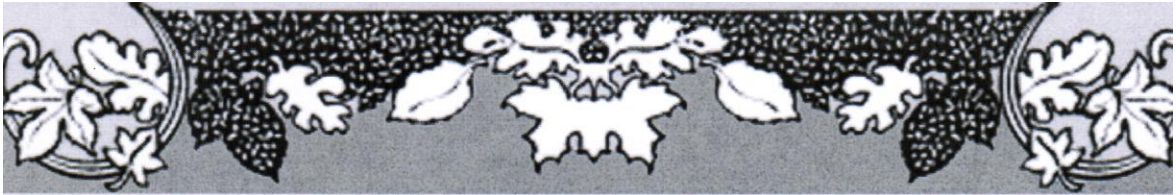


Toward a Sustainable Mindset

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My World View

Everyday I view the world, the world comes into view
I wonder how I see familiar things as if they were brand new
It's as if I wasn't ready to see
Another's point of view

Yesterday

I saw things differently
Who planned the timing of it all?
I guess I've grown to see
Another's point of view
Sometimes I learn something new
And wonder how it can be

Today

The new is a part of me
Another's point of view
My eyes are open wider now
There is so much more to see

Tomorrow

Another day to gain
Some new insights about me

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Abstract

Teaching for change provides for a positive paradigm, yet, according to Edward Taylor the practice of fostering transformative learning is illusive and much about it remains unknown or poorly understood (Mezirow, *et al.*, 2009). Could the teacher's mindset be at the core of this critical examination of transformative learning? A mindset is a set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determines one's outlook, behavior, and mental attitude (Mindset Works, Inc., 2013). The ability to stretch your thinking, to reach beyond the edge of meaning, beyond your current worldview, and incorporate new values into your mindset and throughout your life that transforms you, describes a person with a growth mindset. If our mindset leans toward a fixed state, we hold the belief that we have a natural intelligence that is assigned to us genetically. If such mindsets exist, could one make a correlation between a fixed mindset and transmissive learning and between a growth mindset and transformative learning? This paper will look at individuals across various disciplines to begin to understand the implications of how our mindset encourages or discourages transformative learning and living.

