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## Growth Mindset Pedagogy and Introductory Communication Courses

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GROWTH MINDSET PEDAGOGY AND INTRODUCTORY COMMUNICATION  
COURSES

by

Isaiah Carrington

B.S. Communication Studies, Southern Illinois University, 2014

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Arts

School of Communication Studies  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
November 14, 2022

**RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL**

**GROWTH MINDSET PEDAGOGY AND INTRODUCTORY COMMUNICATION  
COURSES**

by  
Isaiah Carrington

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the field of Communication Studies

Approved by:

Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway, Chair

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

November 14, 2022

## **AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF**

Isaiah Carrington, for the Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies, presented on November 14, 2022, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

**TITLE: GROWTH MINDSET PEDAGOGY AND INTRODUCTORY COMMUNICATION COURSES**

**MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Sandy Pensoneau-Conway**

How students view their own ability to learn plays a significant role in how they perform over the course of the semester. Students who do not believe in their ability to learn will struggle to find success in the classroom. However, if an instructor can encourage students to have a growth mindset (a mindset in which a person believes that they can develop skills with time and effort), students are more likely to achieve at a high level. In this research, three themes for successful growth mindset intervention in a post-secondary classroom are presented. The themes are: an early introduction to what growth mindset is, goal setting assignments throughout the semester, and growth mindset communication in student feedback. Lastly, an example of a growth mindset intervention program in the context of an introductory communication course is provided. This research provides a foundation for creating a curriculum that is centered around the growth mindset.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: WHY GROWTH MINDSET?

Since I was young, I have always wanted to be the best version of myself. I was told growing up that I was going to be great, or a genius. I was consistently placed in “gifted” and accelerated classes. Being told how talented I was from a young age made my expectations for myself almost unreachable. I expected to succeed at anything and everything I set my mind to. As I got to high school and started to struggle in classes, I lost confidence in my ability to succeed. It was clear that I had a fixed mindset. It would not be until undergrad when a friend recommended *Mindset* by Carol Dweck (2016) that this would start to change. Reading this book changed my entire perspective on who I was and who I can become. As I got to the chapter regarding parenting, teaching, and coaching, I started to wonder how a growth mindset-oriented classroom might look, especially in universities. Then the idea clicked into my head: a public speaking course designed with the growth mindset could provide students a safe space to practice a necessary skill while also allowing them to develop their own growth mindsets.

Students’ mindsets play a vital role in how successful they are in the classroom. When students come into the classroom, they make assumptions about what they will be able to accomplish in the class. Part of an instructor’s role is to encourage students to feel like they will be successful when they take their course. One way to accomplish this is by paying attention to how students view success. Do they feel that their success comes from innate talents, or are they successful due to the efforts they are putting forth? Dweck describes this phenomenon as having a fixed mindset versus a growth mindset. Someone with a fixed mindset enters the classroom seeking only a grade or validation of their intelligence. Someone with a growth mindset enters the classroom seeking to learn as much as they can. Instructors have a responsibility to help

students learn to the best of their ability. Incorporating growth mindset into the classroom contributes to such a learning environment.

Many schools around the country require students to take some form of an introductory communication course. This course is pivotal to helping students develop communication and public speaking skills that carry with them into the rest of their lives, both at school and beyond. Communication skills are necessary for anyone to be productive and well-rounded members of society. Learning how to develop those skills can help in all facets of life. Fear of public speaking is something that most people face at some point in their lives (LeFebvre et al, 2018, p. 350) It is not uncommon to hear students say, “I’m just not a good public speaker.” This is a common fixed mindset phrase. Someone who has a fixed mindset believes that their abilities are set in stone. Statements that leave no room for growth are clear signs that someone may have a fixed mindset. Incorporating growth mindset work into the classroom can help students feel more comfortable as communicators in front of an audience. Students must first believe that they can improve their skills as communicators before they truly start to develop those skills.

