

Growth Mindset

Albuquerque Teachers Federation Leadership Program

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Research Question

How can we promote a growth mindset among our students and stakeholders?

Rationale

Judge Mathew Wilson who presided over the Yazzie-Martinez vs. New Mexico case made clear in 2018 that the state of New Mexico was not providing equal opportunity to all students especially those who were low income, Native American, English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The judge ordered a legal mandate requiring students to receive culturally relevant and quality education that prepares them for college or a career without the need for remediation.

Mastery learning is clearly not occurring on a wide scale in New Mexico. Furthermore, a fixed mindset has only widened the learning gap for many subgroups within our schools. I propose that with a radical shift to an asset based framework, we can help all of New Mexico's students reach their full potential. I propose we take simple measures to promote a growth mindset and celebrate mastery at all levels for all students. I propose we begin immediately.

Literature Review

In *The Growth Mindset Playbook*, Annie Brock and Heather Hundley write, "A lot of kids have lost hope. They have lost hope in themselves, they have lost hope in their future, and they have lost hope in you, their teacher. (p.12) While scathing, current attendance records, reports of thousands of children unaccounted for during our unprecedented attempt at mass virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a connection between low test scores and who is failing to show up give credence to lost hope.

Research conducted by Dweck and her colleagues conducted in 2014 in Chile revealed that students who indicated a strong growth mindset, regardless of their socio economic status had better academic outcomes than students who had strong fixed mindsets, and that growth mindset students from low-income backgrounds fared better academically than economically privileged students with fixed mindsets. Growth mindset was developed as an antidote to the self-esteem movement. Instead of praise for the sake of praise, praise should be specific and focused on what progress comes from effort. When there is no progress, the conversation should focus on re-strategizing. The attributes of growth mindset are: action oriented, flexible, high expectations, and communicative, strong relationships, process oriented, values mistakes, empathetic and positive interdependence. (p.24)

Ultimately, embracing a growth mindset is highly compatible with mastery learning. Embracing your and others' ability to grow and learn is the purveyor to achieving mastery.

Attributes of mastery learning include: holding students accountable, targeted and accessible learning, the learner determining content and pace, high expectations and the ability to adapt and evolve. This contrasts with attributes within a traditional school: lack of ownership, a failure to reach all students, management issues, low student performance and day to day survival.

Teachers and classroom/district structure bare responsibility in extinguishing motivation, creativity and even higher order thinking ability. According to research carried out by Wellesley psychology professor Beth Hennessey and Harvard Business school professor Teresa Amabile, the biggest killers of creativity are constant surveillance, expected evaluation, rewards, competition and restriction of choice.

Study Design/Tools/Process

I sought to determine colleagues' familiarity with a growth mindset, their ability and methods for promoting a growth mindset in their classroom, barriers to mastery learning, effectiveness of measurement tools currently being used by the district and teacher familiarity with diverse methods of assessment such as portfolios and project or problem based learning.

Finally, I sought out personal stories of using a growth mindset to achieve mastery of a specified goal and how many teachers considered themselves capable of mastering new skills, or having a fully rounded growth mindset. I chose the qualitative method due to teachers' limited time and ability to respond quickly due to adapting to the hybrid model after their first year of virtual teaching. Out of the twelve colleagues that responded in full, all are elementary teachers. 3 of the 12 teach special education and 3 of the 12 are dual language instructors.

Data Analysis

All teachers claimed to have some knowledge of growth mindset; however, their ratings on how familiar they were with growth mindset (on a scale of 1 to 10) varied greatly as well as their ability to articulate how to implement growth mindset in the classroom. All teachers noted limited beliefs being a part of their mindset to some extent as well. Most common was the idea that they simply were not good in a certain area of school and math was the area most cited.

The following methods were stated as ways that teachers were promoting growth mindset within the classroom: charting growth (most common); goal setting; conferencing with students in regards to growth; questioning and reflecting; exposing students to programs like Habits of Mind and Ted X kids.

Obstacles to overcome in order to promote a growth mindset included: prescriptive curriculum; mandated minutes; limited time; the labeling of students; school culture, learned helplessness and a closed mindset. Standardized testing and the current system of reporting and evaluating were also seen as impediments to a growth mindset.

Implications/Recommendations

1. Language matters, thus change our own self-talk, language with colleagues and students. Celebrate mistakes and failures regularly. "My favorite no." Use non-examples to

critique and improve. “I don’t understand this yet.” Model acceptance of errors as inevitable and opportunities for growth. “I need to dedicate more time to learning...”

2. Create an environment where everyone can question and seek clarification. For example) I give a shout out to students who correct my spelling or point out when I am wrong.
3. Rename Parent/Teacher conferences. For example) Celebrations of growth or student growth conferences. Essentially, rename to place the student in the center of their learning. Have students lead their ‘Celebrations of growth.’
4. Make students accountable for their attendance and participation.
5. Include students in the development of all learning plans. Ensure they track and analyze their data. Be inclusive of both traditional and non-traditional subject areas. A non-traditional area might be learning to play the ukulele or developing metacognitive skills.
6. Revamp the current report card system to an additive or asset based model. When adults present their résumé to a potential employer, they present using an asset (verses deficit) model framework. I propose we design our accountability system to do exactly the same. Through a résumé like reporting system, student reports would reflect where they have gained mastery. Thus each new teacher, mentor, tutor or community member who comes in contact with the student would be introduced to the student, their interests and level of mastery. Such knowledge could be used to build upon skills yet to be acquired.
7. Use portfolios as a means to allow students to demonstrate growth in writing, art and other traditional or non-traditional subjects that often cannot be reflected in an objective score. These could be traditional or electronic.
8. Honor students who are bilingual or multilingual by included their talents in the overall assessment system. For example) A student could video themselves reading aloud in another language or interviewing an elder from their community in their home language.
9. I recommend the use of digital tools to monitor student growth and progress. A mastery portfolio could be kept that monitors mastery of state standards. Unlike the current report card type system used now, standards would only be added once students have demonstrated mastery or proficiency of the skill.
10. Do away with the retention. Negative beliefs and results universally accompany retention. However, also do away with promotion as the default mode. Predetermine guidelines that must be met in order for promotion to occur using the aforementioned tools and ideas.

A reporting system that follows students from Kindergarten through High School would not have to limit itself to learning during the traditional school year. Throughout the summer students would be able to add skills mastered either at home or elsewhere. A greater ability to show students ability to apply knowledge would be captured through such a system. For example) A student working on a community garden could apply knowledge learned on soil health in order to produce a greater crop. A student struggling to read at grade level might take an intensive course to help them obtain reasonable growth. Like lifelong learning, such a system could be analyzed to determine when growth spurts were most likely and due to what factors. Did a summer course solidify learning among students? Teachers do this nearly every summer. Why not our students? Give credit where credit is due, but only when earned.

References

1. Martinez v. State of New Mexico, No. D-101-CV-2014-00793 (1st Dist. argued Jan. 9, 2018).
2. Annie Brock and Heather Hundley *The Growth Mindset Playbook*. Ulysses Press, 2017.
3. Susana Claro, David Paunesku, and Carol S. Dweck. "Growth Mindset Tempers the Effects of Poverty on Academic Achievement." Vol. 113. Issue 31:8664-8669, 10.1073/pnas.1608207113.

Appendix

Brainpickings.org

Mindsetworks.com

Qualitative Growth Mindset Questionnaire 1. On a scale of 1-10, how familiar are you with growth mindset? 0 = not at all 2. How do you implement growth mindset in your classroom? 3. What do you feel should change in order to support a growth mindset schoolwide or districtwide?