

Benefit
Mindset

Schools
Guide



SHIFTING MINDSETS

“School is about producing leaders. It doesn’t mean bosses; it means people who can genuinely make a profound transformative contribution to their society as a part of how they live their lives.” – Peter Senge

We live in extraordinary times where everyone is facing complex challenges they haven’t faced before. From coronavirus to climate change, mental health to extreme inequality, what’s clear is that no individual or school can solve these challenges on their own. Our ability to respond – and break through to a world that works for all life – requires something more than everyone’s best personal efforts. Bringing about meaningful change requires us to build a sense of a “we,” that we are all in this together, as one human family who cares deeply for the wellbeing of all. And our ability to actualise this possibility requires a profound shift in mindset: towards what we call a *benefit mindset*.

In this guide, we evolve Carol Dweck’s research on growth mindset to introduce benefit mindset, to support learning communities who want to live into this possibility.



WHAT IS A BENEFIT MINDSET?

A benefit mindset builds on a growth mindset, when we understand that our abilities can be developed – and we also understand we can transform towards a more caring and inclusive perspective.

It is called “benefit” mindset because it is concerned with the life-long process of learning how we can be the transformation and realise our unique potential in a way that serves the wellbeing of all.

Developed by Ash Buchanan in collaboration with a global community of contributors, benefit mindset is grounded in the understanding that fulfilling our potential is about more than how smart, driven or growth oriented we are. More completely, it is about how well we are able to transform how we come to understand our place in the world, compassionately attend to our individual and collective shadows, and become partners in the wellbeing of all people and all living beings. While a growth mindset has many advantages over a fixed mindset, what truly makes us thrive is our capacity to realise our potential in a way that nurtures our uniqueness and serves the wellbeing, not only of humans, but the entire community of life.

Fixed

MINDSET

Growth

MINDSET

Benefit

MINDSET

Engagement	Resistant to change Shows up resistant to growth and change.	Learning by Doing Shows up with an open mind. We are ready to learn.	Being of benefit Shows up with an open heart. Contributes to collective action.
Development	Entity Believes intelligence and ability can't be developed.	Incremental Believes intelligence and ability can be developed.	Participatory Creates the conditions for everyone's development.
Focus	What Focus on maintaining what is familiar.	How Focus on improving how we do what we do.	Who & Why Focus on who we are being and why we do what we do.
Effort	Reduced Reduces effort when ability does not come easily.	Necessary Sees effort as necessary for learning and mastery.	Flow Align ourselves with the natural flow of life.
Relationships	Inflexible Hold set expectations about our relationships.	Adaptable A practice of learning and growing together.	Emergent A practice of flowing together in deep resonance.
Challenges	Avoids Gives up when challenged. Failure as proof of inability.	Embraces Persists when challenged. Failure as opportunity to learn.	Transforms Uses learnings to transform view of self and world.
Feedback	Selective Selective about the feedback we pay attention to.	Constructive Actively seeks out feedback that helps us grow.	Dialogical Values collective inquiry in an ecology of deep reflection.
Others' success	Insecure Likely to feel insecure by the success of others.	Inspiring Likely to feel inspired by the success of others.	Partners Engages as a partner in everyone's flourishing.
Trauma	Inducing Reacting with quick fixes. Passing on trauma.	Informed Intervening in such a way that learning can still happen.	Collective Healing Holding space for a process of collective healing.
Culture	Expert A culture of authorities and gurus.	Learning System A culture of growth and learning opportunities.	Regenerative System A culture of collective transformation and co-evolution.



Realising your potential starts with helping others realise theirs

In a benefit mindset, we understand we are not separate individuals going it alone. We are interdependent beings who belong to a massive global ecosystem – the community of life – and everyone has a unique and valuable role to play in creating healthy conditions on the planet. Therefore, more than believing we can develop, we take responsibility for realising our potential in a way that affirms life and supports others with doing the same.

