

Myths & Mindsets:
How Everything You Used to Think about Giftedness Is Bad for Children
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Carol Dweck is a developmental psychologist who has done important research on child development, and has pulled together findings in neuropsychology, developmental psychology, and education that she writes about in her recent book called *Mindset*.

FIXED MINDSET: Some children are categorized as inherently smart and some are not. The fixed mindset is associated with lower achievement and self-esteem.

GROWTH MINDSET: Intelligence is seen as developing over time with appropriately scaffolded opportunities to learn. The growth mindset is associated with greater confidence, risk-taking, and higher academic and career success over time.

Dweck's conclusions apply to gifted development in many important ways, and highlight some of the widely-held myths and misconceptions about giftedness:

1. ~~Some People are Born Smart~~ vs. **Intelligence Develops Over Time**

"The great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning." (Dweck, p. 188)

From a fixed mindset perspective, some people are inherently smart, and some aren't, and there are ways to measure this (e.g. IQ). From the growth mindset perspective, intelligence develops over time with appropriately scaffolded opportunities to learn.

2. ~~Praising Children's Intelligence is Good~~ vs. **Praising Children's Intelligence is Bad**

"Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance." (Dweck, p. 170)

Rather than praising for personality or innate fixed attributes like being smart, praise children for what they accomplish through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies. Ask them about their work in ways that appreciate their effort and choices.

3. ~~Smart Kids Learn Quickly and Easily~~ vs. **Working Hard Makes You Smart**

"You aren't a failure until you start to blame." (Dweck, p. 37)

From a fixed mindset perspective, if you have to work hard at something, or you learn it slowly, you aren't good at it, and are not very smart. From a growth perspective, however, high achievement comes from hard work over time, and thoughtfulness (which can be slow) is a good thing.

4. ~~Failure = Lack of Ability~~ vs. **Failure Can Be Seen as an Opportunity for Learning**

"People in a growth mindset don't just seek challenge, they thrive on it." (Dweck, p. 21)

People with a fixed mindset feel judged and evaluated all the time. If they spill something, they feel like klutzes; if they don't do well on a test, they conclude they aren't smart. From a growth mindset, failures are learning opportunities, a chance to see what we don't know or need to work on. The growth mindset is associated with much higher academic and career achievement levels.

5. ~~Some Children are Destined for Success~~ vs. **Potential Cannot Be Measured**

"An assessment at one point in time has little value for understanding someone's ability, let alone their potential to succeed in future." (Dweck, p. 29)

From the growth perspective, potential is invisible and unmeasurable because there is too much open to development over time and to variables like motivation and effort.