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**JAMES ANDERSON**

**SUNDAY 20 MAY**

**Session 1**

**The Agile Learner: Develop Learning  
Agility in Our Students**

**MELBOURNE**

# JAMES ANDERSON

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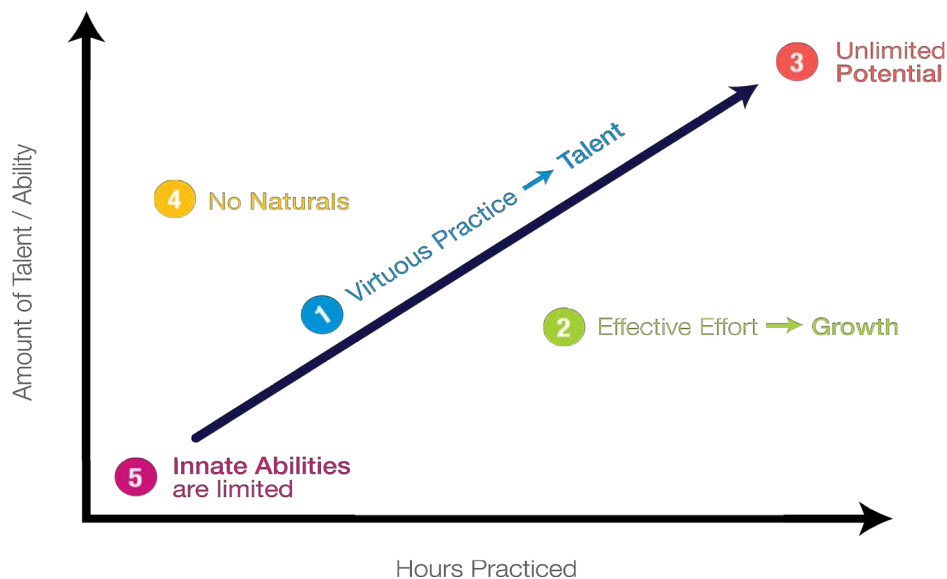
# LEARNING AGILITY



Learning Agility is the **ability** and **willingness** to **learn from experience**, and subsequently apply that learning to perform successfully under new or first-time conditions.

*Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000*

## 5 TRUTHS ABOUT TALENT



### 1. Virtuous Practice Builds Talent

Virtuous Practice occurs just beyond one's current abilities, is highly focused on small specific improvements, is guided by the feedback of experts and/or clear standards, and is responsive to making adjustments. The result of this sort of practice is to build new mental constructs that aid in further talent development – the virtuous cycle.

### 2. Effective Effort Leads to Growth

Not all effort has the effect of leading to growth. Effective Effort combines mature Habits of Mind with Virtuous Practice to produce growth. Less effective types of effort do not produce growth, although they may produce high-level performance.

### 3. Your Potential is Unlimited

There are no limits to your potential. This is a function of your brain's capacity to rewire itself to allow for the acquisition of new abilities – Brain Plasticity. Practice isn't a way of reaching your potential, it's a way of building it.

### 4. No Naturals

The illusion of "naturals" has two sources: 1) failure to recognize the total hours practiced, or 2) a comparison to others based on age instead of hours practiced. Individuals that have accumulated similarly high numbers of hours spent in virtuous practice perform at a similar standard.

### 5. Innate Abilities are Limited

Individuals are born with differences in abilities. Some of these may give the individual advantages over others at a young age. However on an adult scale, the effects of virtuous practice eclipse natural abilities. No one is good on an adult scale without similar amounts of virtuous practice.

# HABITS OF MIND

## 1. Persisting



Stick to it! Persevering in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.

## 2. Managing impulsivity



Take your Time! Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.

## 3. Listening with understanding and empathy



Understand Others! Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas. Make an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.

## 4. Thinking flexibly



Look at it Another Way! Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.

## 5. Thinking about your thinking (Metacognition)



Know your knowing! Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.

