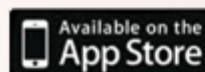


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A MOMENT
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MINDSET MATTERS

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM



BY: NATASHA COX



Habits of mind that challenge personal effectiveness, accountability, and responsibility for the learning of others poses questions that relate to the experience of others" (Cranton & King, 2003).

Stated differently, our mindset drives our individual choices and actions, which ultimately transfer through how we engage and interact with others in the educational environment.

This concept holds special value when teachers work with students. In a recent consultation with elementary teachers, I was briefed about some of the challenges they faced. They shared many of the deficiencies that students had in academic and social behavioral matters. While I offered various suggestions to support the students, I realised that there was not only a need for more dynamic professional practices, but also that decisions had already been made about the future of some students, even though there are several months of instructional time remaining in the school year.

As educators, we've all had similar experiences. Sometimes, students do struggle on their academic and social behavioural journeys. Sometimes, educators have certain beliefs (mindset) about what skills we bring to the classroom, what the students

"should" know, or be able to do when we've planned, delivered and assessed instruction. We may even suggest that our degrees, roles, years of experience, or current state of knowledge should be enough to yield the desired outcomes we have for ourselves and those we educate. However, if the habit of mind is that a student "just can't", or is somehow innately incapable, it may be worthwhile to assess the mindset of both the educators and the students.

What is mindset?

The concept expounded by Carol Dweck (2015), contends that everyone has a set of beliefs about their intelligence, whether it is fixed or one of growth. A fixed mindset reflects the belief that people are more or less born with a certain measure of talent or intelligence, which doesn't require much effort to accomplish various tasks. These individuals are said to focus more on documenting these attributes, or sticking with what they know.

Conversely, those with a growth mindset believe that intellect and talent can be developed, regardless of what measure a person seems to naturally possess, creating a love for learning, and the perseverance it takes to accomplish one's goals. In other words, one's increased, and consistent effort is a major factor in producing positive outcomes.

Why does mindset matter?

Research shows that mindset is critically important to a teacher's professional practice because it impacts the way their students are engaged in learning. Opportunities for increased student achievement, is impacted by the approaches to learning that are used. In fact, the relationship between mindset and achievement are demonstrated by beliefs teachers have about student's intelligence and their behaviours. It influences which instructional, pedagogical techniques they use, and the types of problems they pose, which all flow from the teacher's mindset (Bethge, 2018).

Implications for possessing a growth mindset are compelling. It prompts us to ask, What do we really believe about student's abilities to perform to expected levels of proficiency? Do I have the necessary train of thought, and skills to impact this student's progress? "Does it really matter that everyone did not have a good learning experience today?" (Cranton & King, 2003).

What does Growth Mindset Look Like in the Educational Environment?

- ☑ There is empirical evidence that teachers and students are likely to benefit from exploring and possessing a growth mindset, which fosters abilities and skills to improve over time, when both give immense effort and enriched learning experiences (Clark & Sousa, 2018). In this case, we understand that what we (and students) may not know today can be improved and advanced by next term or next year.
- ☑ Educators with a growth mindset are truly lifelong learners, always seeking ways to develop and enrich their capacity personally and professionally, "serving as a student first in aspiration of achievement for all stakeholders" (Casey, 2016). It means we are "definitively unfinished" (Clark & Sousa, 2018), consistently prioritising learning,



perseverance and strategic work. An obtained degree, title, or number of years in the classroom doesn't mean that learning stops. Continue to take courses online or in school, attend workshops, or build yourself through independent study of the latest research and best practices. You may even think about developing and presenting PD to your colleagues, if it's not available in your school.

- ☑ Because personal competence is prioritised, these teachers are open to exploring new ways of thinking, and embrace the challenges with a sense of resolve, improving themselves to impact the learning of themselves and others (Cox, 2019). If an individual or groups of students are struggling, or require enrichment, ask yourself, am I research-engaged? Have I read up on strategies to differentiate the instructional process, content and products for my students? Can I articulate and employ best practices for engaging students? Are there professional learning opportunities near me, I can take advantage of, to develop my skill sets? Most importantly, have I decided that any one of my students is incapable of learning at a grade or age appropriate level? If so, have I adjusted my own thinking, and taken action to try something new, believing that everyone has the capacity to grow his or her abilities?
- ☑ Teachers with a growth mindset understand the importance of effort, and acquisition. Dweck (2015) reminds educators that a result of effort is also evidence of learning, and improvement in the teacher and the student. By virtue of our profession, most of us have a growth mindset. These teachers work diligently to exhibit tangible evidence that's demonstrated by their own, and their student's learning.

Use Professional Development as a Tool

There are many studies on the benefits of utilising professional development and learning to improve educational practices. However, most professional learning processes are explicit, focused more on content and programs, and less on implicit concepts (Evans, 2019; Evans, 2014), such as mindset.

Given the fact that we all have the ability to plan and implement professional development in our schools, we can create opportunities to reflect on what goes on inside an individual's mind, and perhaps adjust "attitudes to, and intellectualisation that underpins the job...encouraging changed values and/or perceptions before hoping to effect productive or processual change" (Evans, 2014). A few ideas for leaders and teachers to focus on in PD include the following:

- ☑ Spend time researching mindset to get a comprehensive understanding of the science behind the theory.
- ☑ Provide professional learning opportunities for in-service teachers and leaders to promote a growth mindset, and prioritise time for critical reflection and discussion.
- ☑ Identify, and adopt one or more of the many online or published

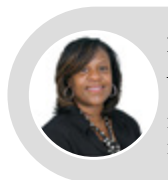
resources and materials that inform teachers and students about growth mindset.

- ☑ Embed mindset into daily practices, and even your curriculum.

Growth Mindset, facilitated through intentional, professional learning can be a great strategy to stimulate reflective practice, intellectual discourse, and new ways to support student performance by identifying time-tested and innovative ways to practice teaching and learning. What's on your mind?

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Natasha is currently the Founding Principal of an international school in Oman. As an education specialist (Ed.S.), and founder of Key Education Solutions Consulting, she also employs 20 years of experience to engage schools, and families in research-based, best educational practices. Natasha enjoys investing in people, to increase life chances.