This research report discusses how we can incorporate growth mindset interventions into an introductory speech class. Growth mindset and its counterpart, fixed mindset, describe the way that students think about learning and intelligence. Growth mindset-oriented people view intelligence as malleable and learning as a process. Fixed mindset-oriented people think intelligence is fixed and can view learning as a challenge. I will provide themes that I have seen across successful growth mindset implementations and address what went wrong in unsuccessful interventions. Finally, I will provide a sample intervention plan that could be added to an introductory speech curriculum in hopes of helping develop a growth mindset in students. The intervention plan consists of three parts. The first intervention lays the groundwork for growth

mindset work by introducing students to the concept early in the course. The next step of the intervention plan asks students to create and reflect on goals throughout the semester. Finally, the intervention plan asks to pay special attention to the way that feedback is given to students and includes a feedback statement example that can be used to encourage students to take feedback as opportunity for learning. This work is aimed to help post-secondary educators to add a growth mindset intervention as part of their current introductory communication course curriculum.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the following section of this paper, I will provide a review of the literature surrounding the growth mindset in a classroom. I will start by establishing what the growth mindset is in comparison to the fixed mindset. Then I will discuss literature surrounding public speaking anxiety, followed by how an introductory communication course can ease that anxiety. In my final section I will discuss the overlap between growth mindset and the introductory communication course.

#### **Growth Mindset**

A person's mindset has a significant impact on how they move through their life. The right mindset can set someone up for a successful life, while the wrong mindset can lead to failure. The ways in which we think about intelligence and knowledge can play a large role in our own mindsets.

In her research, Dweck (2016) discusses what she calls a "growth mindset." The growth mindset suggests that intelligence is fluid and capable of being developed or grown over time. In this mindset, success is not attributed to innate talent or ability, but rather is a result of effort and strategic actions taken to develop skills over time. Challenges are not seen as setbacks but are viewed as obstacles that can be overcome. In fact, those who are growth mindset-oriented tend to seek out more challenges to continue their development. "The growth mindset intervention communicates a memorable metaphor: that the brain is like a muscle that grows stronger and smarter when it undergoes rigorous learning experiences" (Yaeger et al., 2019, p. 364). Just like an athlete trains their body to accomplish their goals, the mind can be trained as well. A person with a growth mindset seeks out opportunities to challenge the brain. This orientation towards

growth enables a person to achieve at levels that a fixed mindset-oriented person may not be able to.

The benefits of a growth mindset are clear, and evidence suggests that this mindset is one that can be cultivated in ourselves and others. In her book, Dweck (2016) discusses how parents, teachers, and coaches can use the growth mindset to improve the success of those they are mentoring. As a teacher, fostering a growth mindset in the classroom can allow students to reach heights they never thought possible. “If you’re a teacher, remember that lowering standards doesn’t raise students’ self-esteem. But neither does raising standards without giving students ways of reaching them. The growth mindset gives you a way to set high standards and have students reach them” (Dweck, 2016, p. 197). The growth mindset is about creating challenges that students have to work towards meeting, and providing the resources to help them get there. Then once students have achieved that success—by meeting the challenge and rising to the occasion—an instructor must acknowledge the effort that students put in to foster the mindset for growth.

Providing a growth mindset intervention can be another way to encourage a growth mindset in a classroom. In a study done by Yaeger et al. (2019), a sample of ninth grade students whose grades fell below a certain threshold were given an online intervention centered around fostering a growth mindset. Within two weeks of having this growth mindset reinforcement, students showed an overall decrease in fixed mindset orientation and an increase in growth mindset. This increase in growth mindset correlated to an increased GPA throughout the rest of their semester. Taking steps to create and maintain growth mindsets in the classroom can have clear positive impact on student success. The alternative can pose significant issues to a student’s

growth and development. In the absence of the growth mindset, a fixed mindset can be fostered and reinforced.