This interdependent view of our potential represents an evolution beyond a fixed mindset where we hold an “entity theory” of development. We believe our intelligence and abilities can’t be developed. It also represents an evolution beyond a growth mindset where we hold an “incremental theory” of development. We believe our intelligence and abilities can be developed by forming new neural connections in our heads (i.e. brain neurons wiring and firing). In a benefit mindset we hold a “participatory theory” of development. We see the inseparable nature of everything and recognise no bodies life is just their life. Our lives are inextricably linked

with others, nature and future generations, and interdependency is built into the fabric of who we are. In this view, more than forming new neural connections in our heads (i.e. brain neurons wiring and firing), we strengthen relational bonds through our hearts (i.e. hearts interconnecting and coalescing). This distinction is important because when we only think about development in terms of brain activity, we reinforce a view of human beings as separate individuals. Whereas when we include the heart, and its boundless capacity for connection, care and community, we get a more complete view of just how inseparable our potential and wellbeing really is.

ROLE MODELS

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish climate activist. She became a prominent figure for initiating the school strike for climate movement. She is known for her frank speeches, speaking hard truths and having the guts to say things which others are afraid to. In Greta's words: "Some say we [students] should not engage in activism. Instead we should leave everything to our politicians and just vote for a change instead. But what do we do when there is no political will? What do we do when the politics needed are nowhere in sight?" Greta was nominated for a Nobel Peace prize in 2019.

Jane Goodall

Jane Goodall is one of the most recognized and respected scientists in the Western world. She became famous because of her ability to observe and connect with wild chimpanzees. Nowadays, Jane is a writer, speaker and UN Messenger of Peace, hosting global conversations about the power of kindness and compassion to transform our lives and the world. She invites all people to recognize their personal power and responsibility to effect positive change. "Every individual counts. Every individual has a role to play."

Student Activity

What role models embrace a benefit mindset in your community?



Serving the wellbeing of all

More than the drive to learn, our turbulent times challenge us to widen our circle of compassion and engage in actions that care for people and planet as an undivided whole.

This means caring for the wellbeing of the whole person – our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health; including our thoughts and feelings, our strengths and shadows, what we find meaningful, and being true to our uniqueness. It also means caring for the wellbeing of the whole of humanity – including all people, as well as caring for the collective wellbeing of our schools and organisations, our communities and cities, and our states and nations. It means caring for the wellbeing of the planet as a whole – the community of life; including the birds and bees, the rivers and trees, the climate, and all the other species we co-inhabit this amazing planet with. And it includes the understanding that in this very moment, each of us has billions of years of life creation acting through us, and how we choose to use the gifts of this life creation has profound implications on the wellbeing of future generations.

In a benefit mindset, we would also understand that in our attempts to live in harmony and balance with the living Earth community, we will also encounter a shadow landscape of unhealthy patterns in ourselves and the world. Therefore, it becomes our duty to do the often uncomfortable work of paying careful and compassionate attention to any shadow material we may be denying, dissociating from, or absent to, and move towards healing this material as an act of service. This includes attending to any societal shadows we may be complicit in perpetuating, such as systems of power, privilege and inequality, and the role they play in marginalisation, collective trauma, and socioeconomic disadvantage. It includes attending to the unprecedented ecological shadows of our time, such as the climate emergency, the mass extinction of species, and the mass contamination of air, water, and soil. It includes attending to any personal shadows we may be projecting onto others, such as personal triggers, unhealthy habits, and hidden biases. It also includes attending to any intergenerational shadows we have been born into and have been passing on from generation to generation, such as colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and systems of oppression. We are all shareholders in these shadows, and our capacity to respond requires something more of us than the addition of new skills alone. They are shadows that require us to see more deeply into the many ways we may be contributing to and passing on the deep suffering of the world, such that we can move towards healing these patterns, and open up to a healthier and more inclusive life orientation which is serving the whole.

Personal Wellbeing

E.G. PHYSICAL
EMOTIONAL
MENTAL
SPIRITUAL

Societal Wellbeing

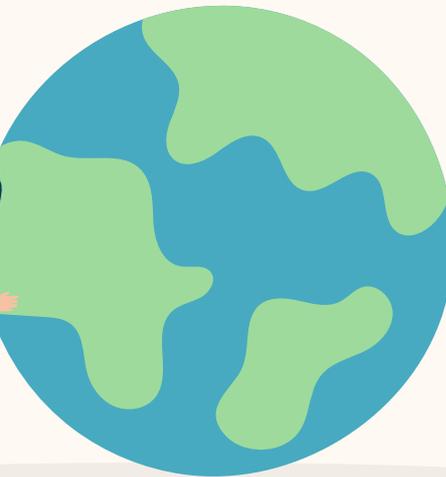
E.G. SOCIAL
ECONOMIC
POLITICAL

Ecological Wellbeing

E.G. AIR
WATER
SOIL
SPECIES



**Billions of
years of
life creation**



**Wellbeing
of future
generations**

Personal Shadows

E.G. TRIGGERS
UNHEALTHY HABITS
HIDDEN BIASES

Societal Shadows

E.G. POWER
PRIVILEGE
INEQUALITY
COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Ecological Shadows