## 6. Striving for accuracy



Check it again! Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.

## 7. Questioning and problem posing



How do you know? Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed and developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.

## 8. Applying past knowledge to new situations



Use what you Learn! Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.

## 9. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision



Be clear! Striving for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.

## 10. Gather data through all senses



Use your natural pathways! Pay attention to the world around you Gather data through all the senses; taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.

## 11. Creating, imagining, and innovating



Try a different way! Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality

## 12. Responding with wonderment and awe



Have fun figuring it out! Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.

## 13. Taking responsible risks



Venture out! Being adventuresome; living on the edge of one's competence. Try new things constantly.

## 14. Finding Humor



Laugh a little! Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at oneself.

## 15. Thinking interdependently



Work together! Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Team work.

## 16. Remaining open to continuous learning



I have so much more to learn! Having humility and pride when admitting we don't know; resisting complacency.

## EFFECTIVE EFFORT MATRIX



### 1. Effective Effort

Only Effective Effort leads to growth and learning. This sort of effort is applied through Virtuous Practice, which places the learning just beyond one's current abilities, is highly focused on achieving specific outcomes, involves errors or short falls that have high learning potential and involves collecting and acting on useful feedback. It demands increasingly sophisticated application of Habits of Mind, which are slightly beyond one's current level of development. Level of achievement increases as a result.

### 2. Performance Effort

Performance Effort involves peak *reliable* performance. The individual is exercising his/her Habits of Mind at their maximum, so the complexity of the task would be considered high. Although errors or shortcomings may occur, they are undesirable and the individual is seeking to minimize their occurrence, as such the learning potential from these is low and achievement tends to remain at a plateau without further development.

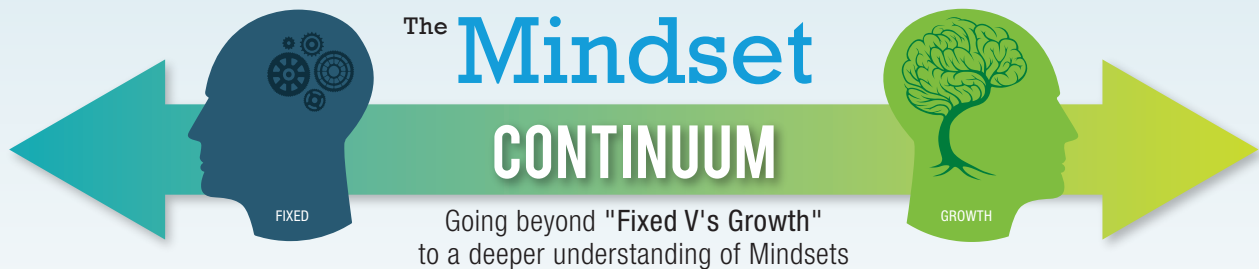
### 3. Ineffective Effort

Ineffective Effort may have many of the characteristics of Virtuous Practice, however the individual's Habits of Mind are significantly less well developed than the task demands. This makes the Learning Power low and therefore ineffective. Due to the extent of errors and shortcomings they often have little learning potential. As a result, achievement tends to decrease.