Prelude: A Transformative Worldview

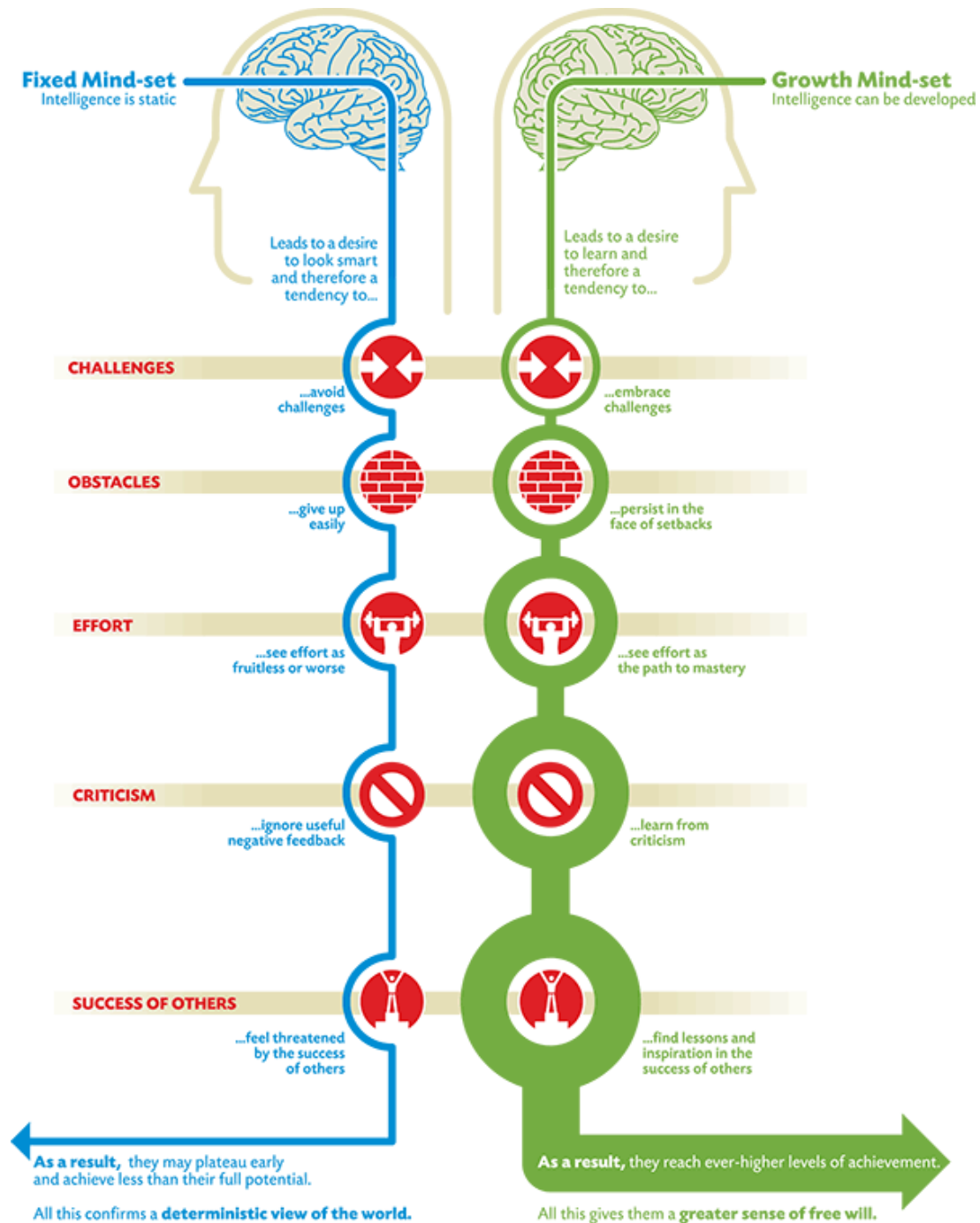
As I embark on this new journey of learning; from a new place, with new teachers, and with new friends, about things I have never known, I have an opportunity to reflect. During this exercise of considering transmissive and transformative education, I am reminded of a poem I wrote in 2002 (and subsequently had published in 2006). It is a poem about my own transformation, although I did not call it that. I experienced my worldview changing as I was learning, so I wrote about it. I learn now, through this class, and the readings that this is called third order learning (Sterling, 2012). I wrote about how I was

able to see things differently, because it was valuable to me and I wanted to always remember that change in me. It holds great meaning for me. This paper, about transformative education, is a natural by-product of my own personal growth through the emergence of a transformative mindset.

Mindset

A mindset is a set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determines one's outlook, behavior, and mental attitude (Mindset Works, Inc., 2013). If you are someone with a fixed mindset, you might believe that your intelligence, skills and abilities are pre-determined, perhaps, fixed by genetic code. However, what if you were someone with a growth mindset? You would believe that you can cultivate who you are through the process of learning, in fact, you would believe in the ability to develop your intellect and your talents (Figure 1). Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., in her bestselling book *Mindset: the new psychology of success – how we can learn to fulfill our potential*, has researched how one can create a love of learning and generate resilience. She provides insight into training our mind for positive change through developing patterns of thinking and self-insight. And what of people suffering from a chronic illness, what if they had a mindset of healing? How would that change their quality of life? If such mindsets exist, could one make a correlation between a fixed mindset and transmissive learning and between a growth mindset and transformative learning? And why does it even matter, why even question this issue? Could a positive mindset help us learn through effort, promote our own inner healing or possibly even, heal our sick and dying planet? This paper will look at individuals across various disciplines to begin to understand the implications of how our mindset encourages or discourages transformative learning and living. Teaching for change provides for a positive paradigm, yet,

according to Edward Taylor the practice of fostering transformative learning is illusive and much about it remains unknown or poorly understood (Mezirow, *et al.*, 2009). Could the teacher's mindset be at the core of this critical examination of transformative learning?



GRAPHIC BY NIGEL HOLMES

Figure 1

Fixed Mindset and Transmissive Education

Carol Dweck, Ph.D., shares a very telling story about her own elementary education experience as a young girl. Her teacher assigned the students to their seats according to their IQ. And, not only did they receive preferential seating arrangements, they were afforded the opportunity to run errands to the principal's office, go outside to clean the erasers and to be her assistant in the classroom. Her classroom was an environment where some people were considered superior and others inferior. Although there may have always been admirable examples of transformative teachers, there are many accounts of having a teacher transmit information to us through a transmissive hierarchy. Dr. Dweck's teacher fixed her own mind on the fact that the student's who scored high on IQ tests were her smart students, and smart students deserved preferential treatment. Essentially, this type of behavior reveals that this teacher may have believed that her student's intelligence was fixed, because if she believed otherwise, she would have treated the other children differently. In fact, she would have believed in human development and committed to fostering that development (Figure 1). This type of behavior is consistent with a transmissive classroom in that the teacher is focusing on her brightest students – focusing on teaching, and not learning. Her own success was wrapped up in the shining stars of her class.