E.G. CLIMATE
POLLUTION
MASS EXTINCTION

Donating to Charities

Buying a tin from my mum
Friends at the canteen
Pole the

Some way to help
someone in what
your way to help

giving up my
I stay on the
pregnant lady
I give a

Sponsoring a child in need

helping my siblings with their homework

My sister always makes time for me.

giving clothes
to those in need
or those

Carrying the Groceries

Sticking up for someone when they get in trouble for something they didn't do.

Cleaning the bathrooms

giving someone my lunch when they have nothing to eat

Helping my mum with the house work when she was busy.

holding the door open for people.

Giving money to the homeless

Giving tips to restaurants

Sponsoring Animals & Children in 3rd World Countries

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 1

Being of benefit

“In the present circumstances, no one can afford to assume that someone else will solve their problems. Each one of us has a responsibility to help guide our global family in the right direction. Good wishes are not sufficient; we must become actively engaged.” – Dalai lama

First and foremost, benefit mindset is a life practice. We show up with an open heart and are ready to lead as part of engaged communities who are putting their practices to work in the world. We understand leadership is not a job title or something reserved for a special few people. Leadership is the distributed capacity of an entire community to respond to its life circumstances. This means responsibility for the wellbeing of all starts with every one of us showing up and contributing something as part of a larger social movement for change and transformation.

For example, this might mean reaching out to tell a friend or teacher how much you appreciate them. It might mean starting a permaculture garden, acting in solidarity with marginalised people, or joining one of the many grassroots groups who are leading transformative change in your local community. It might also mean joining Greta Thunberg and the millions of young engaged global citizens who are turning our climate emergency into a learning and leadership opportunity. Our world is full of opportunities for bold action. It's through acts of everyday leadership, that we cross a threshold, and become more fully ourselves in a way that benefits the world around us.

PRACTICE: 21 DAY CHALLENGE

Educators can activate their school's capacity for collective action by hosting what we call a 21 day challenge, where everyone in the school community is invited to practice a courageous and compassionate act, every day, for 21 days.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Creating ecosystems of kindness and wellbeing by Ash Buchanan
- A force for good by Dalai Lama and Daniel Goleman
- Mindfulness-based character strengths by Ryan Niemiec

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 2

An education of the heart

“When educating the minds of our youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts.”- Dalai Lama

Uncertain times bring with them a mix of complex and challenging emotions. Grief, despair, sadness, anxiety, denial, fear and paralysis have all become poignant experiences which are arising for many on a regular basis. What feels especially important at this time is the willingness to honour the intelligence of these emotions, and rather than shutting them down or pushing them away, we meet them with mindfulness and compassion. Because what we really need right now are people who can remain calm and centred as they role model mutual care in our local communities.

One way we can strengthen our ability to remain calm and centred is by developing our capacity for social, emotional and systems awareness – or what the Dalai Lama calls an “education of the heart.” Such an education builds on a traditional knowledge curriculum, to also include the basics of how the mind and heart work; cultivating a sense of oneness with humanity; developing the capacity to live by compassionate values and be with our experiences as they are.

The point here is while it is important that we care for those around us, what’s also important is that we contribute from a place of presence and deep acceptance of what is. When we do, it not only strengthens our own resilience, but the calmness of our presence ripples out, showing the way for everyone else.

PRACTICE: MINDFULNESS AND YOGA

Mindfulness meditation is a practice which helps us drop into a state of presence, in the here and now. Yoga is another foundational practice that helps us train our nervous systems to rest in a state of presence.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- The Triple Focus by Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge
- SEE learning by Emory University
- Breathing Buddies by Daniel Goleman

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 3

Building a sense of “we-ness”

“At the end of the day, relation is really what nourishes us on a human level the most. And I think if we can manage within a crisis to create meaningful relational networks, where we are supportive of each other... we can find a way to navigate through the more difficult times.” – Thomas Hübl

In times of uncertainty, it is vitally important we turn towards one another and work together to bring out the best in our humanity. We create this possibility when we, as education communities, hold space for one another and build a sense of a “we,” that we are all in this together as one human family that cares deeply for the wellbeing of all. We can build the social fabric and be a source of healing and wellbeing for one another.

