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English 100

13 May 2023

Original Rubric:  Daniel Guldseth Deep Dive Scoring Rubric

Developing a Growth Mindset in College

Carol Dweck defines a “growth mindset” as the belief that our minds and “most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work” (edglossary). For Dweck, this kind of ability to develop a person's thought process is something that has been overlooked in the past, focusing instead on a fixed mindset where once a task is done it is considered complete instead of trying to keep improving. A growth mindset is an idea that the brain can grow, through new approaches, getting help, perseverance, or putting in more effort. Researchers have explained that the way we think has been “carved **in stone**”**however**, with recent studies they learned that the way we think can be “cultivated through their efforts.” Although **it is** important to focus on and take pride in the areas where **you** excel, **it is** beneficial to try and improve in every area including the subjects you're struggling with. Dweck suggested that students whose goal is to “validate their competence” (Dweck 2006) or try to avoid “looking incompetent” show more helpless reactions in terms of their “attributions and behavior”, compared to students who work on “developing their ability.” One example of this “fixed mindset”(Greater Good Education) theory looks at a student who is struggling with fractions and claims, “I can't do math.” Subsequently, the student skips homework and doesn't study for the test, and watches their grade decline confirming their belief. On the other hand, a student who has been taught a “growth mindset” in another Math class, where they are allowed to submit, correct, and resubmit their

work. This can encourage the student to pay more attention to the teacher's comments and respond positively; making the corrections and learning how to become a better mathematician and understanding that their areas of weakness as opportunities to grow instead of giving up. Developing a growth mindset is a crucial skill for college students to expand their individual and collective agency, in order to overcome challenges in the future. Viewing life through a growth mindset will ultimately increase my own personal agency, by improving and expanding the reputar of my intellectual abilities.

In an article on the controversies of growth mindset, David Yeager and Carol Dweck explore various ways in how a growth mindset can expand personal, collective agency and how schools can help students develop that skill. Throughout their research, they focused on “standardized measures and interventions,”(1271) diving in depth to further understand the effects and limitations of a growth mindset. **A Intervention** aims to improve a students persistence by encouraging them to view intelligence as a moldable characteristic that grows with effort. Dweck and Yeager engage in a debate over whether or not the interventions that are being held are working, as well as the “effective size” that must be observed when gathering data on the subject. A study was done in a tenth-grade class in Chile and the results showed how different mindsets were directly related to achievement in test scores; in the conclusion of their study, the correlations to a fixed mindset were larger among students with greater risk of low performance. In another example, they covered some studies designed to identify where “growth mindset interventions do not work,” particularly in the fields of measuring and collecting results; and the ways that teachers have implemented strategies for integrating growth mindset ideals into the classroom. In a study done at Burgoyne of 438 undergraduates, they found “weak or absent correlations” between mindsets, and learning goals or attributions. Thus displaying how

the means for measuring the effectiveness of the interventions have yet to be standardized.

Although these results may seem counter-intuitive, this shows why it is necessary to monitor and get accurate data on the subject. While, “A fixed mindset”, with its focus on “validating one’s ability”(1270-1271) has resulted in lower achievements in grades and test scores. Compared with a “growth mindset”, with its greater concentration on “developing ability” while also “questioning strategy or effort after failure”. This **displays** how a growth mindset can expand personal or collective agency, and help future generations to understand the possibility of growing and excelling in different subjects and tests that would have caused them to quit or grow frustrated.

Reyna Grande’s relationships demonstrate how a lack of a growth mindset can limit her own personal agency. Reyna displays a growth mindset in many different areas of her life, for example in her writing, school, and at work. But when it comes to interpersonal relationships, like her relationship with her father, or in her interactions with Francesco, Reyna continually struggles to control her impulses. This results in a loss of agency due to her unwillingness to directly address the challenges she’s facing. Because Reyna is influenced by her sister having another child, she begins to feel empty as the loneliness crept in. So in order to get herself out of that funk she decides to go on a trip to Europe. Unfortunately, her travel companion, Delila, backed out of the trip, so Reyna instead went with Francisco; however, their trip took a sour turn when Francisco’s wallet went missing and Reyna ended up paying for everything. While most tourists enjoy the feeling of freedom and enthusiasm that comes from visiting different countries, cultures, and experiences Reyna felt disappointment “Instead of appreciating the Spanish dance influence on folklórico”(181) because all that was on her mind “was the cost of the show, and the bottles of wine and Spanish tapas Francisco ordered”. Grande was exhausted and worn down

from the trip, so by the time they arrived in Venice, Grande was distracted by finances, “instead of appreciating the magic of the city”(182) like any traveler normally would, her thoughts were consumed by her “dwindling bank account”. After the trip, she broke off her relationship with Francisco, **however, not** long after she lost her cat and used it as an excuse to get back together with Francisco once again. Reyna Grande’s agency was not only limited by finances but her agency was suppressed through her lack of a growth mindset within her relationship with Francisco. Unable or unwilling to see the similarities between Francisco and her father, Grande was taken advantage of by another selfish, self-centered man in her life. For a researcher like Dweck, this series of events in Grande’s life reveals how evident and necessary it is to fully understand what a growth mindset looks like in an interpersonal relationship. Because this lack of growth stems from Grande’s childhood, it's clear that this is still affecting her life in many ways. Grande’s personal agency is constricted because she strayed from the idea that she can grow and her intellectual abilities and they can be developed even in her relationships.