### **Fixed Mindset**

The fixed mindset is the antithesis to the growth mindset. The fixed mindset is the belief that intelligence is crystalized and limited. Those with this mindset believe that they are born innately intelligent, talented, etc. (or unintelligent, untalented, etc.), and this cannot be changed. Fixed mindset individuals are typically avoidant of challenges. They believe that if they cannot grasp or succeed at something early on then that is an attack on who they are as a person. For example, if a growth mindset individual does well on a test, they may attribute this success to them being born smart. However, if they were to fail or not do well on a test, they may feel as though they are not good enough or smart enough to be successful. To avoid the negative feelings associated with failure, those with a fixed mindset may take easier classes, and avoid challenging sports or competitions. A fixed mindset individual feels they must consistently prove their inherent genius or risk losing confidence in their ability to be successful.

### **Public Speaking Anxiety**

Public speaking anxiety is a fear that affects a significant portion of the population (LeFebvre et. al, 2018). Having to stand in front of an audience and present on a topic can understandably cause anxiety for people. As communication scholars it is important for us to understand why public speaking anxiety (PSA) occurs and how we can help to alleviate it in students. LeFebvre et al. (2018) identified 12 categories of PSA-related fears,

which are presented here in descending order of each category's frequency: audience responses (30%), inability to self-regulate (23%), disfluency (8%), performance evaluation (7%), excessive activation (6%), ineffective nonverbal vocal delivery (5%),

unpreparedness (5%), insufficient audience analysis (4%), misaligned information (4%), inadequate public speaking skills (3%), distracting nonverbal physical delivery (2%), and unexpected events (1%). (p. 352)

The goals of LeFebvre et al.'s study were to identify and categorize different types of fears associated with public speaking. The more that we can understand the reasons that people experience public speaking anxiety the more we can do to help alleviate those fears. These fears are both internal and external. In general, LeFebvre et al. found that internal factors centered on how students believed they performed on the speech. Students were fearful of their ability to complete the speech and feel confident while doing so. One common fear in the category of ability to self-regulate was fear of stuttering or missing sections of their speech. External fears were centered on the fear of being judged by members of the audience. Being unaware of how people will react to the speech is an understandable fear for students to have. If you have not practiced speaking often then an audience can be terrifying to stand in front of. Understanding public speaking anxiety, and its causes, is important to consider as we design courses, such as an introductory communication course.

### **Introductory Communication Courses**

Introductory Communication courses are courses designed to prepare students for success throughout their college careers and beyond. In this course, students are taught ways to improve their communication skills and how to ease communication apprehension. These courses typically have a heavy emphasis on public speaking as well. At many universities this course is part of the required core curriculum for students. Most of the time, students take this course as first or second years. With how early on in their college experience students typically take this course, the course has the potential to be incredibly impactful. A study into the effectiveness of

an introductory course shows its importance in a college student's academic career. "Overall, the results demonstrate that the skills training provided in an introductory public speaking course changes the nature of the anxiety or fear experienced by the speaker. By improving self-efficacy for public speaking an individual reduces PSA" (LeFebvre et. al., 2020, p. 105). Reducing students' public speaking anxiety and speaking-apprehension can give students the confidence boost they need as they move through the rest of their college lives. Learning public speaking skills and figuring out ways to ease their anxiety surrounding public speaking early on in their college careers will positively affect student success.

In hopes to improve the effectiveness of the introductory communication course, studying how to incorporate the growth mindset in the classroom may provide a possible solution to the anxiety that students may feel. Nordin and Broeckelman-Post (2019) tracked student mindsets throughout an introductory communication course and looked at the effects of mindsets on students and their overall performance. The authors aimed to study the correlation between growth mindset, public speaking anxiety, performance, and general communication apprehension. The researchers surveyed students in introductory communication courses to determine how growth mindset-oriented they were and how much speaking anxiety and communication apprehension they reported, then compared those results to student grades on the course's speech assignments. "Overall, results indicated growth mindset was negatively correlated with public speaking anxiety, and positively correlated with public speaking performance, interpersonal communication competence, and student engagement." (Nordin & Broeckelman-Post, 2019, p. 53). While this study did not provide any intervention into the mindsets of students it did survey students to determine if they were already showing growth mindset orientation. Students who already had growth mindset traits were better prepared to deal