You can see this quality of space holding arising in the growing number of communities who are coming together to build a strong container for everyone to feel seen, heard and felt in what they are going through. The key point here is that these spaces are not about teaching curriculum or implementing strategies and interventions. They are about coming together and asking questions, listening deeply, accepting what is and responding with kindness and compassion. They are also about creating inclusive spaces where school communities can connect and co-regulate, and become self-determining around who they choose to be in response.

PRACTICE: MORNING CIRCLE

Morning circle is a well-established practice that can be used online or in person for building a sense of a “we,” where young people are given the opportunity to “check in” and build a sense of “we-ness” around what it is they find energising and enlivening.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Circle Solutions by Sue Roffey
- Interpersonal Connection by Daniel Siegel
- School Climate and Social Fields by Mette Miriam Boell and Peter Senge

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 4

A transformative approach to education

“Could education be one of the roots of the modern crisis, as it reproduces old and inefficient patterns of mass thinking and acting in our society? Or, can it become part of the solution, a sphere wherein new practices and new values for a better and healthier world are cultivated and transferred?” – Global Education Futures

While it is important we facilitate shifts in mindset on a personal level, it's just as important our schools shift mindsets at a collective level too, by upgrading their entire educational operating system to support the possibility of collective transformation. Robert Kegan refers to such schools as being “deliberately developmental.” Otto Scharmer refers to this capacity as building “vertical literacy.” Such a school could also be called a “regenerative system,” because they become self-determining around their ability to align their own transformative processes with the transformative processes present in society.

What this might look like in an education context is a school which empowers young people to identify ecosystem leadership challenges in their lives and in society, especially in places of marginality and disadvantage. Then, the ecosystem leadership challenges they identify are put at the centre of their learning and leadership. This means, a transformative approach to education would create the conditions for everyone to lead as part of engaged communities who are actively participating in the regeneration of their schools and their society. The more a school collectively transforms, the more they are able to take responsibility for their participation in the interdependent processes of life and become a co-evolutionary partner in life's unfolding.

PRACTICE: REIMAGINE EVERYTHING

Consider how a benefit mindset lens transforms everything about the way you learn. For example, what might a benefit mindset mean for the purpose of a class assignment? How might it change what your school celebrates as a success?

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Educational Ecosystems for Societal Transformation by Education Futures
- Vertical Literacy by Otto Scharmer

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 5

Participating in civilization renewal

“What if we used this disruption as an opportunity to let go of everything that isn’t essential in our life, in our work, and in our institutional routines? How might we reimagine how we live and work together? How might we reimagine the basic structures of our civilization? ... That’s the conversation we need to have now. With our circles of friends. With our families. With our organizations and communities.” – Otto Scharmer

Awareness of our interdependency awakens us into a caring relationship with the living Earth community. It also awakens us to the realisation that many of the things we consider to be normal and healthy in today society are actually destructive and unhealthy, causing deep harms for ourselves and the world. Thus, rather than seeing today's disruption as a time to bunker down only to return to the same old ways of living and working, we can use this time to reflect on who we are and who we want to be as a society, and choose to transform ourselves and the world by living into the possibility of profound civilization renewal.

A way education communities can facilitate this is by participating in an innovation lab or a collective leadership program. Spaces where we can be a true global witness, transform how we see the world and our place in it, and actively respond.

PRACTICE: JOIN AN INNOVATION LAB

Consider how your school can participate in a global innovation lab, or a local or international equivalent, which facilitates the transformation of self and society as an undivided whole.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- GAIA: Global Activation of Intention and Action by The Presencing Institute
- The Weaving Lab: Weaving systemic change for universal wellbeing
- Global Social Witnessing Lab

A time of profound awakening

“When in history has humanity had such a shared sense of purpose? And when have we been so aware of our fundamental interconnectedness at every level? This is a moment not to be wasted by any of us.” — Paul Atkins

The point here is that our ability to respond to the great challenges of our day is unlikely to be found in cultures which are rooted in a mindset of growth. Rather, it's going to take the coordinated efforts of millions, if not billions of people who share a deep sense of how they belong to a “global we”: to a collective movement of engaged citizens who care deeply for the wellbeing of all. In such a collective movement, everyone isn't operating as a collection of separate individuals. They are operating as a coherent whole: like a murmuration of starlings who are flying together in a state of group flow.

