Of course I have a growth mindset.

I mean… wait. What does that even look like for a teacher?

Growth mindset — the understanding that intelligence and abilities are not “fixed” but can be developed with dedication and hard work — is a concept first defined by psychologist Carol Dweck. Her research has exploded in popularity, and has trickled down to schools across the nation and beyond as students are taught that they can train their brains to learn anything.

We can all agree that one of the best ways to teach kids to have a growth mindset is to model that thinking ourselves. But as much as we’d like to believe that we’re growth mindset oriented, most of us (myself included!) will likely discover upon reflection that there are old fixed mindset thought patterns that we haven’t quite let go of.

Fortunately, we can examine these self-defeating thoughts and replace them with growth mindset thoughts that are...
I can’t admit to students when I was wrong or if I don’t know something because they’ll lose respect for me.

There’s no better way to help students understand that mistakes are an essential part of the learning process than to model that for them! I can create a classroom community in which I learn WITH and FROM students. As the kids watch how I respond to frustrating or embarrassing situations, they’ll learn how to rebound from their own mistakes more quickly and discover what it means to be a lifelong learner.

I can’t learn yet another new curriculum (or assessment, or set of standards.)

It will be a lot of work to learn a new way of teaching, but I’m resilient and I can do difficult things. I’m ready for this
students to face challenges head on and not be discouraged when they’re overwhelmed, so I’m going to practice and model that same behavior myself.

Professional development is always so boring and irrelevant — they never teach us things we actually need to know.

I don’t rely on others to mandate or direct my growth as an educator. I am in charge of my own learning! It’s empowering when I choose to grow in areas I care about and seek out new teaching ideas and best practices. (Plus, Pinterest totally counts as PD.)

It’s impossible to enjoy teaching — all we do is test!

I know teachers who are facing these same pressures who still love what they do — I wonder what their secret is? I can learn more about the type of mindset and daily practices that have a positive impact on my energy level and enthusiasm. I can choose to implement
I wish my students’ parents would stop telling me how to do my job.

I can learn something from every interaction I have with another person. I can choose to disregard the information that’s unhelpful without ignoring the kernel of truth within each piece of feedback. I can choose to look past tone and word choice to see the heart of the message that can help me improve. I can create a relationship with families that encourages them to provide feedback in ways that are constructive, such as through parent surveys. Giving parents a chance to be heard gives me more insight as to how families perceive what’s happening in the classroom so I can continue growing as an educator.

That lesson this morning was a complete disaster. My motivation is gone for the day.

I’ll feel even worse if I give up on myself (and my students) and write off the whole afternoon. Instead, I can choose to put this in perspective: having a chaotic morning doesn’t mean I’m a bad teacher, and it doesn’t mean my students are hopeless. I can quickly identify what I can do differently next time, and mentally move on with the day. The past is over: each moment in the present is an opportunity to make a new choice and work toward a better outcome, starting right now.
I don’t have time to reflect on my teaching, and it’s not a big deal, anyway.

When I take a moment to think about what I did to make a lesson successful, I have a better understanding of what created that success. This helps me get excellent results again next time, making teaching easier AND more effective! I can create habits and routines that allow me to reflect on my teaching practice…even spending two minutes at the end of the day thinking back on everything that went RIGHT (and why) can make a difference in my efficacy.

The school year is halfway over; I can’t introduce a new procedure or activity now.

This is actually the perfect time to try something new, because I’ve already established a rapport with this class. I can have a conversation with the kids about what’s working and what’s not, and together, we can come up with a better plan. It’s never too late to change something that’s become less effective, and my students will benefit if I show them how to continually reflect and improve.

Kids these days don’t put any effort into their work and want everything to be easy.
and grit can be learned! I can explicitly teach growth mindset strategies to students and help them take charge of their own learning. I can show students how to think critically about what it takes to be successful, push themselves to do their best work, and teach them to believe in their own ability to learn.

Some of my students are just unteachable — there’s nothing I can do to reach them.

I choose to believe that every child is capable of growth. I can continue to build a rapport with students and help them make progress, celebrating even the smallest wins to help us all have the motivation to keep pressing forward. I refuse to give up on any child in my class, and I refuse to give up on my own teaching abilities. I believe my work makes a difference, regardless of whether I see results.

If you’ve been feeling defeated and discouraged, choosing to develop a growth mindset can make a huge difference in your motivation.

Want to explore more? Take a look at the book Awakened: Change Your Mindset to Transform Your Teaching!
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