



## 2015-2016 NOII Case Study

**School:** Evelyn Dickson Elementary

**District:** #91 Nechako Lakes

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**Our focus for this year:** We wanted to work on creating a school culture based on Growth Mindset, focusing on student perseverance and resilience.

According to the author of 'Mindset', "In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits." Alternatively, "In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point."

**Scanning:** We were noticing that learners were giving up on work, when asked what are you learning, they didn't seem to know how to articulate it. They often immediately resorted to asking for help and then would give up. When we attempted to let students lead their own learning and give them choice about what to learn, for example during genius innovation week, many students were lost and had no idea where to begin. They would often expect the teacher to tell them what to do and how to do it.

Many of our school staff attended a workshop in August 2015 which focused on Formative Assessment. As an inquiry group, we originally discussed and did professional reading on Formative Assessment. Within the professional reading, there was a chapter dedicated to Growth Mindset – this philosophy resonated\* with most of the teachers – it totally made sense to integrate this into our school culture.

This was our turning point and as an inquiry group we felt this was an avenue that would greatly benefit our school community, including students, staff and families. The principles of stretching all students and focusing on formative assessment drove our inquiry thinking this year.

**Focus:** Over time, our focus changed. As stated above, we started working on Formative Assessment and it evolved into a focus on Growth Mindset. It seemed a natural shift because we recognized that fixed mindsets are hindering our learners in many ways. We could see benefits of developing learner awareness of their fixed mindsets and creating habits of thought/action for sustaining growth mindsets that would better serve them in learning, and in life. Ultimately it became the key topic in our primary and intermediate collaboration groups as well as our inquiry group.

**Hunch:** By developing awareness and behaviors associated with a growth mindset we think that we will improve learner resilience, perseverance, and willingness to take risks when encountering challenges. We shouldn't just expect them to persevere if they hadn't been taught strategies that would take them through challenges.

We also recognized that the language we adults were using in classrooms and around the school might be contributing to fixed mindsets. We needed to learn more effective ways of teaching this, and we needed to develop our own mindfulness around the words we choose to use with learners. We also really needed to create a safe environment in which students would more readily engage in risk-taking behaviours in their learning.

We wanted to build resilient learners and we felt that some students were quick to give up when presented with challenging tasks.

**New professional learning:** As collaborative groups, we read “Active Learning through Formative Assessment.” As an inquiry group, we read “Mindset – The New Psychology of Success.” With both books, we worked through them as a book study, reading chapter by chapter and discussing in a group format.

We also researched a variety of Growth Mindset teaching units and they were used widely throughout the grades. Our professional conversations at collaboration meetings and extra meetings helped us design next steps along the way. We helped each other look honestly at our own practices and shared successes and struggles.

**Taking action:**

- The first steps involved clarifying and defining what fixed and growth mindsets are, and identifying the benefits of having a growth mindset.
- Older students began to self-reflect/assess and realized that they may have growth mindsets in some areas, but fixed in other areas, and then began to focus on the specific areas that needed improvement.
- The primary students focused on not giving up and the power of ‘yet’, and the importance of practice in achieving a goal.
- In addition, we also fostered school-wide learning through a variety of avenues:
  - Bulletin boards
  - School Assemblies
  - School Newsletters

**\*\*Interesting Note\*\*** In the Term 2 Report Cards, our formal school leader noted that almost all teachers in the school were using the Growth Mindset language to describe the learners’ progress. This was a natural shift in our school thinking, it was not directed or discussed in advance.

**Checking:** For our baseline, we used observation strategies as well as self-assessment checklists to see if students could identify strategies to solve problems and face challenges. We determined that many of our students had a fixed mindset and that this was an opportunity for growth.

In our final term, we decided to use surveys with older learners, staff and parents to assess the learning. Younger students were given the question “What do you do when you face something that is challenging?”. Then they checked off a list of possible strategies.

Most students were able to identify a strategy or a growth mindset approach that would help them, which was an improvement from the beginning.

We were encouraged to note that many families noticed a difference in their child at home as a result of the school learning. They owned the Growth Mindset strategies and transferred them to other areas of their lives.

Below are a few quotes from our students, staff and parents:

"Growth Mindset means to me that you should never ever give up. It also means to me that you can always try new things even if they are hard." Grade 4 student

"To have a Growth Mindset means that you replace words like 'I can't' with 'I can do this, I just have to try a different way.'" Grade 6 student

"I love the language and concept of "Growth Mindset". I am learning slowly how to change the way I talk so the class and I are learning together. I am encouraged by all the positive comments coming back from parents." Staff member

"When she makes mistakes, she tells me 'Mistakes help me learn.' As compared to before, she perseveres more and takes on the challenge to accomplish it." Parent

"I have noticed that he has determination, and a great positive outlook even if he attempts something new and fails. I do recall him saying 'just not yet' but one day soon! It's Fantastic!!" Parent

**Reflections/Advice:** As a group, we learned that focusing on Growth Mindset as a school community has helped to foster a positive attitude toward challenging learning opportunities. *We definitely noticed a progression from awareness, to using the language, to doing it.* With explicit focus and attention on growth mindsets, learners are able to change their "self-talk" and use growth mindset thinking. The first steps have been raising awareness of mindsets and having them starting to use the language. It takes time for them to change thinking, believe it, and start to live it. Learning requires patience and time.

The focus on identifying personal areas for growth recognized individual differences as students selected goals to achieve. They were more motivated and expressed excitement as they achieved their goals, or at least were able to say, "I am practicing and I can't do it...yet. But I will be able to if I keep trying."

Having a common language and focus as a school has strengthened and solidified the student ownership of Growth Mindset. We strongly feel that our teaching in this area needs to be ongoing and will require further professional development. To this end, we have decided to start a new book study on the book "A Mindset for Learning: Teaching the Traits of Joyful, Independent Growth."