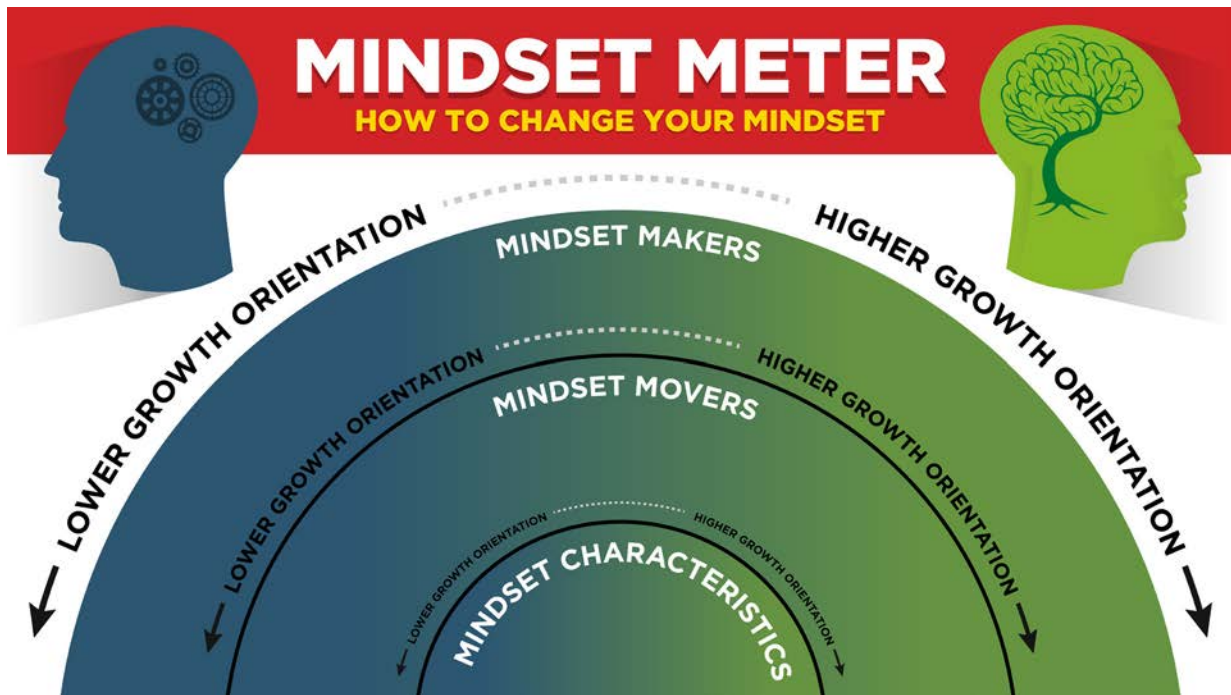
### 4. Low Effort

Low Effort falls well within one's current level of competence. It is characterized by either long mastered abilities or the acquisition of simple skills that require little or no intellectual stretch. Mistakes are likely to be the result of inattention rather than intellectual stretch, as a result have low learning potential. This sort of effort is characterized by under performance.





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



## The Mindset Meter

The Mindset Meter depicts both the Mindset Continuum, and the influences that create and shift our Mindsets

## Mindset Characteristics

These are the characteristics of a person based on their beliefs and understandings about the nature of abilities – their Mindset. Often we only hear about the characteristics of people at the extreme ends of the continuum. A more realistic view is to recognize that most people fall somewhere along this continuum.

## Mindset Movers

These are messages and experiences that affect our beliefs and understandings about the nature of abilities. These can be Negative Mindset Movers, that push us towards the Low Growth end of the continuum, or Positive Mindset Movers that push us towards the High Growth end of the continuum. Where we find our mindset is a result of the sum total of all the positive and negative mindset movers we experience in our lives.

## Mindset Makers

Anyone who creates a Mindset Mover for a student is a Mindset Maker. As teachers we have the opportunity to change our pedagogy and structures to create many Positive Mindset Movers in a student's life. In this way we can slowly shift their mindset towards the high growth end of the Mindset Continuum.



# MISUNDERSTANDINGS

## ABOUT MINDSETS

BY JAMES ANDERSON



A Growth Mindset is not the same as self-esteem or positive affirmations. It is about an understanding that the right sort of effort leads to real growth of our most basic abilities.



Whatever Mindset we find ourselves with today, we can change it. Ways we change our Mindset include studying the nature of abilities, learning and experiencing the real process that leads to success, as well as listening for, and re-framing, the Fixed Mindset messages around us.



Knowing you can extend your abilities - a Growth Mindset - can be motivating, especially if you previously thought they were fixed. However, you also need to see those abilities as relevant to your goals in order to want to develop them.



