchphrases to practical strategies that work. By challenging teachers' Mindsets, he equips them with the tools to create a powerful teaching framework that nurtures students' Growth Mindsets.

James skilfully unites the Habits of Mind, Anders Ericsson's critical work on practice and Carol Dweck's work on Growth Mindset. The result is a compelling combination that increases student efficacy and achieves greater learning outcomes through the development of Learning Agility.

James is a Certified Speaking Professional and author of *The Agile Learner*, *Succeeding with Habits of Mind*, *The Mindset Continuum* and numerous e-books. His latest book, *The Learning Pit and the Learning Landscape*, is due for release in 2019.

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