

INTEGRATED APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR THE GROWTH MINDSET TRAINING



Victoria MASCALIUC, PhD
Alecru Russo Băți State University,
mascaliuc@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper is designed to analyze the advantages of the integrated approach to teaching English, referring to some data gathered within a three-month period in two schools from the Republic of Moldova. It starts with the rationale, underlining the importance of the growth mindset development in today's education. The growth mindset theory is mostly based on the investigations made by C. Dweck (2006) and D. Sousa and T. Pilecki (2018). It presents a modest research that points to the connection between the teacher's mindset and the development of the similar mindset at the learners that are in his/her class. Finally, it shows a way to develop the growth mindset through the integration of Science, Technology, Math, Engineering in teaching English from early age.

Key words: integrated approach, growth mindset, early age, English, challenge.

Rationale

All educators discuss the importance of developing thinking skills at every class. The problem appears when we speak about the type of thinking we have to focus on. More and more students experience the school culture when the teachers make them focus on a right answer. In other words, the school policy focuses on convergent thinking development as it is based on memorization and certain easily-evaluated criteria. Many and many educators over the world are sure that divergent thinking is the key to success. The students generate ideas, often by breaking it out in components, and there is no right answer. Sousa and Pilecki (Sousa: 35) emphasize that it is more difficult to measure students' divergent thinking, but open-ended questions are necessary, in this respect. At the same time, the mental processing involved in divergent thinking stimulates the development of higher order thinking

skills. They support the idea that the current classroom is not designed to encourage divergent thinking, because of a great number of reasons. Mostly, it is assumed that the students “balk due to their lack of familiarity with this type of challenge. They quickly recognize that trying to solve the problem will take much more effort and time. The researchers who investigated this problem conclude that the narrowing of the curriculum, standardized tests have reduced the students’ motivation to pursue time-consuming projects” (Olivant, 2015).

This whole educational policy that the learners are exposed to influence the formation of a certain mind-set. The creation of a mindset occurs at an early age and it represents a set of beliefs, assumptions, expectations how to behave and live in the society. The development of a fixed or growth mindset starts in kindergartens and schools. There are a lot of kids today that failing once, would never start again. That is the characteristic of fixed mindset. The growth mindset kids will start over and over again. As Dweck says, “The people with the growth mindset don’t think they are Einstein or Beethoven. But aren’t they more likely to have inflated views of their abilities and try for things they’re not capable of?” (Dweck:11). That is a talent “to keep on going” in education. Gardner mentioned this talent as one that helps people identify their strengths and weaknesses (Dweck:11).

Mindset is of major value in education. It helps to modulate personalities that rely either on their genetics or effort. The effort is that hard work that we want our learners to undertake. Sometimes, the educator is to be the lead, but sometimes the lead is to be taken by the learner. The growth mindset will make any kid a learner that is more important than to get a high score at the standardized test. How many times the educators opt for success over growth at their learners. The answer to this question is given by Dweck who provides with her personal experience of how people with a fixed mindset feel.

She writes, “I, too, thought of myself as more talented than other, maybe even more worthy than others because of my endowments. The scariest thought, which I rarely entertained, was the possibility of being ordinary. This kind of thinking led me to need constant validation” (Dweck: 30). Namely constant validation feelings, the educators try to train in their learners.

Continuing to investigate the topic of fixed versus growth mindset, we, as educators, want our learners intelligent and not creative. Although many of us believe that these two are identical, they are not. Until recently, many assumed that creativity is something that a person

is born with. Today, the psychologists came to the conclusion that we can distinguish between ordinary creativity and extraordinary creativity. Everyone possesses ordinary creativity, but it may be or may not be used in the creative thinking process. The creative thinking is a complex phenomenon that consist of 4 stages (Hadamard, 1954). These are:

1. Preparation that involves purposeful study and documentation of the problem;
2. Incubation that is a period when the creative thinking is blocked, but there is a kind of internal growth before an idea is generated;
3. Illumination that is a burst of ideas time;
4. Verification that is a time when the solutions are verified as workable or not.

In schools, fear of errors suppresses the students' creativity. The creative thinking process starts, but it never finishes. The learners remain at the preparation stage being frightened of the consequences.

Methodology

In Moldova, there are a lot of educators that are sure that the long-term objective of the lessons of English is the high score at the final examination (Baccalaureate Examination). The learners are trained convergent thinking, although there are some cases when creativity is trained, mostly at writing short paragraphs. The objective of this modest research was to determine whether the mindset type of the teacher trains a similar mindset type at the learners. There were selected two groups of eighth graders together with their teachers of English. The selection procedure was based on the sets of questions that I had borrowed from Dweck. They are:

1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.
2. You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.
3. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can change it quite a bit.
4. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are. (Key: questions 1 and 2 are the fixed mindset questions; questions 3 and 4 reflect the growth mindset)
5. You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change it.
6. No matter what kind of person you are, you can always change substantially.

7. You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can't really be changed.
8. You can always change basic things about the kind of person you are. (Key: questions 1 and 3 reflect the fixed mindset; questions 2 and 4 reflect the growth mindset) (Dweck:13).

One teacher of English had a fixed mindset, another teacher had a growth mindset. The hypothesis that I had was that certain beliefs and assumptions of the teacher are transmitted to the learners. These learners take them as life truths and use them.