Our Mindset is not an innate part of who we are. We are not born with a certain Mindset. We develop our Mindset through our experiences, including the messages we receive from others.



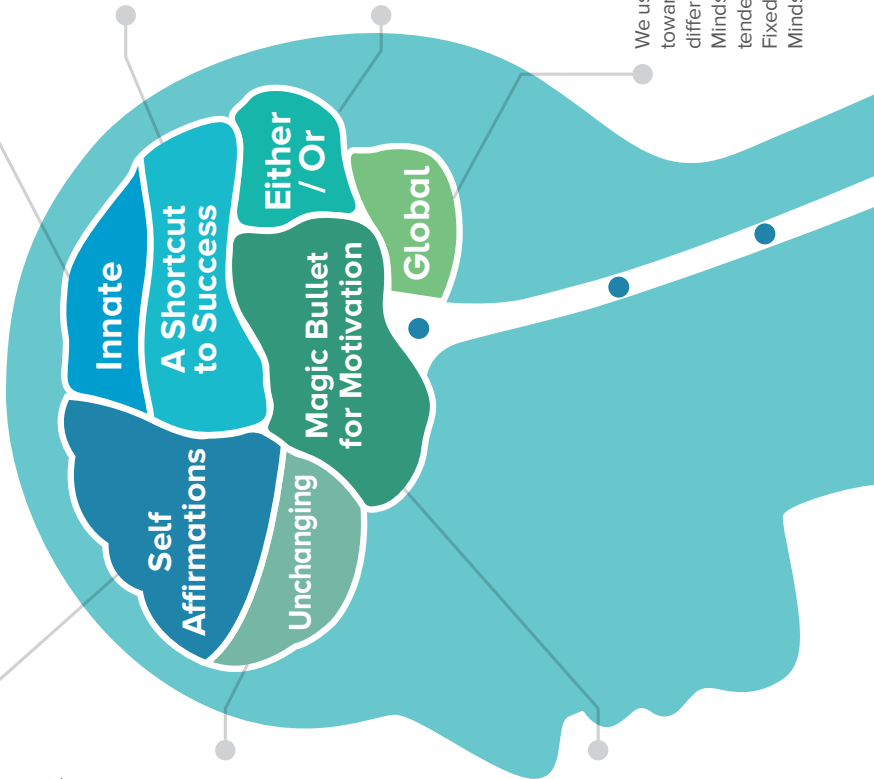
Developing a Growth Mindset is just the first step. You will still have to do the actual hard work of engaging in effective practice, to see the growth and development. Just having a Growth Mindset doesn't make you smarter - it just opens the door to getting smarter!



No one has a completely Fixed or Growth Mindset. It is probably more accurate to talk about the degree to which a person holds a Fixed or growth Mindset about abilities. When it comes down to it, we all have a Mixed Mindset to varying degrees.



We usually don't have the same Mindset towards all abilities. We often approach different types of abilities with different Mindsets. Although we may have a tendency to be predominantly more Fixed or Growth-oriented, your actual Mindset is likely to vary by domain.



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Based on: Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, by Carol S. Dweck.



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# How to be a Growth Mindset Teacher

by James Anderson



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# Where are you on Your Growth Mindset Journey?

## The Growth Mindset Classroom

Teachers have a deep understanding of Mindsets and are actively developing their own Growth Mindset. They have acquired a large repertoire of teaching and learning strategies tailored for students at different points along the Mindset Continuum. Emphasis is on building robust and enduring Growth Mindsets in students. Increasingly, focus is given to teaching and valuing the process of learning and the actions required for students to achieve growth, rather than simply understanding that growth is possible.

School  
Culture

## The Growth Mindset School

There is school-wide commitment to the importance of developing a Growth Mindset in students, teachers, leaders, parents and the wider school community. The development of a Growth Mindset is supported by school-wide systems and procedures; it's not limited to the discretion of the classroom teacher. Therefore, it is an explicit goal of the school to develop a culture that fosters a Growth Mindset.