Stephen Sterling (2011) sought to examine education in the modern era for a variety of reasons, one of which was to re-envision the way we learn for the major changes that are occurring on our planet. He has found that even through all of our modernization and globalization of education – designed by the perceived needs of a market based system, our educational process is still informed by a “fundamentally mechanistic” view of the world. To further his point of view, Sterling references Lazlo, “we are attempting to cope with the

conditions of the 21st century with the thinking and practices of the 20th.” Again, this example is consistent with the observation that a transmission paradigm correlates with a fixed mindset.

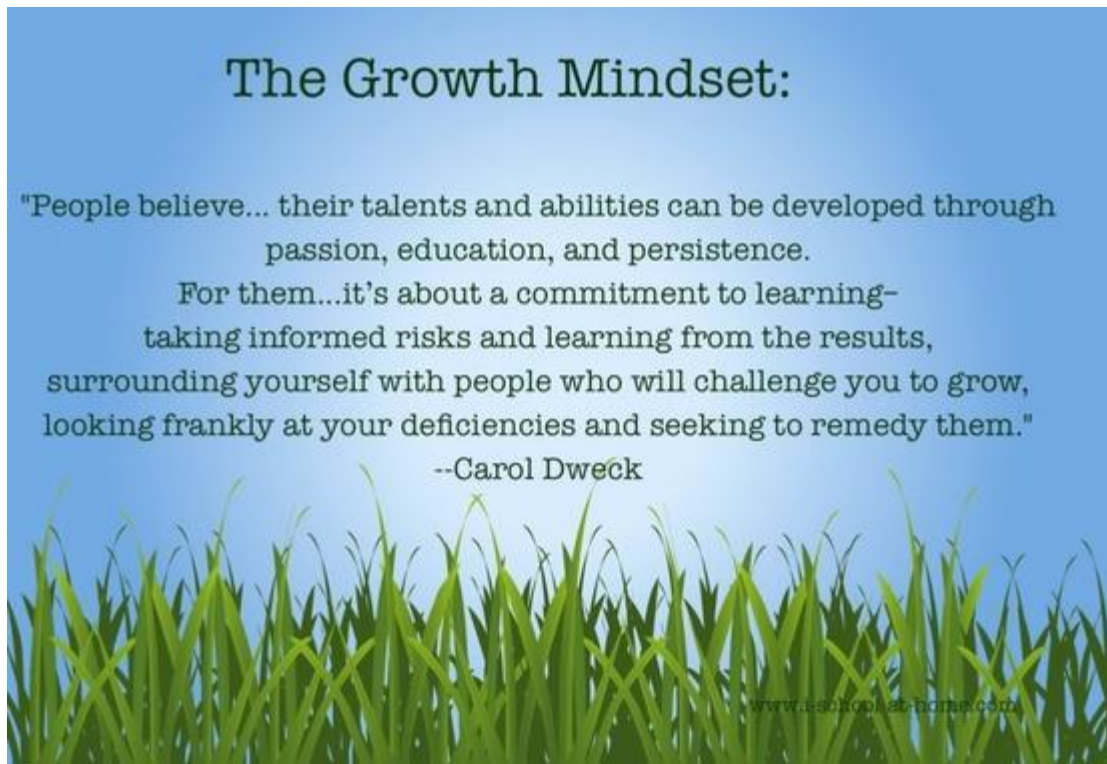


Figure 2

Growth Mindset and Transformative Education

The ability to stretch your thinking, to reach beyond the edge of meaning, beyond your current worldview, and incorporate new values into your mindset and throughout your life that transforms you, describes a person with a growth mindset. If education has the objective of giving meaning to the lives of the students, it must be able to make them aware of the value that they can create for other's (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008). In fact, Ackoff, Greenberg's contemporary shares that the most important thing for students to learn is how to learn and to be motivated to do so throughout their lives (2008). Interestingly enough, these authors's of *Turning Learning Right Side Up* are speaking of imparting a growth mindset when teaching our students, although they are not specifically naming it as such. They also explain that there is a lot that we

learn throughout life that is mastered without it ever being taught to us. A teacher who sets about transforming students, value's student input, and embraces the opportunity to learn from them, would more than likely foster a growth mindset. This mindset considers equity and empathy towards each other. Thus, there is an inherent value in having a growth mindset to develop the skills necessary to be motivated to learn on our own, whether you are the teacher or the student.