with their own anxieties regarding public speaking than their fixed mindset-oriented peers. The belief that you can develop skills to become a better speaker had a positive effect on student's ability to develop those skills and led to a decrease in anxiety. It is clear to see that a growth mindset can lead to student success, so how do we encourage students to have this mindset if they do not already have it?

### **Growth Mindset Interventions**

Learning the growth mindset for yourself can be impactful on your life, but the ability to instill that mindset in students is something that takes effort and practice.

Dwecks's initial idea [is] that growth mindset is defined by the core belief that one's abilities can be changed (i.e., malleability of intelligence), which does not mean that simply saying the right words or administering an intervention in a vacuum without broader buy-in will be effective in improving outcomes. (McCabe et al., 2020, p. 140)

To do growth mindset work, a teacher must incorporate it into the framework of the class. There are many ways to encourage growth within the classroom. The three consistent themes that appear in successful growth mindset interventions are to create an environment that fosters growth, goal setting, and growth mindset-oriented feedback.

### **Creating a Growth Mindset Environment**

Nguyen (2020) outlines an activity designed to create an environment for growth in the classroom. The activity revolves around showing a video and having a discussion regarding growth mindset. Discussing with students what a growth mindset is and stating the intention for students to develop a growth mindset early in the class is an important first step in creating the correct environment for student growth. "One possible answer is to teach the growth mindset explicitly in the first lesson and reassert this throughout the school year" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 31).

Before they can practice having a growth mindset, students must know exactly what it is and what it means for them. By informing students early on and being mindful of creating a growth mindset environment in the classroom, students are able to spend the rest of the semester developing a growth mindset. This may be even more important in classes that students view as difficult. Cutts et al. (2010) show this in their attempt to incorporate growth mindset in their computer science classroom. “One possible reason for this is that the computer science atmosphere is one where a growth mindset may be challenged repeatedly. Students come up against failure regularly, more than in most other subjects. Hence the mindset message may need to be reinforced regularly.” (p. 434). When students feel challenged in a classroom, their mindset is also challenged. It is critical in these situations to reinforce to students that the goal of the classroom is to learn and provide opportunities for growth.

Creating the growth mindset environment is something that must be intentionally created throughout the year as well. “For our population, again, these students had approximately 18 years of lived experience that likely contributed to and shaped their mindsets regarding their academic ability. A brief intervention might not be enough to overcome that experience” (Brez et al., 2020, 466) Creating a growth mindset in students is something that must be practiced early in the semester and often reinforced to overcome the years of messaging that students have been taught about their academic abilities.

### **Goal Setting and Growth Mindset**

Goal setting is an important aspect of growth mindset. Woods (2020) outlines a class assignment designed to help with goal setting. In their study, an IT class was given a series of assignments about developing goals and planning how they would achieve those goals throughout the semester. The first assignment asked students to identify 2-3 technical skills to

develop proficiency in throughout the course. Not only does this assignment help to encourage students to think about their growth, but it also allows them to clarify and give direction to their growth. Since they are the ones who are identifying which area they want to focus their development on, they are taking an active role in their learning. The second assignment required students to reflect on the goals they set at the beginning of class and assessing the effort they have put into achieving those goals to this point. Students also had the opportunity to adapt or change their goals for the rest of the class. This continues the effort to keep students active in the direction of their learning and development. The final assignment asked students to reflect on the goals they set one last time and to reflect on how setting these goals affected their abilities to complete other assignments in the course. This series of assignments allows students to set goals, reflect, and assess their goals throughout the time of a course. This consistent checking and updating on their goals and the effort that they were putting into those goals allowed students to develop their own growth mindsets. Starting a course by creating an environment that encourages a growth mindset and creating assignments that allows students to create goals and reflect on those goals throughout the semester gives students every opportunity to be growth mindset oriented.