Classroom  
Strategies

## The Growth Mindset Teacher

Teachers have a clear and accurate understanding of Mindsets, including the role of positive and negative Mindset Movers that contribute to a person's Mindset over time. They understand that Mindset is a continuum, with change occurring in small steps that are influenced by these Mindset Movers. "Teacher Talk" is one of the most common positive Mindset Movers adopted by teachers.

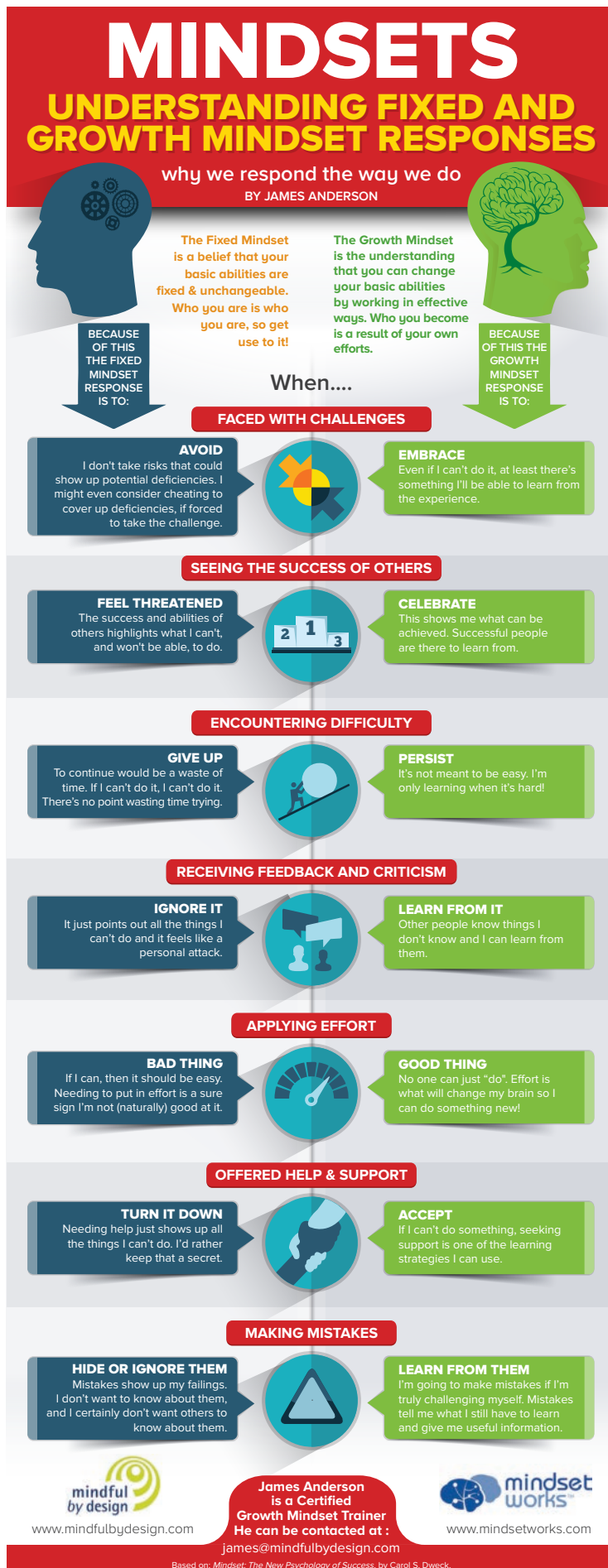
Deeper  
Understandings

## The Growth Mindset Student

A Growth Mindset is seen as a teaching strategy. Benefits of a Growth Mindset are advocated. A Fixed Mindset is considered to be a problem, so students are encouraged to "adopt" a Growth Mindset. However, little, if any, consideration is given to the underlying causes of a student's Mindset. Responsibility for Mindset lies with the student. In some cases, teachers may unknowingly have "False Mindsets".