At some point in our lives, we will all face some type of failure. Dr. Dweck states that even in a growth mindset, "failure can be a painful experience" (2008). But for a student or adult with a growth mindset, failure will not define them. They will be able to face the problem, deal with it, and learn from it. In effect, having a growth mindset can change the meaning, and subsequent outcome of failure. What a transformative lesson this is? A teacher with a growth mindset, teaching about effort and motivating students will encourage self-esteem, personal growth and the ability to thrive. Teaching for change allows students to be challenged, to assess their own value system and worldview, and are subsequently changed by the experience. The growth mindset provides a necessary foundation for resiliency (Figure 2). Educational opportunities, whether as a parent, teacher, supervisor, student, or professional, are the perfect outlet for experiencing transformational growth through the creation of the love of learning, for the sake of learning itself. This second order learning – learning about learning – is an essential life quality for thriving in the 21st century. (Sterling, 2011). The core architecture of the mindset paradigm we are discussing even allows for those who operate within a fixed mindset the ability to transform toward a growth mindset, or grow towards a transformative mindset. The positive focus of the ability to transform through self-awareness is a very powerful feature of a growth mindset.

Outdoor Mindset

Imagine the idea of a healing mindset, but calling it an outdoor mindset; a classic example of transformative thinking. According to their website, Outdoor Mindset “unites and empowers people affected by neurological challenges through a common passion for the outdoors” (Outdoor Mindset, 2013). It would be easy for someone with a chronic neurological illness such as epilepsy or having a brain tumor to have a fixed mindset; to consider their illness as debilitating, life threatening, and with a fixed result – facing death. However, in the case of this organization, built around the transforming power of bringing people together who challenge each other to grow through community in nature because of the biophilic quality of loving nature, these individuals are embracing life and thriving. As one views the online video, they will see individuals experiencing an elevated quality of life, enjoying nature, and healing themselves through a positive mindset – while working on their own holistic awareness.

Sustainable Mindset

Sustainability is the background context that is shaping society for this century and beyond. But can the term “growth” as in having a growth mindset, have a positive inference when we talk about it from a sustainable point of view? When considering a sustainable future, that is one we can sustain, we need to explore the ideas of learning, the idea of learning, or having a deeper awareness.

In his 2010 Ted Talk “Let the Environmental Guide Development” in Oxford, England, Jonah Rockstroem posits that “we are in a phase where transformative change is necessary.” Our planet is in a state of crisis which brings us to a point of opportunity. Through adaptive, non-linear thinking, we can move from crisis to innovation – with redundancy in social and

environmental systems as the means to adapt to global change (Rockstroem, 2010). But how do we do this? Johan tells us “we need to have a shift in mindset; we need to move away from a situation where we are simply pushing ourselves into a dark future.” This shift in mindset toward sustainable development can be brought about through persistence, transformability, and adaptability (Rockstroem, 2010). It is important to note that the two words transformative and ability are merged into one word on one of his slides; transformability. This clearly indicates that we are able to transform. The scientists involved in this planetary boundary analysis believe that we have a window of opportunity to change – to transform, in fact, to have a paradigm shift in our mindset toward resiliency. And, they believe we can achieve this if we work simultaneously together, look at things differently, and learn to live in a safe operating space.

