

How to grow the minds of teachers for schools of tomorrow

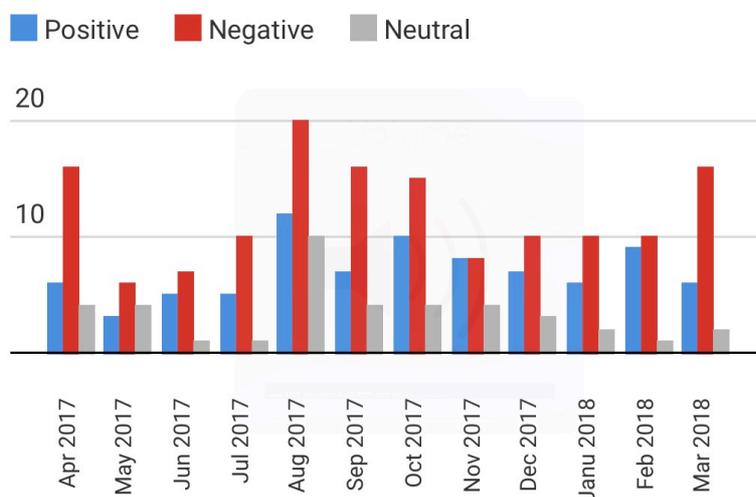
*“We are what they grow beyond. That is the true burden of all masters”
Yoda*

There seems to be a lot of huff and puff about ‘SIMS this’ and ‘STEAM that’, schools all freaking out about being digital Apple or Windows, teachers Google-driving and iPad overload, coding, airdrop whoop-dee-doo! Some of these (literally) poor, old teachers are just trying to survive! They have the struggle of ‘standardisation vs the new world’, let alone all this tech stuff. Keeping up with all of this is insane and feels like it is out of their league. What are we to do? Where do we start in finding our place in this new world of teaching?

Teachers are the change-makers of our world, as they were thousands of years ago. It is just a different packet on the same chocolate bar. The problem we face, as teachers have for generations, is the changing nature of pedagogy and philosophy. ‘A teacher’s own mindset belief and practice is vital to supporting students to consider their own mindsets and to develop thinking strategies to support their learning’ (Seaton, 2017, pp. 3). It is disgusting to see in figure 1 below showing the profound negativity that is psychologically enforced on teachers and their profession. This infection is a real problem and has a negative effect on multiple levels.

Sentiment in newspaper articles about teachers

Total news, opinion and editorial articles within the Factiva database with a focus on teachers or teaching methods, April 2017 to March 2018, author classification.



Source: Author provided/Factiva

Figure 1: Negative effects about teachers and pedagogy in public media.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Hedegaard, 2009) is about ways an individual's intelligence is seen and influenced by a number of systems in an external environment. This has a clear effect on the student-teacher relationship, as well as 'a teacher's own self-view impacts their own approach and confidence levels' (Seaton, 2017, pp. 3). This mesh of the mesosystem, exosystem and microsystems in this ecological theory is something that has to be considered in leadership when it comes to the use of time and sustainable change, and when interventions are suggested for teacher pedagogy, school curriculum and culture. The teacher's individual environment on multiple levels in a conscious ecology determines their longevity and growth. This is not an easy task and there are many humps in the road, good and bad, successes and failures. However, the best way for leadership to support a growth mindset in these systems, is articulated in how Lao-Tzu, the Chinese philosopher, majestically translates this from the Tao Te Ching: 'a tree that it takes both arms to encircle grew from a tiny rootlet' (Lao Tzu, 1919, pp. 112).

If teachers are expected to teach and develop a growth mindset in their students, it has to be supported within the organisation they find themselves employed at and, more importantly, with themselves. John Hattie's (2012, in Seaton, 2017, pp. 3) meta-analysis research suggests that, 'when teaching and learning are visible and metacognition is explicit there is a greater likelihood of students reaching a higher level of achievement'. This understanding is not only targeted to the notion of teacher-student, but can also be applied to the universality of the definition of student as this is also the teacher being the student. This kind of recommendation is depicted as lifelong learning, also replicated in the Tao Te Ching (Lao Tzu, 1919), and to further extent an additional requirement to navigate away from negative effects (Rodd, 2006). Such insight supports my previous articles about the importance of lifelong learning, and this seemingly modern attribute in teachers must somehow be connected to a growth mindset. All the elements are all around us in this world to do so.