## Growth Mindset Gimmicks

A Growth Mindset is broadly recognised as being important "for student learning". Approaches consist largely of slogans, catch phrases and other low-level strategies with little consideration for how these align, or fail to align, with the broader teaching and learning process. There is little change to teacher practice or student learning outcomes. Misunderstandings about Mindsets are common.





# Not all effort is created equal

*By James Anderson*

I am increasingly of the belief that we should ban the word “**effort**” from the classroom.

Praising effort has become all the rage in education—all in the name of Growth Mindsets.

The argument goes something like this: If we praise students for their ability or achievements we detract from the importance of their efforts. So “Great Work!” is out. So are “You’re so clever!” and “You’re a natural at this”. By focusing on who they are and what they did, rather than how they did it, we contribute to the development of a Fixed Mindset.

The alternative, we are told, is to praise “effort”. “Great effort!” is supposed to be a way of praising students for how they go about learning. The trouble is that not all effort is great effort. Some of it is very ordinary, and in some cases it’s completely ineffective.

When Professor Carol Dweck advocated praising effort, what she was trying to do was

focus attention on the *behaviours that lead to growth*.

It’s essential that we don’t lose sight of the fact that at the end of the day it is the growth, which education is all about. Dweck was simply pointing out that we should attribute that growth to what the student does, rather than who they are.

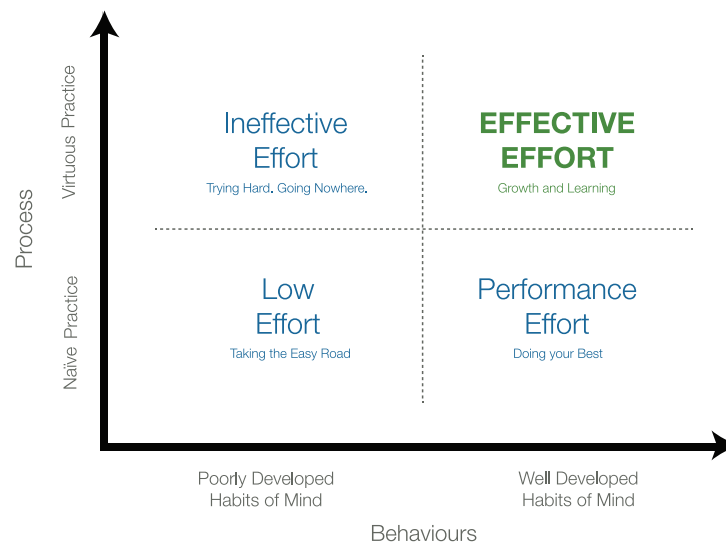
Not all effort is created equal. The sort of effort we should be praising is effort that leads to growth. Where effort does not result in growth, we need to direct students towards the type of effort that does.

***The sort of effort we should be praising is effort that leads to growth.***

To explore this idea I have created the Effective Effort Matrix. The matrix considers both the skillfulness of the student’s learning behaviours as well as the process those behaviours are being applied to, in order to achieve growth.

Not All Effort Is Created Equal

## EFFECTIVE EFFORT MATRIX



Let's take a moment to consider the axis before considering the four types of effort.

The Behaviours axis describes the actions students take in learning situations. Costa and Kallick describe these as Habits of Mind. Highly effective learners have very well developed Habits of Mind, which they apply skillfully and mindfully when confronted with challenging tasks. The more difficult and complex a task, the more highly developed the Habit of Mind needs to be in order to succeed at it.

The Process axis describes the effectiveness of the learning process—how we practice while we're learning. Naïve Practice, so called because people often engage in it with the incorrect belief that it will result in growth,

typically does not involve any intellectual stretch, is unfocused and undirected.

