

GROWTH MINDSET

Pocketbook

By Barry Hymer &
Mike Gershon

Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone

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Foreword from Carol Dweck

"I am delighted to recommend this important book. The authors explain my research on students' motivation and mindset elegantly and succinctly, and show how it can be applied in everyday learning and teaching. With research evidence, classroom examples, and case histories, they show how developing a growth mindset in students can be transformational.

The *Growth Mindset Pocketbook* has the potential to have a lasting impact on the lives of teachers and learners alike."

Carol S. Dweck, Author of *Mindset: How We Can Fulfil Our Potential*,
Lewis & Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology,
Stanford University

Abandoning cherished practices



Bear with us! In this chapter we could be nibbling away at some of your most cherished practices. In some cases this might be less of a nibble than a savage chomp. We will be questioning from first principles the role of praise, stickers, reward schedules, prizes, 'self-esteem' and other off-shoots of behaviourism and 1970s Californian culture. This isn't because stickers, praise etc don't work or aren't sometimes recommended by people who should know better. They often *do* achieve certain things. But they do so at a cost. The cost is to a learner's intrinsic motivation and growth mindset.

We will suggest alternative routes to growth mindset ends. We're aiming for intrinsically-motivated learners, not extrinsically-motivated sticker-junkies.

As we write, we will look back guiltily on our own past practices. Barry remembers how he used to buy industrial quantities of fun-sized Mars Bars as rewards for his pupils. He's since improved his practice. Please do as he now says, not as he once did...

The nature of feedback



Feedback is *information provided about any aspect of someone's behaviour, performance or understanding*. It can be provided by anyone (eg a teacher) or anything (eg the score you get in an online quiz). You can also generate your own feedback – eg when reflecting on a lesson's success and the possible reasons for it.

The link between feedback and our previous growth mindset heroes, *challenge* and *effort*, is this: challenging, effortful tasks need rapid, high quality feedback in order to:

- Keep learners engaged
- Help learners spot weaknesses in their performances (there's no point practising and embedding flawed skills or understandings)
- Help learners know when they're getting something right

When **challenge, effort and feedback** operate in harmony, learners begin to see their skills and understanding develop in real time – literally growing their abilities and exposing as an absurdity the notion that these are fixed.



The importance of feedback



As a teacher, you're giving and receiving feedback throughout the day. Because it's omnipresent, it's not surprising that feedback plays a major role in creating, maintaining and changing mindsets. We know from the research on formative assessment that:

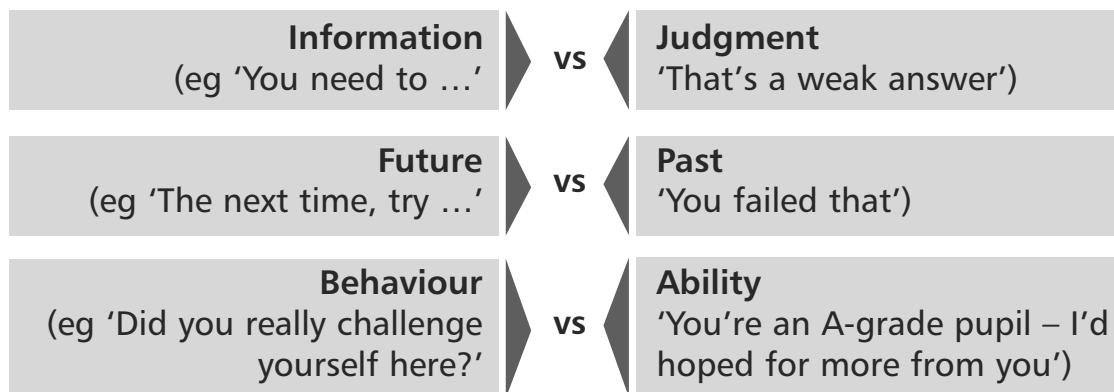
- **the best feedback you can give your pupils will be the feedback that provides them with the most helpful information.**

How can you be sure you're giving the sort of information that feeds a growth mindset and starves a fixed mindset?