What if a teacher doesn't grow or change?

Maybe it is just that they are not happy and don't know how or what they need. Nevertheless, like a video store, they last for some time but not for much longer; eventually, they disappear. Come the day when now we all say, 'wow, remember when we used to go to the video store every week and get a VHS or DVD and put it in a machine to play at home? I used to rack up loads of overdue fees!' This is exactly what will happen to the teacher who does not change mindset or navigate away from negativity. Just like the truck drivers who will eventually find themselves out of a profession, these teachers are an ancient breed of animal in an inhospitable, changing ecosystem of education. Bronfenbrenner's microsystem has changed, fractionating the mesosystem and creating a new exosystem with participation based on survival of the fittest (Hedegaard, 2009). The role of the teacher in society and humanity is one of the primal roles of the Earth. Just like the chief, shaman, warrior, hunter-gatherer, medicine-man and other primitive tribal roles, the teacher is also a primary tribal entity. Therefore the teacher is a survivor, evolver and crucial role of humankind throughout all time. These tribal roles will be examined in a later article. Does this mean that true teachers that adapt and change are the destined ones by primoreal and historical DNA, and others are just doing it for a job? As mentioned in my previous articles about leadership and cognitive dissonance, we really want to avoid teachers developing moral neutralisation techniques in their philosophy and pedagogy. Lazarus (1991, in Rodd, 2006) defines core relational themes in the person-to-environment relationship, as expressed in the connectivity of Bronfenbrenner's systems. These emotions that contribute to the teacher that struggle, to navigate away from negative effects are:

Anger: A demeaning offense against me and mine.

Anxiety: Facing an uncertain, existential threat.

Envy: Wanting what someone else has.

Guilt: Having transgressed a moral imperative.

Fright: Facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming danger.

Jealousy: Resenting a third party for loss or threat to the affection of another.

Sadness: Having experienced irrevocable loss.

Shame: Having failed to live up to an ego ideal.

(Rodd, 2006, pp. 53).

The application of ecological relationships such as Lazarus's definition of negative emotions, (Rodd, 2006, pp. 53) 'arise from human-environment relationships following two parallel types of cognitive appraisal processes: one automatic, unconscious and uncontrollable; and one that is conscious, deliberate, and under volitional control (and hence susceptible to cultural conditioning)'. These are all negative emotions that we find in teaching and educational leadership consistently.

Andragogy is the primary educational philosophy in adult education. The first priority is for organisations and leadership to support the happiness of their staff; positivity. In this reality, it could be the best way in laying the foundations for a growth mindset, followed by a provision of training through knowledge, awareness of own practice, resources and identification of changes (Seaton, 2017). Lao-Tzu (1919, pp. 17) cares for the teacher and their growth because, 'the jar is made by kneading clay, but its usefulness consists in its capacity'. This is a growth mindset. In times of adversity, this is where learning and change begin.

So what is a growth mindset?

There are two types of mindsets according to Dweck (2000, in Seaton, 2017). They are defined as a fixed mindset, which is about an intelligence that is set in concrete, and a growth mindset, which is an intelligence that can be developed. I find that for one to be 'fixed', then they must have grown into being fixed and therefore would classify that they have or had the ability to grow that mindset in the first place. Growth mindset is not just about self-esteem, but it is a movement within an environment. Some may consider that there could be a fake growth mindset environment as well (Dweck, 2015), which can taint the progress in an individual or organisation. This fakeness comes to surface when it is time for action. A fruitless labor yields no gain. An excellent example of this fakeness is poetically described in the Italian Eurovision contestant Francesco Gabbani in 2017 with his song called 'Occidentali's Karma'. The words of Gabbani define this fakeness as a detriment to the growth mindset as, 'La scimmia nuda balla [the naked ape is dancing]' (Gabbani et al., 2017). A growth mindset could also be a reflection of Eastern philosophies of the teacher, leader and spiritual enlightenment, and it is clearly new to Western civilisations. Rodd (2006, pp. 40) articulates such a reflection as Gabbani, that 'many Western models for understanding consciousness have thus far been primitive relative to those developed in Eastern meditative traditions, or to those of Amerindian societies that value and make use of knowledge derived from a range of modes of awareness'.

