

Incorporating a Growth Mindset Into Your Teaching Practice

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12/15/2016



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Growth Mindset

A growth mindset isn't essential for students alone—it can help teachers increase their impact in the classroom as well.

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December 15, 2016

A growth mindset, as described by [Carol Dweck](#), is a belief that while individuals are different in many ways in terms of their initial performance, interests, talents, and skills, everyone can improve, change, and grow through application and experience. We believe that one of the greatest school-based factors for improving education today is empowering educators with opportunities to develop a growth mindset by working together to build skills and strategies to increase the impact of their instruction in the classroom.

Our view is based on the assumption that educators at every level have tremendous untapped potential. It is

especially important for teachers to have opportunities to build on what is working well and to enhance their professional practice.

The growth mindset approach stands in stark contrast to a traditional view that some people enter the profession as natural-born teachers endowed with a high level of innate talent while many others do not. (These so-called naturals are often quick to tell us how hard they have worked to develop the skills they now have and how tough it was in the beginning.) A fixed mindset approach (believing that one's qualities are carved in stone), teacher isolation, and lack of support can undermine motivation and contribute to a significant percentage of teachers leaving the profession within their first few years.

To counteract the fixed mindset, we need to build a more scientific basis for appreciating the potential of all educators to learn and grow. In our professional development, we facilitate this by connecting the science of neuroplasticity with a discussion about growth mindsets. The core concept of neuroplasticity is that learning changes the structure and function of the brain. While it used to be assumed that this capacity was confined to childhood and early teen years, it is now known that this process happens across our life spans.

This understanding of neuroplasticity pairs well with the concept of growth mindset, in that throughout our professional careers we have a tremendous capacity to improve our knowledge and skills in ways that increase our effectiveness in teaching (or in other professional endeavors). At the same time, we are changing the structure and function of our brains. In short, when a growth mindset is adopted and supported, performance in teaching or any other domain can be improved.

Capitalizing on Teachers' Sea of Strengths

While understanding the science of neuroplasticity and growth mindsets can support the development of individual teachers in isolation, there is even greater potential for sustained growth when teachers have formal and informal opportunities to collaborate. When teachers have opportunities to work together to create lessons or assessments, for example, they can tap into their collective expertise in terms of their knowledge of students, community, content, and teaching strategies. We call this combined knowledge and experience a powerful sea of strengths. Having worked with more than 160,000 educators over the last two decades, we have been consistently impressed with what teams of teachers can do and learn over time. This is described in our book [*Smarter Teacher Leadership: Neuroscience and the Power of Purposeful Collaboration*](#).

A powerful way to support the development of growth mindsets among teachers is for them to experience a positive impact in their classrooms, and teachers have shared with us the positive impact they have seen when they have an opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and work on projects, such as creating more effective lessons.

Here are a few steps for promoting a growth mindset among teachers.

Planning

Step 1: Establish your clear intent. A key point at this first stage is to establish motivation for the project. Teachers should agree on the positive changes they expect to see from developing and implementing the project and commit to the work that will be required for success.

Step 2: Develop your action plan. Collaborative preparation is needed to turn intentions into actions. At this stage, teachers may want to make their goals public, pick their start day, and identify people who will support them.

Step 3: Set goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-specific. In our workshops, we use the metaphor of a rocket launch to convey the importance of careful planning and goal setting in these early stages: The launch requires the most energy. If you commit the required resources, time, and effort to planning the launch, implementing will go much more smoothly.

Engage in Teaching

Step 4: Take action. With full planning accomplished, implementation should be fairly straightforward. A small reward for the team should be in order to celebrate this milestone.

Group Evaluation and Staying the Course

Step 5: Chart course corrections. For nearly every implementation, the team is likely to encounter unexpected setbacks. When these slips happen, the best approach is to persevere, revisit the original planning and goals, and identify necessary corrections to get back on track.

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Step 6: Persist for continued progress. A common obstacle to long-term change is a dwindling commitment to the original goals or a tendency to turn to the next big thing and away from the need to maintain and continue to improve projects that are in process.

About the Author

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