### **SMART Goals**

The SMART Model (Doran, 1981) asks students to create goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. Using this format for setting goals gives more guidance to students as they create their goals. Instead of operating with vague goals such as “I want to improve my communication skills” this model asks them to think deeper on what that means and how they plan to achieve that goal.



Below are explanations of each criterion of the SMART model:

- **Specific:** Having specific goals means detailing exactly what the end result looks like. It challenges one to be clear and present an acutely defined vision of the goal.
- **Measurable:** Measurable asks students how they will know if they achieved their goals. Having clear metrics enables them to outline progress clearly and makes tracking towards their goals more efficient.
- **Achievable:** Creating that goals are achievable asks students to ensure that those goals are within the boundaries of the resources that they are provided. An achievable goal is within reach when all the resources that are available to them to help achieve the goal are utilized effectively.
- **Realistic:** Asking students if their goals are realistic forces them to think about the effort it would take to accomplish their goals and whether they will have the energy and time to give that effort to their goals. With other classes and a life outside of the classroom to balance, it is important to make sure that students are not taking on more than they can handle.
- **Timely:** This element of the model asks students for an end date for when they will achieve their goals. Students can go above and beyond here by creating a timeline of when they will create action steps towards their goals as well.

### **Growth Mindset Feedback**

The final component to a proper growth mindset intervention is to pay attention to the ways in which we are communicating about success to students. Telling students that they are innately smart or are born gifted or not gifted only serves to reinforce a fixed mindset. To combat

this as educators we must be intentional about giving feedback that praises *effort* instead of *talent*. When teaching, we must “reinforce purposeful and meaningful effort to foster the learning process. In other words, be mindful when you praise a student’s efforts” (Nguyen, 2020, p. 35). Students should be rewarded for their efforts to take part in the learning process. When they face challenges, we must communicate with them in a way that encourages them to find a new or creative solution to the problem. “It's not just about effort. You also need to learn skills that let you use your brain in a smarter way. ... You actually have to practice the right way ... to get better at something” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 305). When praising effort, we must also encourage students to put their efforts into finding new strategies. Simply praising effort does not hold the same effects. When providing feedback to students we must balance praising the efforts that they have made while also giving ideas on what could be improved moving forward.

One possibility for giving growth mindset feedback was offered up by Cutts et. al (2010) in which they attached a message to each assignment, in their programming course, prior to the feedback provided on the assignment.

Remember, learning to program can take a surprising amount of time & effort – students may get there at different rates, but almost all students who put in the time & effort get there eventually. Making good use of the feedback on this sheet is an essential part of this process. (p. 433)

Having a similar message attached to feedback that is given to students may help encourage having a more growth mindset-oriented approach when reading the feedback that they get on assignments.

## Communication Mindset

The ability to communicate is a skill that requires a special emphasis in order to improve. As such, growth mindset work being done regarding communication skills must have its own curriculum. As Nordin and Broeckelman-Post (2020) outline what they call a Communication Mindset (CM, a growth mindset specifically related to communication ability), we now have vocabulary to discuss what could be included in this curriculum. In introductory communication courses we have an opportunity to change students' mindsets about developing communication skills. "However, consistent with other mindset research, there was no change in CM (RQ1), indicating the introductory course does not act as a mindset intervention" (Nordin & Broeckelman-Post, 2020, p. 96). The current format of most introductory speech courses does not sway students' mindsets regarding the ability to improve their communication skills due to its lack of emphasis on altering student's mindsets throughout the semester. By incorporating growth mindset into introductory communication courses, we can more effectively change students' mindsets and better help them develop their communicative abilities. Students who take a more growth mindset approach to communicating and specifically public speaking tend to have less apprehension and are better prepared than their fixed mindset peers (Stewart, et. al. 2017). By continuing to research ways to incorporate growth mindset into the field of communication studies, a pedagogy utilizing growth mindset could help to change student's mindsets surrounding their ability to improve communication skills.