My experience with Mrs. Brainstormer demonstrates how a growth mindset can increase personal and collective agency by encouraging me and the other students to keep learning while giving support to help build the confidence we need to overcome the challenges in our way. Many years ago, I faced challenges in my English class due to my inability to read, spell, and punctuate. While Mrs. Brainstormer consistently pointed out my mistakes and believed that I was just slacking off, and not putting in enough effort. From my perspective, I was overwhelmed by her lectures, and because I was homeschooled, it was my first time in a classroom so I had yet to adapt to the new learning style. Due to these dilemmas, I gave up trying to improve my skills and began to think that I would never be a success when it came to English. For this reason, Mrs. Brainstormer noticed my grades were dropping, and one day after class she took me aside and

began to ask me questions such as, “Why are you not trying?” or, “Is there anything I can do to help?” I responded by telling her, “I’m terrible at English, and I’m overwhelmed by the gap between the other students and my reading, and spelling capabilities.” She answered with a kind expression, saying “Don’t compare yourself to the other students, just do your best and keep trying to understand and learn as much as you can.” It was only then that I realized that eventually if I kept applying myself and tried to grow, I would be able to read and write at the same level as my peers. From then on, I began to put effort into my English class and met with my teacher regularly. But it was only because Mrs. Brainstormer brought a growth mindset into the classroom, that I began the process of changing the way I viewed problems. She opened my eyes to the fact that learning took time, and everyone struggles in different areas. Originally, I believed that I was not capable of learning the vast variations, and immense detail of the English language. However, after implementing a growth mindset I learned that the other students and I could increase our agency by merely just believing we could develop our skills in the areas we struggled with and slowly increase intelligence.

College faculty should encourage professors and other educators to implement a growth mindset into the classroom, to strengthen the collective agency of the staff, and students. We need educators who will assign, teach, and encourage a growth mindset in order to prepare students for their future endeavors. Creating assignments directed towards encouraging students to keep developing and enhancing their skills, even in failure, is vital to keep the students growing in every subject. But it is also just as important for the professors to give positive reinforcement as well as low-stakes grading to encourage the students to keep attempting the assignments they are struggling with. Implementing a growth mindset into the classrooms involves a joint effort from both the educators, and students to ensure that the students have a

clear understanding of what a growth mindset is; so that they are able to improve their skills, and expand their mindsets and not be held back by their failures. However, before implementing a growth mindset into the classroom, it must first be cultivated and processed by the faculty to create a universal infrastructure that can be easily adopted by educators in every class. By universal infrastructure, I just mean for the faculty to develop a simple understanding and strategy to implement a growth mindset into different classrooms and the campus. Partially because of the many applications and the collective agency that it gives to the students, but also because of the long-term impact that it will have in the lives of those who adopt this learning style. Cultivating the students' growth mindsets can create a more engaging classroom for the Professors, as well as improve the grades, attitudes, and lives of the students. A professor who understands and works to implement a growth mindset into their classroom will achieve better results when connecting with the students, building relationships, and receiving feedback.

College students should master the skill of strengthening their growth mindset to expand their individual agency. When college students begin to embrace their failures and learn from them, they put themselves in control of their education and begin to reach out for the help they need to succeed. If a college student is given the opportunity to focus on their areas of weakness, then the students will be more knowledgeable of the type of questions to ask, and help that they need. This will, in turn, allow the student to reach out for help and find the resources that will aid them along the way. While a growth mindset is useful in the classroom for correcting mistakes, it is just as important for identifying what the student is excelling at and tracking their progress over time. If educators focus on the positive and the strengths of the individual students, then the students will be encouraged to contribute and feel more comfortable to reach out for the help they need when they need it. Rather than having a negative impression of their professor from

only informing and correcting the students, the students gain a positive view from their professor's encouragement. Instead of receiving critiques and judgment, that drive a wedge between the students and educators; giving positive feedback builds connections, expands the students' individual agency, and reinforces the students' growth mindset. Another area that a growth mindset should be encouraged, is in the students' time management. For example, if a student procrastinates and doesn't get their work turned in on time, then the next time the student will be more aware of the deadline and will have learned how to get the most work out of the time they set apart by limiting distractions or managing their time so they finish the project before the due date. A student who understands and works to improve their failures will be better prepared to tackle the challenges both in and out of college. By developing the students' growth mindset in college, they learn how to embrace their mistakes and are better prepared to take on challenges in the future.

As a person living in this modern era that is riddled with problems and challenges arising **all over, furthermore, it is** necessary to utilize a growth mindset in my future in order to overcome the obstacles blocking my goals and to develop my ability in learning new skills. In the next five to ten years, as I navigate through college and begin my career, I must lean into the belief that all my skills can be developed, even in the subjects that give me grief. For example, in the past I have struggled with technology; however, just believing that I have the capability to grow and improve my skills will assist me in completing my Intro to Autocad class along with other computer-based learning classes that I might take. When looking to the future in my career, and how my growth mindset will look then, I am thrilled by the idea of clients coming to me for landscaping solutions. As I work with them it will be crucial to use a growth mindset when addressing the problems they are facing, in order to come up with designs that address and

overcome said problems. Finally, when looking to the future in my personal life, a growth mindset will allow me to understand my flaws and learn from them in my relationships with other people. In the next five to ten years, I hope to view the familial struggles or fights I might experience as a learning opportunity so that I am able to learn and understand how to prevent issues from arising later on. My role should be to encourage a growth mindset among my peers, while I incorporate it into my own education, career, and relationships. I need to search for the areas in my life where I am implementing a fixed mindset and work incorporating a growth mindset so that I can reach my full potential in the future.

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