Growth vs fixed mindset feedback



When feedback is oriented explicitly towards guiding future behaviour, growth mindsets flourish. But to do this you will need to win three linked battles, with forces ranged as follows:



Always go for the first of each of these. That way you'll be providing **Information** to guide **Future Behaviour** – not judging children on the basis of fixed abilities. To see the impact of this, try the exercise on the next page.

Evaluating feedback



If you rate the following three pieces of feedback according to the **growth mindset feedback criteria** we've just introduced, you'll probably end up with these outcomes:

Feedback offered	Informational?	Future-oriented?	Behavioural?
A. That's brilliant Marcus	✓ (sort of)	✗	✓ (sort of)
B. OK Nat, but what if you ...?	✓	✓	✓
C. Jaidev you're a superstar!	✗	✗	✗

And now rated according to the **fixed mindset feedback criteria**:

Feedback offered	Judgment?	Past?	Ability?
A. That's brilliant Marcus	✓	✓	✗
B.OK Nat, but what if you ...?	✗	✗	✗
C. Jaidev you're a superstar!	✓	✓ (job's done!)	✓

Try evaluating some feedback of your own using these criteria. (See the bad praise challenge on page 67 for a way of making this fun and slightly adversarial!)

The problem with praise



Arguably, praise of the 'You're a superstar / genius / smart cookie' sort is barely feedback at all. It gives students no information about the task, or how they tackled it, or how they might take ownership of its mastery. Instead, this kind of 'fixed' praise risks closing down future learning by:

- Inviting complacency ('*Geniuses always excel, don't they?*')
- Locating the purpose of learning as pleasing someone else ('*Should I be doing this for my teacher, or myself?*')
- Creating resentment ('*I dislike people who don't say I'm a genius.*')
- Inspiring a fear of future failure ('*Can I ever evoke that level of praise again?*')

It's all too easy in the hurly burly of classroom life to praise a pupil for something they didn't actually find difficult; we've known for some time* that this can serve to *lower* personal expectations of performance.

'He was pleased with that?! (Maybe it's because I'm not capable of doing any better.)'

*Eg Morine-Dershimer's research in the '80s



But kids love praise!



‘If we are not accountable [to ourselves], we shall wander the world seeking someone to explain ourselves to, someone to absolve us and tell us we have done well.’

Nietzsche

Yes, pupils love praise. Don't we all? We might also enjoy sweets, cigarettes and huge, calorie-laden breakfasts, but it doesn't mean they're good for us. Praise, prizes and performance grades all act as **extrinsic reinforcers**, focusing on the outcomes of learning rather than the **intrinsic satisfactions** of the task itself.

As we said earlier, it's not that extrinsic reinforcers don't work, they often do. But they work at the expense of something much more precious than behavioural compliance – your learners' intrinsic motivation and desire to grow their skills, knowledge and competencies. We know this from decades of research – rewards have hidden costs. So your sticker charts and reward schedules will probably get short-term results, but they won't turn your pupils on to learning – they are more likely to turn them into sticker-seekers, or individuals who'll go through life seeking meaning in others' affirmation, absolution or judgment.

About the authors



Barry Hymer is Professor of Psychology in Education at the University of Cumbria, Lancaster, where he researches talent development and classroom applications of mindset theory, primarily through school-based practitioner research. He has worked closely with Professor Carol Dweck on two recent European conference tours, with a third in preparation. Recently authored, co-authored and co-edited books include *Dilemma Based Learning in Primary School*, *The P4C Pocketbook*, *The Routledge International Companion to Gifted Education*, *Gifts, Talents and Education: A Living Theory Approach*, and the *Gifted & Talented Pocketbook*. Barry.Hymer@cumbria.ac.uk



Mike Gershon is a teacher, trainer, writer and consultant. He is the author of eight other books on teaching and learning, including *How to use Assessment for Learning in the Classroom*, *How to use Differentiation in the Classroom*, and *How to use Questioning in the Classroom*. Mike is also the creator of some of the world's most popular online teaching and learning tools; his resources have been viewed and downloaded more than 2.4 million times by teachers in over 180 countries. He also writes regularly on pedagogy for the Times Educational Supplement. Find out more and get in touch at www.mikegershon.com