The ability to encourage a growth mindset in students can be a powerful tool towards creating pedagogy that leads to more student success. Most people, including students, experience some form of public speaking anxiety (Hunter, et al., 2014, p. 126). By understanding where this anxiety comes from, we can help students to overcome it. Utilizing the growth

mindset, students can learn to enjoy the process of learning and take control of their own development. Utilizing this mindset in the introductory course can create an environment for students to overcome their public speaking anxiety. “When students believe that their public speaking abilities can be improved and honed, they may be more resilient in the face of failure and welcoming of instruction and feedback.” (Stewart, et al., 2019, p. 45). If students start to believe in their ability to learn and grow, the growth mindset process has potential to become cyclical in the sense that they may be more responsive to the other aspects of growth mindset work that is being done. Being more receptive to feedback should further the learning process and provide even more benefit to students who are trying to improve their public speaking skills.

In an aim to consolidate the research above, the next section of this paper will offer a sample of a growth mindset intervention plan. Utilizing the three themes of an early introduction to growth mindset, goal setting throughout the course, and an emphasis on communicating in growth mindset language, this plan hopes to start to move student’s mindsets toward being more growth-oriented. It consists of five sections: Introduction to Growth Mindset; Goal Setting throughout the Semester; Goal Reflection; Final Reflection; and Growth Mindset Feedback. Each section contains learning outcomes, a description of the process, and a discussion.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTERVENTION PLAN

#### Section I. Introducing Growth Mindset

##### Section I. Learning outcomes.

- Students will be introduced to growth mindset theory and learn the differences between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.
- Students will take an inventory of how growth or fixed mindset-oriented they are.
- Students will participate in a discussion about how growth mindset affects the introductory speech course.
- Students will come up with classroom norms to set expectations for how to foster an environment that encourages growth throughout the semester.

##### Section I. Process.

- (10 min.) Have students take growth mindset quiz (<https://advising.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/341/2020/07/MINDSET-Quiz.pdf>)
- (10 min.) Watch Carol Dweck TEDTalk ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_X0mgOOSpLU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_X0mgOOSpLU))
- (15-20 min.) Discussion questions based on video
  - Now that you have heard it discussed, do you think that you have a growth mindset? Why or why not?
  - How would having a growth mindset change how you experience this class?
  - How can we create an environment in this classroom to encourage growth?
- (10-15 min.) Set classroom norms for the semester keeping growth mindset theory in mind.

## **Section I. Discussion**

It is critical to the success of any growth mindset work that students are made aware of the theory being used. Much of the work that is done using this theory relies on intentional efforts to grow. Thus, it is important to let students know that the goal of the class is to allow them space to grow their skills. The class period that I have outlined above should be done in one of the first classes of the semester.

Beginning the coursework with a growth mindset inventory provides a starting point on where the students' mindsets are as they come into the class. Students will come in from various backgrounds and the ways they have been communicated to about success will be important to note. If the majority of students are oriented towards a fixed mindset in the beginning of the semester, it may require more work to reinforce the growth mindset environment that we are trying to achieve in the classroom. If you have students who are growth mindset oriented at the beginning of the semester, then they can help set the tone for the classroom. Regardless of where students are when they come into class, this information is valuable to know so that as an instructor it is easier to understand the location students are approaching this content from.

Having students watch the TEDTalk from Dr. Dweck (2014), gives them an opportunity to hear about the theory from its founder. In the TEDTalk, Dr. Dweck discusses the basics of the theory and what it means for the learning process. It is an easy to digest explanation of growth mindset and offers an exemplary introduction to the topic that will lead into further discussion.

