



You're Smarter Than You Think!

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A young boy with dark skin is sitting at a desk, looking intently at a computer monitor. He has his hand resting on his chin in a thoughtful pose. He is wearing a green and blue plaid shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom or office setting. On the left side of the image, there are several white circular graphic elements of varying sizes.

Discussion

- What do you believe about your ability to learn?

- What do you hear from students about how they perceive their ability to learn?

How I'd Answer These Questions

"I'm pretty good at learning,
except in math. **I'm no good
in math.**"

"Oh, I'm not good in writing, I
can never figure out what to
say."





There's a Name for This

- ❑ This is called a **fixed mindset**, a person's lack of belief in their ability to learn and change their thinking.
- ❑ You might have heard of **growth mindset**, which is the opposite.
- ❑ But **why** might we, as students and people, not believe in ourselves?

Unpacking the Fixed Mindset



First Description of the Fixed Mindset

- Avoids challenges
- Gives up easily
- Sees effort as fruitless
- Ignores criticism
- Is threatened by others' success

Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006. Print.



My Description of the Fixed Mindset

- **Terrified** of challenges
- Gives up because extra effort **never helps**
- Feels **shut down** by criticism
- Sees others' success used to **mock** them





The Fixed Mindset's Secret Origins

- Many assume this mindset is CHOSEN or DESIRED.
- Based on my experiences, however, I believe that the fixed mindset is TAUGHT.

Example: My Math Experiences

- ❑ I scored lower on tests, took longer to complete assignments, and could not understand in-class explanations.
- ❑ Teachers often used my math results to prove that I was “lazy” or “careless,” or to accuse me of “not trying.”
- ❑ Other students used my math results to mock me and suggest that perhaps I didn’t belong in the gifted classes after all.





Fixed Mindset By Another Name

- ❑ Fixed mindsets have lifelong negative impacts.
- ❑ Despite a person's desire to overcome, life or other people have taught them that these negative beliefs are true.
- ❑ I believe the fixed mindset might be better named something else: **educational trauma**.

The background consists of a dense, overlapping collage of colorful sticky notes in shades of blue, green, yellow, pink, and purple. Each sticky note features a large, bold, black question mark. The notes are scattered across the frame, creating a textured and vibrant visual field.

So, What Do
We Do About
It?



Overcoming The Fixed Mindset

- ❑ Unlearning the fixed mindset is like **decluttering**. You first must acknowledge that you have this junk, these negative beliefs, and then you decide what to do with it.
- ❑ As academic support, we must be able to recognize the symptoms of a fixed mindset, and to **acknowledge** its presence, rather than dismiss it or deny it.





The Challenge of Fixed Mindsets

Fixed mindsets are incredibly painful to live with, which means a student may be resistant to receiving help at first.

Some negative beliefs have been in place for years or even decades...they will not leave quickly or quietly.

Outside Factors: Student Stress

Students will not always be:

- Young
- Unemployed
- Childless
- Responsible only for themselves

Some students will be:

- Older
- Retraining for a new career
- Parents
- Caregivers

**These outside stressors intensify
fixed mindsets.**





The Price of High Academic Stakes

- ❑ Educational trauma can leave students feeling **incapable** and **undeserving** of help, which makes failing more likely.
- ❑ Failing in college means **wasted money and time**, and possibly the **loss** of a career put on hold.
- ❑ This means struggling students will have even more difficulty learning, and may even appear lazy or unmotivated, leading educators to **withdraw** help.

Reviewing Our Own Mindsets

- ❑ Working with students will also make us confront our own fixed mindsets.
- ❑ We must take time to process and heal our own educational trauma, too.
- ❑ **But take heart: the strategies we'll discuss today can also help us, too!**





Helping Students Further

- We may be the first people in a student's life who pay attention, listen, and assist.
- This means we may meet students who need help we cannot give.
- Connecting **academic support** and **mental health care** is crucial.

Two Strategies Students Can Try



Noticing Self-Talk



Rewording Negative Thoughts

Pay Attention to Self-Talk

- What is self-talk? Our inner **narrator!**
- What are we telling ourselves when we see a challenge?
- Who taught us** to speak this way to ourselves?
- Is this self-talk actually helping us?





Activity: Rewording Thoughts

- If I do not get a good grade, I am a failure.
- I got an A on my essay, but I never get As. I just got lucky.
- There's no reason to try, because I already know I'll fail.

Helping Students Feel Safe to Learn





Creating Safety for Students to Learn

The 3 strategies I will go over next will help prepare any student to learn with you, no matter your subject area.

As we go through these slides, think back to your own educational experience.

- When did you notice a teacher or tutor using these with you?
- When did you feel the lack of these strategies?
- How did this affect you?



Strategy 1: Permission to Fail





What Does This Mean?

Permission to fail is essential for learning. If you believe you are not allowed to fail, you cannot take in new information, let alone interact with it.

"We're going to make mistakes tonight, and that's okay, because we're learning." - Myrtle Mashburn, longtime piano teacher in Cliffside, NC

How We Practice This

- ❑ Focusing on **practicing skills** rather than completing assignments is the goal for academic support staff.
- ❑ Setting this expectation gives students permission to try and **fail without judgment**, which is the only mode of practice that works...and over time, they will learn how to give themselves that same permission.



Strategy 2: Safety to Explore



What Does This Mean?

- ❑ When a student knows they can try and fail in front of you **without being judged**, they will feel safe to explore new ways to think and act, since there is no risk of being hurt, and no risk of losing the respect of others.
- ❑ This is where real learning can begin!





How We Practice This

- ❑ We can show students **many ways to learn** and understand material, which helps them release some shame they may feel about differences in learning.
- ❑ We can also **demonstrate our own failures** and share how we rebuilt from failure. We can even laugh about our mistakes to relieve the pressure.
- ❑ This builds the feeling of **safety** in tutoring sessions over time.

Strategy 3: Confidence to Try



What Does This Mean?

Once a **student** knows **they** can fail without judgment, and that **they** can explore new ways of learning, this builds the confidence **they** need to try more on **their** own.

I've seen this happen many times and it's my favorite part of education—that moment when a student tells me excitedly, "I get it! I think I can do this myself!"



How We Practice This

- ❑ In academic support environments, we can **guide students through skills** and then encourage them to keep working.
- ❑ Through teaching new ways to learn, new ways to think about information, we are like **physical therapists for the mind**, helping students' learning muscles move in ways they may have never expected.



A hand is shown from the bottom left, holding a glowing, golden orb. The background is a soft, warm sunset or sunrise with a blurred horizon. The overall mood is hopeful and uplifting.

Summary

The fixed mindset is not **anyone's** fault.

We can **support** a student to help them declutter negative beliefs.

We do not have to do this **alone**—education and mental health can work together.

We can **give** students permission to fail as many times as necessary.

We can **provide** safety for them to explore new ways of thinking.

Over time, **students** will gain confidence, and learning will become easier.

Discussion

What do you think about the strategies presented today?

Have any educators used these strategies with you, or do you wish they had?

What other strategies can you think of to support students as they learn?

What was the most surprising point to learn or think about in this workshop?

Are there any ideas discussed here that are challenging or unsettling for you?

How do you think this information will change your tutoring strategies?



Questions?



*You're braver than you believe,
Stronger than you seem,
And smarter than you think.*

- A. A. Milne