How can teachers develop a growth mindset?

It is a combination of both - collaboration and individual action. In some anthropological research by Dr Robin Rodd (2006, pp. 35), a social ecology of emotions of 'understanding relationships between nonlinguistic thought and culture' may provide the mental mindset that can be applied towards confronting the two types of mindsets that need developing, in order to navigate away from negative effects. Being aware of the social ecological model of emotions defined by Lazarus (1991, in Rodd, 2006, pp. 53) is crucial to the issues previously mentioned about how or why teachers do not grow or change. Relative to the ideas of a growth mindset is the research by Rodd (2006, pp. 40), on how 'knowledge developed during waking consciousness is considered to be an inadequate basis for understanding social processes and cause-effect relationships'.

One way teachers and collaborative efforts can develop a growth mindset is provided by Seaton (2017). The activity mentioned activates a mindset within the classroom or within themselves. This promotes positive psychology that focuses on three positive thoughts each day, to open and connect an individual's behavioural repertoire, skills and resources (Seaton, 2017). By focusing on these things, Seaton (2017, pp. 6) explains that, 'an individual accumulates personal resources which begin an upward positive feedback loop'. If individuals can identify mindsets within the classroom and themselves, this will activate their ability to take action and implement change. As you can imagine there are many parallel ways this can be replicated. This is mostly an individualist approach that goes further than the 'waking consciousness' Rodd (2006) find inadequate. Such action can be seen in figure 2 below.



INSTEAD OF.....	TRY THINKING....
I'm not good at this	What am I missing?
I give up	I'll use a different strategy
It's good enough	Is this really my best work?
I can't make this any better	I can always improve
This is too hard	This may take some time
I made a mistake	Mistakes help me to learn
I just can't do this	I am going to train my brain
I'll never be that smart	I will learn how to do this
Plan A didn't work	There's always Plan B
My friend can do it	I will learn from them

Figure 2: Individualistic growth mindset.

On the contrary, not everyone has the strength to go it alone. Especially when you need to have a growth mindset in a culture, organisation or team. This is why developing a growth mindset has to also be a collaboration of shared perspectives. Some schools and educational organisations already have the foundations for an authentic growth mindset to come alive. This can be seen in the international-mindedness qualities of knowledge, concepts, skills, attitudes and action in the five essential elements of the International Baccalaureate (IB) philosophy and pedagogical approach. This excellent example provides a relevant and inspirational educational regime that caters for the changes and diversity, acting in accordance with the future of our shared and interconnected world. The IB is a primary example of how a growth mindset can be nurtured collaboratively and independently, throughout the entire developmental process of a human. How can this be done collaboratively for teachers? This same learning could be done in training and professional development opportunities as shown by Seaton (2017, pp. 8) in figure 3:

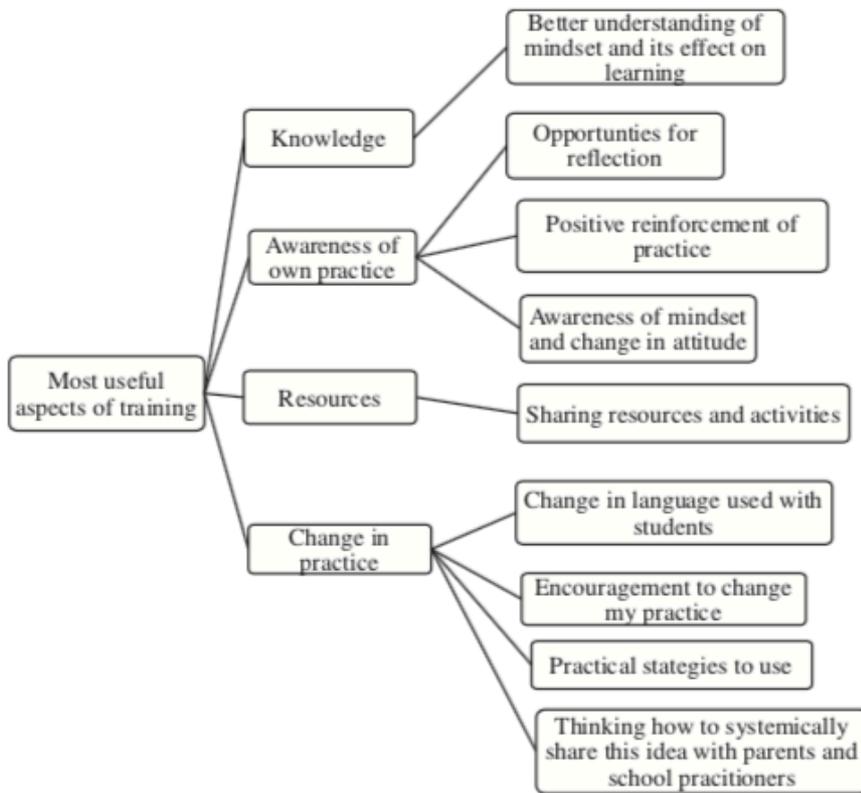


Figure 3: Most useful aspects of collaborative training to develop a growth mindset.

From the research and studies mentioned by Seaton (2017), these most useful aspects of training replicate much of this self-talk in figure 2, as well as the international-mindedness approach of the IB. What may not be as useful and create negative effects are the themes covered in training and design of training, such as what is to be avoided in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4: Least useful aspects of collaborative training without growth mindset.

Earlier in figure 3, it is clear that this approach to training and collaboration can lead to change and a growth mindset. Unlike figure 4 [above], this is a total overload of information with collaborative efforts that lead to nowhere, in a non social-constructivist environment. What growth mindset needs is action. Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action (1990, in Dann, 2016) would enable us to recognise in this format in Figure 4 that feedback and interpretation cannot be a one-way street. Habermas' theory of communicative action can be defined in Dann (2016, pp. 402) as, 'the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech acts and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach understanding about the action situation and their plans for action in order to coordinate actions by way of agreement'. This definition of how we can take communicative action in ways to develop a growth mindset exemplifies the relationship. The suggestion about the IB and their educational vision and mission 'to become active, compassionate and life long learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right' (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2018), is an example of a global culture that can support growth mindsets for the future. This all sounds great but why should we bother with any of it?

What are the neo-schools of tomorrow going to be like?

The landscape of teaching and education has always been rapidly changing, and it seems it is now more than ever. Industrialisation will be dead, it is the age of passions, interests, attributes and skills. There is no such place as an institution of school. Neo-schools of tomorrow are highly digital, with systems of technology stitched into the fabric of the entire experience of learning and teaching. The learning areas will be deskless and designed to implicate and provoke different practices according to the skills necessary in relation to knowledge of the world, and construction of the new. There will be no paper workbooks, the pencil will be replaced by the e-pen and the finger, eventually replaced by visual recognition of the keypad and oral spelling and writing in digital communities. Eye and touch will make actions with technology and learning tools. Lessons will be a facilitation of problem solving and critical thinking in creative multi-sensory means. Learning and teaching will enhance these senses to include creativity and physical productions, printed and created using multiple forms of digital applications and systems with historical formations of motor skills. Shapes, size, colour and texture are stimulants in the design of the neo-schools of tomorrow. The teacher will challenge and support these systems but will have a different approach that is based on the human systems rather than acquisition. Resources play an important role, as they always have, in driving the best resourced learning places that grow the best results in human success and integration into life skills and universal attributes and attitudes, when dealing with diversity and culture. The neo-school of tomorrow will not be confined to one place, campus or location. Travel on multiple planes of consciousness will be a regular event in learning. Learning cannot do without the priority of experience and action in the real world with everybody in it as the only institution accountable. These engagements reflect a prehistoric relevance in the tribal roles in a futuristic world that will be our means of sustainable survival.

Conclusion

'Therefore if he who administers the empire, esteems it as his own body, then he is worthy to be trusted with the empire' Lao-Tzu (1919, pp. 21).

Need I say more?

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