Leading the discussion into setting class norms for the semester gives instructors and students the opportunity to combine their visions for what the rest of the semester will look like. By having them participate in the creation of norms, instructors set the expectation for the class

that it will take effort from every student to create an environment designed to practice skills in a safe and welcoming classroom.

### **Section II. Goal Setting throughout the Semester**

This unit aims to give students agency over what they want to learn in class. After the completion of these assignments, students will have set goals for themselves and reflect on the progress they are making towards those goals.

#### **Section II. Learning outcomes:**

- Students will learn why goal setting is important to the learning process.
- Students will set learning goals for the semester.

#### **Section II. Process: Assignment 1 → Initial goal setting**

- (10 min.) Introduce goals/explain SMART goals
- (15 min.). Time for students to come up with personal goals:
- (15 min.). Debrief goals:
- (10 min.). Explain goal reflection assignments:

#### **Section II. Discussion**

This lesson and the initial goal setting of the goal reflection assignment should be started within the first two weeks of class so that students have ample opportunities to complete the other assignments related to this unit. Start by announcing to students that they will be creating goals for what they hope to get out of the class, using the SMART Model. Explain to students that the goals that they set will need to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. By using this model students will create concrete goals for themselves. It may be helpful to have an outline of what topics will be covered in the course up on the board. Furthermore, goals such as “get an A” should be heavily discouraged. Goals that align with class outcomes

such as: overcome anxiety speaking in front of an audience, incorporate delivery cues into my speeches, or how to properly outline speeches, are examples of goals that will foster a growth mindset.

Once students have had time to write out their goals for the semester, ask students to share these goals with the class. As the instructor, make sure to ask for students to expand upon goals if you feel like they are not meeting the expectations of the SMART Model. After class, have students post their goals in the first goal reflection prompt assignment so that they have the goals that they set written down somewhere that they can come back to throughout the semester.

### **Section III. Goal Reflection**

Over the course of the semester students will be asked to complete a goal reflection assignment every two weeks. The first reflection prompt (described below, “reflection prompt 1”) is designed to help students create their goals. Each prompt following (described below, “reflection prompt 2-8”) is designed to give students an opportunity to reflect on the progress towards their goals.

#### **Section III. Learning outcomes**

- Students will be required to reflect on the goals that they set throughout the semester.
- Students will start identifying steps they have made and will make over the next two weeks.
- Students will have an opportunity to ask for help/additional resources.

#### **Section III. Process: Assignment 2 → Goal reflection assignments**

**Reflection Prompt 1:** (*to students*) This semester I am asking you to set a learning goal and to regularly reflect on your goal throughout the 16 weeks we are together. In doing so, my hope is that you will feel more agency over where you focus your energy. With intentional



energy and effort put forth towards your goal, you are more likely to be successful in this class and hopefully beyond. In the box below, I am asking for you to write out your goal. Please use the SMART format when writing out your goal. The more specific you can be, the better.

If you are stuck, here are some topics that we will cover in this course:

- Confidence while speaking
- Writing and using an outline
- Word choice
- Speech delivery
- Connecting with your audience
- Effective practice habits

**Reflection Prompt 2-8:** (*to students*) Please take some time to reflect on your progress towards your goal(s) that you set in the beginning of class by answering the following questions.

- Question 1: What have you done in the past two weeks in an effort to achieve your goals?
- Question 2: What do you plan to do over the next two weeks to strive towards those goals?
- Question 3: How do you feel about the progress you have made towards your goals so far?
- Question 4: If you gave a speech during these past two weeks, how do you think you performed?  
What did you do well? What do you think you could have done better?
- Question 5: Is there any support you need from me to better help you towards your goal?

### **Section III: Discussion**

Having students set their own learning goals for the semester helps to give them a sense of agency over what they want to improve on over the course of the semester. By requiring them to do frequent checkups on their goals, the instructor can encourage small steps towards growth.

