

# Mindset Matters

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## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

Carol Dweck's research on mindset shows that intelligence, abilities, and talents can be developed and that challenges and failures are part of the process. As I worked with teachers, some had expressed concern because they had not received the highest mark in a competency in the evaluation. In addition, teachers recounted times when students were given material that they had never seen before and the students cried because they did not know the right answer or became frustrated because they could not work through a problem. It was obvious to me that we needed to create an environment with high expectations that allowed for everyone to take risks and learn from success and failure. The purpose of my action research was to find ways to promote a growth mindset in teachers that would transfer to students and to provide teachers with a plethora of resources.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered how a growth mindset could be cultivated personally and how to cultivate a growth mindset culture so that it would thrive at Brownstown Elementary.

## **Methods/Procedures:**

The first step was to delve into the research on growth mindset to find strategies that would be helpful for myself and for teachers. Videos and articles on mindset were put into a website for teacher use (<https://sites.google.com/btownccs.k12.in.us/chrystal-street/mindset-matters>) that could be referenced anytime. An informal survey was taken to determine the background knowledge on mindset with only a few indicating that they were familiar with Carol Dweck's work. Staff was given a survey entitled "What's My School's Mindset Culture?" An after school Teachers' Meeting was devoted to professional development on mindset and things that could be done to create a classroom that promoted a growth mindset. A few teachers then participated in a book study on Mathematical Mindsets by Jo Boaler.

Google docs was used to collect some notes from videos, articles, and podcasts. Data given through IPLI on my personal growth mindset was analyzed as well as the data given to staff on the School's Mindset Culture. Some field notes were gathered during evaluation post-conferences. After the book study, teacher testimonials were taken on beliefs about instructional practices and growth mindset.

## **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

The survey administered by IPLI showed that my mindset was a 38 which meant that there was still room for growth. The survey that the staff took on the School's Mindset Culture showed that student motivation was the lowest area and leadership and open communication were signs of strength. It was not surprising to learn that the staff had an overall mixed mindset but was actually really close to being growth-mindset oriented. In the area of motivation, teachers indicated that students were not participating with enthusiasm or that they would give up when work was challenging. In the category of shared leadership and open communication, teachers expressed that they have been able to give critical feedback about administrative practices and that

administration is responsive to feedback. Teachers stated that everyone works together to design goals and places for teacher development with appropriate support.

As a result of analyzing the data, there were many important things that I learned including: 1) Continue to work on growth mindset feedback when talking with teachers during post-observation conferences; 2) Teachers are more willing to take risks when they know more about growth mindset and when they are encouraged to take risks in their own classrooms. Teachers also need continued support in allowing their students the opportunity to fail; and 3) It is more difficult to change your personal mindset than it is to give someone else tips and strategies to change their own.

Just as students benefit from feedback, teachers need feedback that fosters a growth mindset. Teachers need to be given specific strategies that will enable them to grow their instructional practices. After walk-throughs and during post-observation conferences, an administrator can work with the teacher to develop strategies by using growth-minded prompts with teachers such as what can you do to improve the learning outcomes of your students or what can I do to help you be more successful? This type of feedback that the administrator models is the same type that you want teachers to communicate to their students.

It is important that teachers know the difference between a growth and a fixed mindset, the characteristics of each type of mindset, and how these characteristics frame their belief about themselves and others. Teachers and students should be given opportunities to take risks, have sufficient supports in place, and have the opportunity to reflect on the good and bad that happens. This takes targeted and intentional professional development or book studies on mindset, feedback, building relationships, high expectations, and rigor.

People often fluctuate between a fixed and growth mindset depending on the task and level of importance or relevance. It is easy to offer advice and suggestions to others, but tends to be a bit more difficult to practice what you preach. As an instructional leader, it is important to allow yourself to take chances and try initiatives but then support teachers as they do the same.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

This project has allowed me to grow as a leader and learn ways to talk to staff so that they become growth-minded. We have a great deal to do before we could consider ourselves to have a culture that thrives on growth mindset practices. As we continue to learn about the research from Carol Dweck, there are a number of things that need to be done by administration such as providing continued professional development and resources for teachers on growth mindset.

There are a number of things that I would like to do in this area such as continue to add resources to the website and to develop announcements that focus on growth mindset themes that tie in children's literature. I also plan to further research the correlation of mindset and Hattie's work on the factors that influence student achievement particularly teacher's estimates of student achievement and collective teacher efficacy.

### **References:**

- Boaler, J. (2016). *Mathematical mindsets: Unleashing students' potential through creative math, inspiring messages and innovative teaching*. California: Jossey-Bass.
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- Mindset Works. *Growth Mindset Culture Implementation Guide*.