Rehearsal is an example of Naïve Practice. Simply repeating or rehearsing something you've already mastered, is not likely to result in growth.

On the other hand Virtuous Practice has the effect of producing growth. It occurs slightly beyond one's current level of competence, in the Zone of Proximal Development. It is highly focused, on small incremental learning outcomes. It is called "virtuous" because it results in development of new learning schema, which are then built upon to contribute to further growth and development—a virtuous cycle. (See *Peak*, by Anders Ericsson)



## Four Different Types of Effort

### 1

#### Low Effort: Taking the Easy Road

When we see students working on tasks that are too easy for them, often in ways that require only basic skills, we are seeing Low Effort. Because the work is easy, the quality is likely to be high, with few errors. The student might be “concentrating” or otherwise “busy”, but they aren’t learning anything new, and they aren’t being challenged in any way—either in the content or the process of learning.

Answering the easiest questions, where the answer is already known or easily produced, is an example of Low Effort.

Low effort can also be seen when learning new things that are simply well within the student’s current capacities. For example asking an adult to learn their 13 times tables would be an “easy thing they haven’t done yet”, and would require low effort. While students engaging in low effort might be “on task” they are not likely to be experiencing growth. Mistakes made when applying Low Effort are likely to be “sloppy mistakes<sup>1</sup>” and therefore have low learning potential. Praise of this sort of effort will simply lead to further under performance.

### 2

#### Performance Effort: Doing Your Best

Students applying Performance Effort are doing their best, reliable, reproducible work, and are inside their comfort zone. Energy and skill levels are high. This is the sort of effort that is appropriate in performance situations (e.g. exams and exhibitions).

Students engaged in Performance Effort are not in their Zone of Proximal Development, so are not experiencing the stretch required to grow. Mistakes in this context are generally avoided. As a result,

Performance Effort tends not to lead to growth.

The problem with praising this sort of effort is that it is a de facto way of praising the product. Students only receive praise for performance effort if the performance or product is of a high standard. So if a teacher is frequently praising this sort of effort, the student focuses on the standard, not growth and learning.

While there are times when we want students to demonstrate mastery, in most classroom situations growth is the goal. So when we see students retreating to the safety of Performance Effort our response generally has three components:

- Recognize the prior effective effort that has lead to the current mastery. Value the back-story of hard work and effective learning and ensure they associate this effective effort with their current achievements.
- Recognize that while mastery or standard achieved is a good thing, it is just one more step in their ongoing learning and growth. Now it's time to look to "What's next?" in their learning.
- Help them identify where future learning might take place by setting appropriate learning goals.

**For example:** "It's great to see that all that hard work has paid off and you've mastered this level of work. Now it's time to work on something harder so you can learn and grow. School is about learning, not simply demonstrating what you know."

### 3

#### **Ineffective Effort: Working Hard, But Getting Nowhere**

Students applying this sort of effort are being challenged, spending lots of energy, but lack the skills to meet that challenge. Students are "working hard", but to little effect.

Students applying this sort of effort can become frustrated with their learning. If they have been surrounded with Growth Mindset messages in the classroom they may start saying things like "I can't do this yet".

However, if teachers aren't helping students develop more effective learning

strategies and Habits of Mind, "I can't do this, yet" may become "I STILL can't do this yet!"

Unfortunately this sort of effort is often praised as a "consolation

***"I can't do this yet" may become "I STILL can't do this yet!"***

prize". When we can't praise students for achievement, at least we can be tempted to praise them for "trying their best". Teachers need to resist praising this sort of effort, and instead direct students to more effective effort.

When we recognize students applying ineffective effort the type of praise we give should have the following qualities:

- Recognize the energy the student is expending and the fact that they are challenging themselves. These are aspects of their effort that should be encouraged.
- Help them identify where future learning might take place by setting appropriate learning goals.