Each group was formed of 15 pupils. The pupils' mindset was not investigated. Conclusions on the assumptions, beliefs and expectations had to be drawn at the investigation end period.

I strongly believe that integration of concepts from other disciplines can work on the development of a certain mindset. I pledge for the integration of Science, Engineering and Math at the classes of English as it ignites curiosity, trains creativity, allows failure and supports the continuous learning initiative. There were created lessons that follow the structure:

Experience and discuss.

That is a quick challenge the students have to express their opinion.

Sample: Complete the following quick challenge to learn about energy.

Take a basketball and a tennis ball. Follow the instructions:

1. Drop a tennis ball. What do you observe?
2. Drop a basketball. What do you observe?
3. Drop a tennis ball and a basketball altogether. What do you observe?

Read and explore.

The students are proposed to read a text and perform exercises after the text. All the texts are created for this research and not borrowed.

Sample:

Energy is everywhere. It makes things happen and it is the ability to move. In fact, everything that we do uses energy. There are two types of energy: kinetic and potential. The kinetic energy is the energy possessed by a body due to its motion. The faster a body moves, the greater its kinetic energy. The potential energy is the energy stored in a body due to its position. The higher the body is, the larger its potential energy.

There might be different sources of energy such as food for people, and electricity, steam, gas for machines.

The humankind looks for clean sources of energy. Wind energy is promising and one of the most fast-growing technologies. Wind power is clean unlike coal, oil and gas. Wind is also available. In some parts of the world, it blows almost all the time.

People have taken advantages from wind power for centuries. The first known practical wind power plant was built in Sistan, Persia. In Europe, the wind power appeared in the Middle Ages. The first electricity-generating wind turbine was a battery charging machine that was installed in the 19th century in Scotland.

Find in the text synonyms/antonyms.

Complete the sentences with the correct forms.

Practice a dialogue orally in class.

Watch and write.

The students are offered to make a project starting with a video.

Solve a challenge.

This is an extension of the text and integrates other disciplines in teaching English.

Sample:

Extension of the text:

You have a friend whose father is the head of a company that wants to invest in green vehicles. He knows that you are extremely creative. He hires you and would pay you a fortune if you invented a means of transportation that would use moving air to put it into action.

Integrated disciplines: Engineering & Physics

At the end of three months, the eighth graders were asked to tick sentences that related to them at those particular lessons:

I'm awesome at this.

This is too hard.

I'm so stupid.

I just can't do math.

She's so smart, she makes me sick.

It's fine the way it is, and yours isn't any better.

I seem to be on the right track.

This is going to take some time.

That's an interesting idea for improvement.

What am I missing?

I'm going to train my brain in math.

I'm going to figure out how she's doing it.
(<https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/blogpost/creating-growth-mindset-your-students>)

The results are as follows:

Sentences 1 through 6 (4 choices and more)	Sentences 7 through 12 (4 choices and more)
Group 1. The teacher has got a fixed mindset	
12 pupils	3 pupils
Group 2. The teacher has got a growth mindset	
2 pupils	13 pupils

The verbal feedback that we got at the end of the three-week period is stated below:

Group 1.	Group 2.
Student 1, "I think that it was not related to English at all. We had to solve problems." Student 2, "I somehow liked it, but I thought the teacher liked the activities." Student 3, "There was Math, but I dislike it." Student 4, "We had to write, speak, read and listen at the classes of English." Student 5, "I want that our English classes are as usual." Student 6, "We come to school to learn, but not to play."	Student 1, "We often do different activities and I always find them a lot of fun." Student 2, "I was so excited about making the well, testing and explaining how it works." Student 3, "My other colleagues envied me that my classes are so interesting." Student 4, "I understand so many things now." Student 5, "I want that all the lessons are like this." Student 6, "I made mistakes, but I was not ashamed of them." Student 7, "The teacher gave us the possibility to solve the problem, but we used a lot of English."

The analysis of the results makes us believe that the teacher's beliefs, values and assumptions have an impact on the students' performance. The choice of assertion that most closely relate to their activity demonstrates that they, being exposed to a fixed mindset teacher, are likely to share the same beliefs. This idea is fortified throughout their verbal feedback. In the second group the pupils are not afraid to fail and that failure is a part of the learning process. This is a characteristic of the growth mindset people.

Conclusion

Moldovan educational institutions strive to bring changes in the policy they share through the educators. The educators, in this respect, are valuable in training learners in changing their mindset for success. Definitely, training somebody to succeed is not about being all the time right and getting high scores at tests. It is about being creative, effort-directed and failure-accepted. Utilizing strategies to remake literacy increases student engagement, excitement for learning, and wondering for life-related solutions.

References

Dweck, C. S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. - NY: Random House, 2006. – 276 p.

Hadamard, J. *An essay on the psychology of invention in the mathematical field*. - NY: Dove, 1954. – 164 p.

Olivant, K.F. I am not a format: Teachers' experiences with fostering creativity in the era of accountability./ *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*//- 2015, - 29(1), - pp. 115-129.

Sousa, D.A., Pilecki, T. *From STEM to STEAM. Brain-Compatible Strategies and Lessons that Integrate the Arts*. - Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin, 2018. – 264 p.