Rockstroem also claims that we need to be redundant in our social and environmental systems, that the linear – top-down – command-control systems and that the practice of searching for efficiencies and optimization is the very thinking that has put us into this planetary crisis. In fact, whole systems operate with redundancy – across many and varied systems. And, when we begin to adapt our thinking through transformative change, toward redundancy, we will emerge resilient. We see evidence that redundancy across systems is a viable alternative within the context of this paper. For example, the psycho-social discipline of Carol Dweck’s growth mindset fits within the earth based science paradigm shift of Jonah Rockstroem. And, Sterling (2008) illustrates sustainable education across systems through a diagram he calls, nesting systems. His nesting system looks at educational movements for change, within the context of any educational system, within social, economic and cultural systems, that are nested within the larger biophysical system. And yet another example of this non-linear redundancy is clearly evident in Nosichs’ Circle of Elements (Figure 3) and Rockstroems’ Planetary Boundaries

(Figure 4). These spatial representations show an outward trend from the center of the circle. In us, according to Nosich, the eight elements of reasoning are always present, and it is context and alternatives that encompass the different choices that can be made through reasoning (2012). Likewise, in Rockstroem's illustration, he shows us the pressures that the planet is facing, with the planet earth at the center. The outward push moving beyond the inner circle represents how we have exceeded the boundary of living harmoniously on the planet (2010), essentially, through the choices made since the industrial age. Through this direct correlation, we see that through reasoning, we can live within a safe operating space – at a local (personal) and global level.

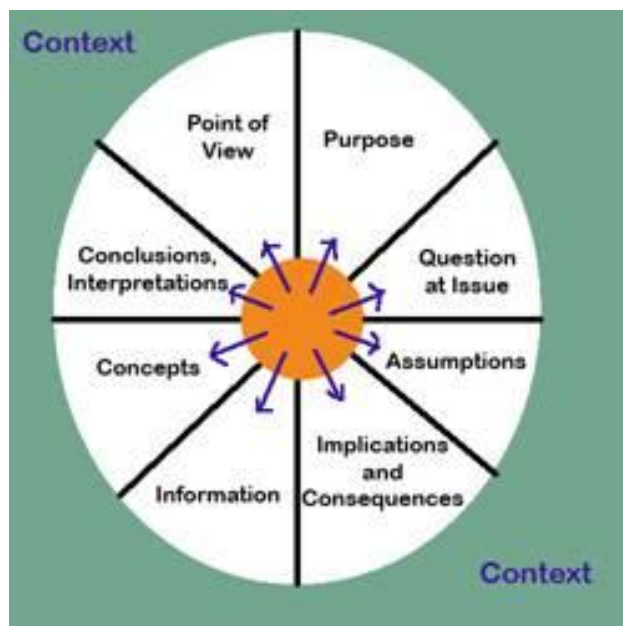


Figure 3

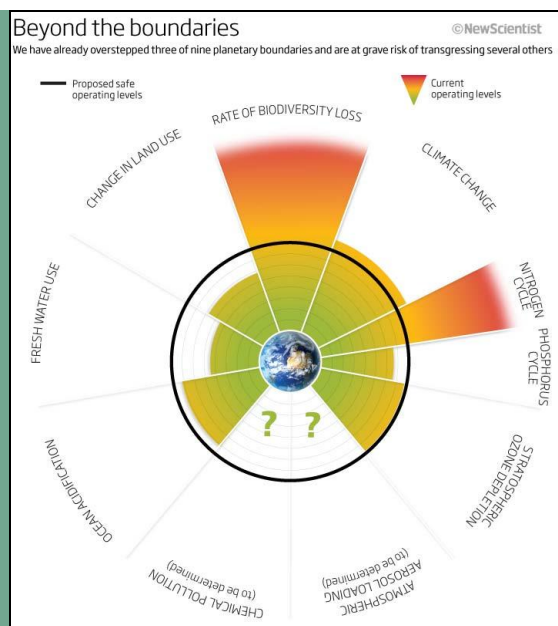


Figure 4

Conclusion

Our mindset prepares us for change. Having a growth mindset allows for one to be transformed through a commitment to learn, persistence, and passion. If our mindset leans toward a growth state, our dynamic capabilities provide us with many opportunities to transform

our thinking and experience a deeper learning necessary to accommodate and assimilate change. Given that there are positive psycho-social results as we gain more knowledge and understanding about mindsets, quite possibly, the practice of teaching for change by fostering transformative learning no longer has to be illusive or poorly understood. Through the merging of just these two concepts, exercising redundancy across disciplines, the possibilities are profoundly endless. Whether one is experiencing a fixed mindset through a belief that we are naturally born intelligent, a growth mindset that considers intelligence can develop over time through effort and challenge, or a healing mindset through the love of nature and being out of doors; conceivably, we can harness a transformative resilience that moves us away from a transmissive paradigm toward a sustainable mindset.

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