

## Chapter 28

# Encouraging a Shift in Mindsets K–6

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The authors' focus while writing this chapter is to effectively implement a mindset shift in their classrooms to successfully lead their students to take ownership of their learning and build resilience for the challenges they face in the classroom. An individual's mindset encompasses the beliefs and thoughts that the person has regarding his or her capabilities, intelligence, traits, and success. According to Zhang, Kuusisto, and Tirrri, the mindset theory founded on positive psychology by Carol Dweck asserts that human intelligence is a flexible quantity that helps in the prediction of numerous individual achievements such as socioeconomic, academic, cognitive, and affective achievements.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

A growth mindset is a critical component defined as the perception individuals have to exercise control over one's capabilities in learning and improving skills. According to Ronkainen, Kuusisto and Tirri (2019), people who have the growth mindset believe that primary human qualities such as ability, personality, and intelligence are malleable and can be developed. People who have a growth mindset strive through hard work and dedication to improve. It is most important not just to explain and model a growth mindset but to provide students with the background theory about what happens to the brain when engaging in a mindshift. "Research has shown that growth mindset has an impact on children's behavior, particularly in terms of effort, motivation and resilience. By understanding the underlying mechanism of intrinsic motivation, teachers are able to guide students in applying the relevant self-regulatory strategies at school. When individuals have intrinsic motivation for performing a task at work or school, their work or educational performance will improve. With the inculcation of growth mindset,

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individuals will perceive the intrinsic value of a given task and self-regulate their behaviors to perform the task. Through internalization, individuals will generate intrinsically motivated behaviors at work or school.” (Ng,B.,2018)

The growth mindset holds that the accomplishments of individuals depend on their love for learning and dedication. The growth mindset is important for students in elementary school since it allows them to engage in the continual improvement of their skills and abilities, leading to greater success (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). In this awareness embracing this belief, as educators at American Community Schools of Athens (ACS), we will explore how we nurture a mindset shift in the grades we teach. A plethora of pedagogic methods of teaching is used at ACS Athens to best meet our students’ needs. Our institution is an International JK-12 school adopting an American educational philosophy and a diverse multicultural community. We are strong supporters of our school’s mission statement and vision whereby ACS Athens is committed to inspiring students to realize their full potential through diverse educational experiences and challenges all students to realize their unique potential: academically, intellectually, socially and ethically — to thrive as responsible global citizens.

This chapter is a collaboration between Eleftheria Maratos a veteran teacher, who has taught fifth grade and now is teaching sixth grade and Christina Venos who is starting her 7<sup>th</sup> year teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. In her 30 years of teaching, Eleftheria strongly believed in providing a classroom environment of acceptance, and encouragement. Building self-esteem in her students was paramount to their academic and social emotional growth. Christina Venos has a philosophy of teaching that encompasses the growth mindset approach before ever learning about it. She was then introduced to growth mindset teaching her very first year as an educator and was sent by her school district to a growth mindset conference where she had the honor of meeting Dr. Carol Dweck and taking part in her training conference. Ms. Maratos’ veteran expertise and Ms. Venos’ excitement and experience with growth mindset led them to work collaboratively to grow as educators for the benefit of their students. They represented ACS Athens at the NESAS (Near East South Asia) 2019 Spring Educators’ Conference by leading a growth mindset workshop for educators from around the world (Figures 1 & 2).

Our focus while writing this chapter is to effectively implement a mindset shift in our classrooms to successfully lead our students to take ownership of their learning and build resilience for the challenges they face in the classroom.

## **MINDSET SHIFT**

As educators we believe that students can develop the necessary growth mindset skills to improve their academic, behavioral, and social emotional outcomes. Within the classroom setting, students have various strengths and challenges. Students believe that they can only attain knowledge when things come easy to them. In other words they believe that ‘I am good at math or I am good at writing.’ This way of thinking limited the students’ perception of themselves but also their ability to progress in learning and to tackle new challenging information. In many cases, such notions are instilled in the students by the societies within which they live and the ideologies of their parents, guardians, and even educators. There are societal norms and notions such as the belief that children learn faster and better than adults and the belief that certain students are better than others in some subjects. How many times have we heard the age old stereotype that boys are better at maths and sciences. Children may be negatively impacted to think that and this may hinder their chance of academic growth. We have observed that many students

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