

The Science of Mindsets

A *mindset* is a way of thinking about something. As Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck (2008) explains, people (broadly) think in two ways: either you "have it" or "you don't."

In the area of intelligence and competency, you may have more of a fixed MINDSET (stuck in place) or a growth mindset (capable of changing).

Those with a *fixed* mindset believe intelligence and competency are a rigid unchangeable quality. Those with a *growth* mindset believe that intelligence and competency can be developed over time as the brain changes and grows.

Mindsets can be defined in many areas.

A mindset might be about relationships: either you "have chemistry" or "you don't." In the area of relationships, if you have a fixed MINDSET (stuck in place) you might leave a sticky, difficult relationship. If you each have a flexible mindset (capable of changing), you both might both agree to make some changes to foster a better relationship.

So where do mindsets come from and how do they "reside" in the brain?

Mindsets originate from many different sources. Here are just a few of them.

1. Our **intense life experiences may evoke** strong emotional events that can often alter our course in life (e.g. trauma).
 2. A **pervasive culture** consistently and purposefully shapes actions THIS way (but not THAT way). These happen (for example), in families, at companies, in the military, sports teams, at certain non-profits, as well as sororities and fraternities.
 3. **Conscious growth and learning**: reflection, self-talk, discovery, reading, writing, learning, and mindfulness.
 4. When humans are constantly **hearing and repeating** stories about "the way things are", the narrative gets daily reinforcement. The stories could come from music (favorite hit songs), books, online sites, newspapers, theater, politics, musicals, interest groups, sports, as well as school and community cultures.
 5. **Specific social groups** that include, or exclude, you based on how you respond to challenges, obstacles, others successes, and criticism. For example, Scientology, Ku Klux Klan, Tea Party, Black Panthers, senior citizens, or NRA.
- Neuroscience tells us that activating mindsets (perspectives) alters two areas: "**Value**" and "**Choice**".

The first of these activates the MOC (medial orbitofrontal cortex) and LLPC (left lateral prefrontal cortex) areas of the brain.

When you are making a "choice" it activates the left amygdala and left putamen. What's the relevance of this?

Unless your actions alter values and choices, they are unlikely to succeed in influencing another's mindsets. In short, mindsets are 1) what you value and 2) the corresponding choices you make.

Sounds good; now what can you do about it?

Practical Applications

REALITY #1: Pervasive work cultures can consistently shape actions THIS way, but not THAT way.

ACTION STEPS: At school, create ceremonies, teams, rituals, routines, daily and weekly events that reinforce the values, beliefs, and actions that everyone at your school will take. Classroom cooperative learning groups can be set up to influence thinking. PLCs can make this happen.

Strong Resource: [School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess and Transform It \(Gruenert & Whitaker\)](#)

REALITY #2: Learning can change our lives: writing, reflection, mindfulness, self-talk and reading.

ACTION STEP: Give staff and students reflective questions to answer daily. Use this daily practice of reflection to create dissonance between the present and the "new" staff. Reinforce the affirming new behaviors with daily triggers. Give your students 3 daily Qs to answer. "How did I help others today? How did I become a better learner today? What am I grateful for and also looking forward to?"

Strong Resource: [Triggers \(Goldsmith\)](#)

REALITY #3: Hearing and repeating stories about "the way things are" will become the dominant, reinforcing narrative in their heads.

ACTION STEP: Create and repeat a new narrative. Help staff collaborate to set new, higher goals, provide a reason for others to believe them, set micro-goals, and share the rewards of success. Affirm the positives. Do this in meetings, casual conversations, and at school events. Talk about the successes of your past students. Have them repeat the stories as a memory activity. In reality, the repetition will be influencing their mindsets. Spread the "better student and school narrative around".

Strong Resource: [Redirect \(Wilson\)](#)

Feedback, please. Send me feedback on this month's newsletter. Good, bad or ugly, I appreciate hearing from you. I am at eric@jensenlearning.com.

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