Now it's up to all of us – schools, businesses, governments and the general public – to build the global we-ness necessary to respond as one humanity. This is not a task for hero leaders, or a few enlightened ones. It's a responsibility for every human being. Every one of us has a role to play. If we have an entire planet of people who are committed to showing up together, everyone is more likely to be fully received, realises they belong to the whole, and this improves the likelihood we will bring out the very best in our collective potential.



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“The benefit mindset challenge has had such a discernibly positive impact on so many individuals in our community, it genuinely went beyond my expectations. Students who participated in the challenge found that this was one of the most meaningful service learning experience they had undertaken, many noting that the nature of daily reflections and an increased awareness of everyday acts of service and leadership played a significant role in shifting their mindsets. Though they found it much more challenging than expected, it ultimately led to a meaningful and memorable experience.” - **Amanda Stefancic, Creativity, Activity, Service Coordinator, Wesley College, Victoria**



“My coach championed my mindset as a contributor towards our success and expressed how she wished everyone in the squad had the same attitude. I was completely baffled by this news as I did not realise how much impact my actions had towards those around me...” - **21 day challenge participant**



“At a time when it is easy for people to look inward, the Benefit Mindset has helped us to stay connected, to stay grateful and to keep our heads up and our eyes open for each other.” - **Michelle Pereira, Assistant Principal Wellbeing, St Francis Xavier College, Victoria**



“The Provincial Direction of Educational Planning and Evaluation of Buenos Aires is promoting growth and benefit mindsets in 2000 public schools through communities of practice. Their province wide initiative focusses on school climate and the development of an emotional education curriculum.” - **Delfina Terrado, Education and Regenerative Development Leader**



“It was lovely to see the growth of the students throughout the process, where the acts of kindness began as small, to more thoughtful, where students began to make a conscious effort to go out of their way for others. For example, Aimee began her challenge by smiling at people throughout the day and ended up extending her kindness beyond school, returning a phone to a lady at the shops who had left it on the bench accidentally and walked away. We had students bringing their actions home and extending their kindness to their families, many helping more with daily chores but some students, like Trinity, who said she made a conscious effort to tell her brothers that she loved them. Each Care Group put their own spin on the challenge” for example “Mr Cookson’s care Group who set upon, what they called Mr Cookson’s Quest to make the world a better place. I truly believe the challenge has had a positive impact on the students in my house as well as the rest of our school.” - **Nadia Liu, Head of House, St Francis Xavier College, Victoria**



“I really feel like I have made a difference over the last few days. I feel humbled and grateful for helping people, going out of my way to support them.” - **21 day challenge participant**



“By exploring the Benefit Mindset in the early stages of our Program, we are able to challenge our participants to become everyday leaders, help them find the ‘why’ in their work, whilst contributing to the impact that Pollinate generates in over 1200 communities.” - **Luke Barbagallo, Program Manager, Pollinate Energy**



“I have been so thankful to be a part of the benefit mindset program as it helps me to centre myself every day and think about even the smallest things which make me happy and positive.” - **21 day challenge participant**



“Buchanan’s insights have significant implications for the way schools integrate teaching around fixed and growth mindset... I am excited about the Benefit Mindset and how it can strengthen the application of positive education more broadly in schools.” - **Matthew White, Associate Professor, Melbourne Graduate School of Education**

Who do we choose to be?

“It is time to face the truth of our situation. We are all in this together. Let’s figure out how to engage the hearts and minds of everyone, and get on with the work to do it.” – **Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze**

These are challenging times, yet they can also be times that awaken us to who we really are and who we want to be as a society.

Today’s disruption presents us with an unprecedented opportunity to come together and be of benefit like never before. Let’s use this opportunity to embody our best human qualities and contribute as awake, engaged and responsible members of the living Earth community.

Fulfilling our potential in ways that serve the wellbeing of all.

If you would like to follow up on any of the content presented, or discuss opportunities to bring benefit mindset to your school, please get in touch:

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Our team is located in Melbourne, Australia. We offer a range of local and international options for working together.

On our website, you will also find a variety of free resources, including images, videos, slides and case studies to curate your own learning activities.