Writing, Grammar, and Growth Mindset in the 21st Century Learner

Ondine Gage, Ph.D.
California State University, Monterey Bay
CATESOL 2017, Santa Clara
Growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; 2015)

- Growth mindset versus fixed mindset
- Growth mindset reflects research on neuroplasticity; we can grow our minds if we continue to work at a problem.
- Fixed mindset reflects our “baggage” from poorly understood concepts like Intelligence Quotas (I.Q.), i.e. born with abilities which are our lot in life. Reflected in people’s comments like “a bright student”.
- Perceptions of Fixed mindset: “I’m not good at…” as if anyone is naturally capable.
Growth mindset (Dweck, 2015)

- Growth mindset caught on in popular media. But developed a misconception—Growth mindset as “effort”.

- Dweck’s concern: Praising “Great effort!” may reinforce fixed mindset implying:
  1) They put out effort, but may still not be learning;
  2) ”Good effort” carries the meta-message, “for you, I don’t expect much from you.”
Middle school math classes

- May use growth mindset rhetoric but send meta-messages implying that the teacher does not really think the child is smart enough.

- We need to encourage students to explore a range of options for solving problems when they are stuck. She suggests we aim to cultivate a culture of asking, “So what is the next step?” to help students move forward (Dweck, 2015).
“Issues with grammar” signaling a fixed mindset?

- “Issues with grammar” may be a message that students who were ESL or labeled Gen 1.5 have been told all their life reinforcing a “fixed mindset”.

- More over teacher attitudes towards students’ grammar may imply a fixed mindset.
Began the Social Turn in SLA, moving our work out of the cognitivist domain of input, output, interlanguage, and fossilization to a focus on what people do with language.

Their research emphasizes the social aspects of language use, where people engage in a variety of activities doing things with language---with largely grammatically imperfect language.
How to build a praxis of growth mindset in a written communication classroom?

- In deeply pondering their quote, "...people can never say what they mean in the absolute sense--meaning is ineluctably negotiated" (Firth and Wagner, 1997, p. 290).

- I aim to endorse a classroom climate which explores meaning which is ineluctably negotiated.

- Written language is not a binary good or bad, but a conversation in which we air our thoughts to refine, articulate, and move ideas forward.

- How might classroom instructional practices support a growth mindset?
1) Flipped classroom model: Students lead discussions on class themes.

2) Writing assignments which build sequentially (instead of process revisions).

3) Revolving cycle of peer-review by students and instructor.

4) Metacognitive reflections following each sequence to consider: What went well? Where were problems? How will I move forward?
1) Flipped classroom model: Students teams lead activities on class themes.

- Student teams build relationships and are responsible to their peers for leading class in activities and discussions.

- Climate supports the discussion of topics which interest students, and allow all students to engage in activity—less teacher talk.

- Climate builds trust needed to participate in copy-editing feedback on written communication.

- Student lead activities allow opportunities for the instructor to listen to all students’ voices, observe student creativity, authority, and autonomy.
Sample rotating block schedule
Colors represent teams rotating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Each block theme covers 5 class periods</th>
<th>Blogger 1 Day 1-4</th>
<th>Discussion leader 2 Day 1-4</th>
<th>Language Awareness 3 Day 3 &amp; 5</th>
<th>Debate 4 Day 5</th>
<th>Free block 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language Awareness Block

- Student teams teach each other the difference between
  - Simple, Compound, and Complex sentences.

- Each team creates a quiz in google forms with answers built in.

- Each team takes the other teams’ quiz. Team is graded on how well their team does on the other team’s quizzes.

- Review quiz at end of class. Mistakes in the quiz are a good conversation point.
2) Writing assignments which build sequentially (instead of process revisions).

Model in Junior Year
Critical analysis of problem.

- Begin with researching/and reading articles. Taking notes.
- Annotations
- A review/report synthesizing annotations
- An analysis of recommendations
- Revise entire report

First Year Seminar
Ethnographic Memoir

- Select 5 meaningful items.
- Write a draft for each item over course of semester.
- Revise and assemble entire piece.
3) Revolving cycle of peer-review by students and instructor.

- Each draft gets feedback once from peers, is revised, and gets feedback from instructor. Peer feedback is guided by content related questions.

- Instructor feedback
  - Content: Questions asking: Did you mean this? What do you think?
  - Grammar: Intensive metalinguistic CF with numbered sheet (Ellis, 2008). Students are asked to determine if error is a competence or performance error and to keep a record of the error pattern.

- 5 sequences with 5th being a revision and assembly of entire paper.

- Rather revisions allows for the conversation “What next?” as students delve deeper into their topics.
4) Metacognitive reflections following each sequence to consider:

- What went well?
- Where were problems?
- How will I move forward?
Limitations

- This study examined student perceptions. The implication of this work is that through the process of engaging in course work, students gained strategies which they will use when writing for other purposes, thus enhancing growth mindset.

- As a qualitative study, the findings in this study cannot be generalizable.

- As a study of student perceptions, there is not correlation between growth mindset and improvement in student writing.

- Future work might examine how perceptions of growth mindset build student agency and quality of writing.
Works Cited