**For example:** “It’s great to see you working so hard on that task. That’s a really difficult task and you’ll need to work hard at it! I can see you’ve tried several

strategies to help you solve it, which is great, but they don’t seem to be working for you. What other strategies do you think you could try? We want to see you progressing, not just working hard.”

It’s possible that a student engaged in this sort of effort is too far outside their Zone of Proximal Development and needs to come back a few steps to master prior learning before moving on. In this case the skill that needs to be developed or supported is identifying the Zone of Proximal Development—problems that are just slightly beyond their current ability. There are no short cuts.

## 4

### Effective Effort: Growth and Learning

This is the sort of effort that Dweck was referring to when she encouraged teachers to praise effort. Effective Effort is the sort of effort that is targeted just beyond a student’s current level of performance in both behaviour and understanding. It is designed to lead to the growth that underpins the Growth Mindset.

Mistakes made when engaged in Effective Effort are “stretch mistakes” so have high learning potential. They help identify learning needs at a point where we are capable of making the small adjustments required for incremental growth—they act

as a signpost on a pathway towards future growth.

Students engaged in this sort of effort are seeing regular, incremental growth in learning. They are able to recognize that their behaviours (efforts) lead to growth, and as a result, are more likely to develop the understanding that they are capable of change and responsible for their own growth—a Growth Mindset.

Effective Effort is the sort of effort that is truly worthy of the praise “Great Effort!”

## How Do We Praise “Effort”

The problem is that just saying “great effort” is too vague and too easily confused with Low Effort, Performance Effort and Ineffective Effort. On the other hand, saying “Great effective effort!” just doesn’t fit with our vernacular.

We can, however, ensure that students understand the different sorts of effort, by teaching

***praise should be directed at the specific actions that lead to growth***

them about this matrix. This would help them identify the sort of effort that they are engaging in, and what’s expected in the classroom.

A word of warning: The term “effort” is so pervasive and used so frequently in non-learning contexts that we are unlikely to ever get to a point where we can say “great effort” to a student and be sure they are clear that we are praising them for being slightly outside their previous best, developing both their behaviors and understandings while engaged in virtuous practice. Realistically, and whether you like it or not, when we use the word “effort” in the classroom, there are few school communities that would have a strong shared understanding of what effort means.

That’s why I’m increasingly of the belief it

should be banned—or at least used more sparingly—in the classroom.

### What can we say instead?

As an alternative to praising “effort”, praise should be directed at the specific actions that led to the growth. **For example:**

- Praise the student for attempting problems that were slightly too difficult for them.
- Praise the fact that the challenge led to mistakes they can learn from.
- Praise the strategies they used to respond successfully to those mistakes.
- Praise how they developed new skills and Habits of Mind and how they applied them to new learning situations.

In short, do what Carol Dweck has advocated and praise the *behaviors that lead to growth*. We just need to be clearer and more specific about the way we do it if we want students to consistently associate the right sort of effort with growth, and therefore develop a Growth Mindset.

<sup>1</sup>*Mistakes are Not All Created Equal*, Eduardo Briceno <http://community.mindsetworks.com/blog-page/home-blogs/entry/mistakes-are-not-all-created-equal>

# How Growth Mindsets become “last year’s initiative” – A cautionary tale

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By James November 14, 2017 1 Comment

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 behaviours 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 instil 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*, 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 instil 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 ...

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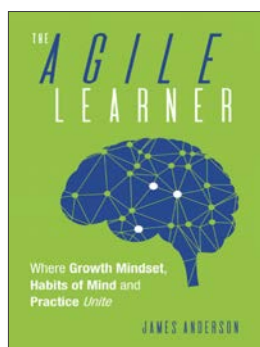
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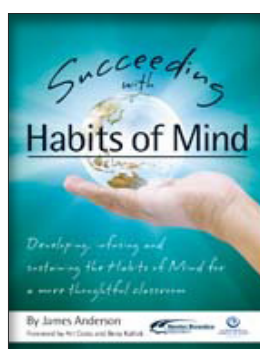


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