

Reflective Pedagogy in College Composition: Creating Spaces for Risk-Taking, Experimentation, and Productive Failure

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is failure necessary for success? YES!

- ▶ Carol Dweck's "growth-mindset" research: successful individuals "fail well"
 - ▶ Treat failure as an opportunity for learning and growth
 - ▶ Aren't afraid to take risks and experiment
- ▶ What does this look like in the college composition classroom?

growth mindset & “productive failure”

Do you believe that [writing ability]...

...is something you're either
born with or not?

...can always be improved
through effort?



How do you view assignments?

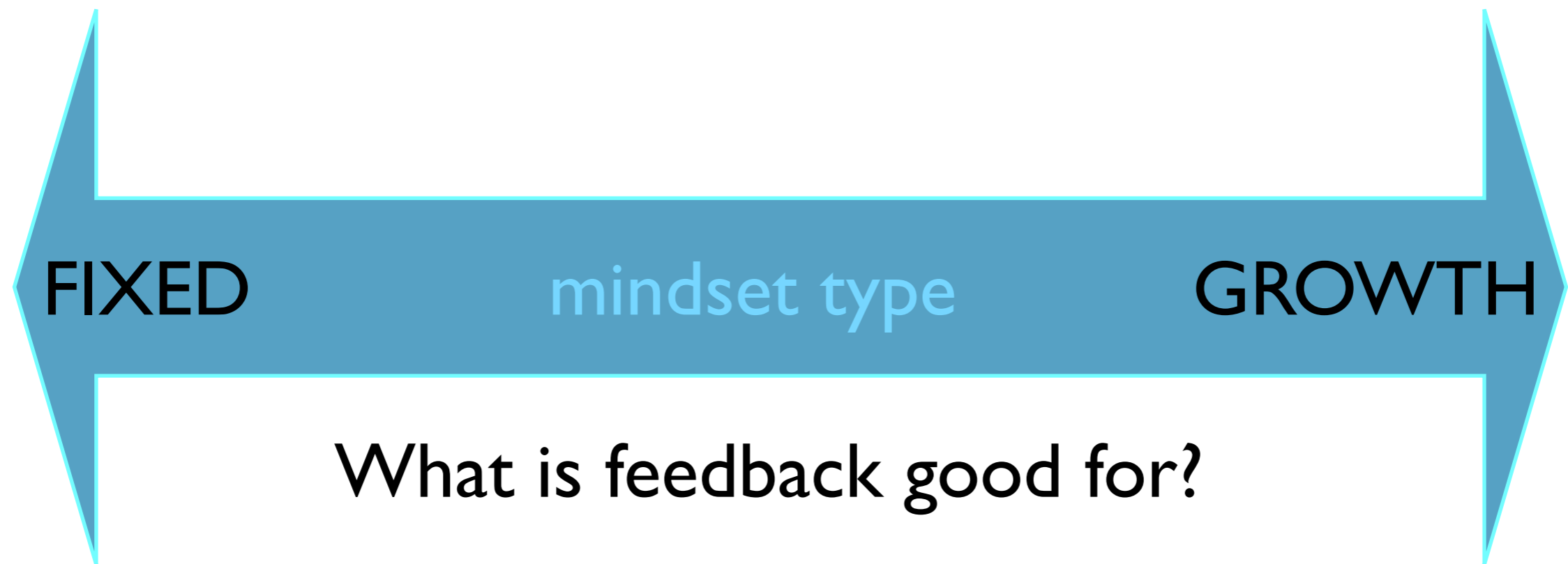
...as a “performance” - no mistakes allowed
(perfectionism)

...as a chance to get feedback and learn from mistakes



growth mindset & “productive failure”

- a judgment of your ACTUAL (inherent) ability
- confirmation of your self-evaluation (whether positive or negative)
- an evaluation of how well you’re currently achieving what you’re trying to achieve
- a source of information that you can learn from



where do fixed mindsets come from?

- ▶ A focus on **outcomes** rather than **learning process**
- ▶ **Gifted students:** often praised for “being smart” and can “be smart” without much effort
 - ▶ believe needing to exert effort implies low ability → avoid challenges that would require effort or risk-taking
- ▶ **Lower-achieving students:** Often criticized for poor performance no matter their efforts or progress
 - ▶ end up thinking there’s no point trying; they’re just doomed

reacting to failures and critical feedback

- ▶ **fixed mindset, low-achiever:** “I’m a bad writer!”
 - ▶ confirmation of their low self-evaluation
 - ▶ avoidance/defeatism
- ▶ **fixed mindset, high-achiever:** “You’re a bad grader!”
 - ▶ defensiveness, inability to hear criticism, blaming the reader
 - ▶ OR...

reacting to failures and critical feedback

- ▶ Another outcome for **fixed mindset, high-achiever**:
 - ▶ “I must **ACTUALLY** be a **BAD** writer!”
 - ▶ experience it as a **HUGE** setback, injury to self-image
 - ▶ shame spiral, avoidance

None of these outcomes are good if our goal is student growth and learning!

creating opportunities for “productive failure”

- ▶ Students need space and support to experiment, take authentic risks in their writing, and to learn from their failures
- ▶ **Risk-taking:** real risks, but low stakes (in terms of final grade)
- ▶ **Reflection** is necessary for this kind of learning!
- ▶ How do we create these spaces in our classrooms?

portfolio-based grading

- ▶ All writing in the class is about “practice” until the final “performance” (the portfolio)
- ▶ Makes **revision** and **reflection** the central tasks of the course
- ▶ Creates space for **risk-taking** and **experimentation**
- ▶ De-centralizes grades as the main feedback
- ▶ How to motivate students WITHOUT grades? **Whitney’s breakout session: Pedagogical and Logistical Considerations for Portfolio-Based Grading systems**

student-driven formal writing assignments

- ▶ ESL writers and peer feedback (Hylan, 2000)
- ▶ Formal writing assignments, risk-taking, and authentic purpose
- ▶ Opportunities for deep reflection on successful as well as unsuccessful attempts

student-driven formal writing assignments

- ▶ Student as formal assignment prompt designer:
 - ▶ Purpose of assignment features and criteria
- ▶ Student as planner and researcher:
 - ▶ Scope and other design and implementation elements
- ▶ Student as audience chooser and analyzer:
 - ▶ Influence on linguistic and rhetorical choices

(Suzanne's breakout session)

what's in a title – or that accompanied image?

Reflection, peer collaboration, and code-meshing in (Stella's breakout session) first year composition

“Sir, Yes, Sir”:
The Making of Marines
Through Milgram's Lenses
and Beyond



what's in a title – or that accompanied image?

Reflection, peer collaboration, and code-meshing in first year composition

- ▶ Code-meshing in first-year composition
 - ▶ Definition, risk-taking, and relevancy
 - ▶ Real-world and academic applications

what's in a title – or that accompanied image?

Reflection, peer collaboration, and code-meshing in first year composition

▶ Reflection

- ▶ Consider purpose, context, and audience: using design notes
- ▶ Code-meshing meets multimodality: moving beyond literal translation

what's in a title – or that accompanied image?

Reflection, peer collaboration, and code-meshing in first year composition

▶ Peer collaboration:

- ▶ No one – including the peer and the instructor – needs to know all the languages being used for code-meshing
- ▶ But we can all use our bits of curiosity and patience to achieve shared communicative success.
- ▶ What if the objective IS to frustrate reading and comprehension? Code-meshing on a different plane.