Two weeks was chosen as the time frame for the reflection to allow for students to make

actionable steps even if they have one particularly busy week. Using this biweekly schedule, if the assignment is started in the first week, it will lead to the eight total parts of the reflection assignment that was outlined above. The goal is to balance between giving students enough coursework to meet their level of challenge and not to exceed or undermine this. If students have given a speech during the time between reflections, this is a good opportunity for them to take an extended look at how they think they performed on the speech.

Reflection check-ins are also useful to ensure that the goals that instructors have students set do not just disappear for the entirety of the semester. By having regular check-ins, students will hopefully keep their goals in mind throughout their time in the classroom instead of forgetting about them until the end of the semester. In doing so, instructors and students can be more intentional about taking steps towards those goals. As an instructor, this can be valuable information as well. If students have goals in similar areas or are struggling in certain aspects of achieving their goals, more emphasis can be placed in those areas that students want/need to improve upon.

#### **Section IV: Final Reflection**

##### **Section IV: Learning outcomes**

- Students will retake the growth mindset inventory to see if they have become any more growth mindset oriented.
- Students will reflect on the goals they set one final time to see if they have accomplished them.
- Students will analyze one of their speeches more in depth to understand what could be improved upon.

##### **Section IV: Assignment 3 → Final paper assignment prompt**

Over the course of this semester, we have attempted to utilize growth mindset theory to improve our abilities to communicate effectively. In doing so, we set goals, have performed speeches and participated in reflection assignments. This assignment is a final opportunity for reflection on your experiences this semester.

**In this paper I am asking you to:**

- 1) Retake the growth mindset inventory that you took at the beginning of class
- 2) Analyze one of the speeches that you performed
- 3) Reflect on the progress you have made in regard to your personal goals

This paper should include:

- An introductory paragraph, several body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph
- Complete sentences, well-developed paragraphs, and specific examples
- Attention paid to grammar and cohesion of thought
- 1-inch margins
- 3-5 DOUBLE-SPACED pages
- 12-point Times or Times New Roman font
- Your name and class on the first page
- Page numbers in the top right-hand corner
- An **introduction**: similar to our speeches, your introduction will include a preview of the ideas you will be discussing in this paper.
- 3 distinctly labeled sections with well-developed **body paragraphs** that discuss each of the following:
  - Section 1: Growth Mindset Inventory: Retake the growth mindset inventory. After retaking your growth mindset inventory, do you feel like you have become more growth

mindset oriented? Take a paragraph to talk about your results and anything interesting that you have noticed about the results or your reaction to the results.

- Section 2: Speech Analysis: Analyze aspects of your delivery or speech content, connected to particular concepts from either of our textbooks. Please make these connections clear, by including where in our text these concepts are discussed.
  - Questions to think about:
    - ◆ What was your purpose?
    - ◆ How did you structure your speech?
    - ◆ Did you utilize any specific delivery cues?
    - ◆ Is there anything you could have done better?
- Section 3: Goal Reflection: Take one last opportunity to reflect on the learning goals that you set for yourself. Do you think that you have successfully accomplished these goals? Why or why not? Is there anything more you could have done to be more successful? Is there any way that I, your instructor, could have helped you be more successful?
- A **conclusion** which explains your overall thoughts regarding this speech course, a thorough conclusion also reviews what you included in your paper, restates your central idea, and ends with a final memorable statement (much like the conclusions in our speeches).

#### **Section IV. Discussion**

In this final assignment, the goal is to collect data and wrap up the growth mindset intervention for the class. By first having students retake the growth mindset inventory, students get a chance to reflect on whether their mindsets have shifted during the course of the semester. The hope in doing the work of mindset interventions is that students will use the shift in mindset to continue to grow outside of the classroom. As instructors, this can be valuable data to see

whether or not the interventions laid out have worked. Whether they have worked or not, student responses to the growth mindset interventions allow for those running the class to continue to evaluate what could be done better. If the goal is to create a growth mindset classroom, then instructors must also take a growth mindset approach to teaching in this way as well. By using these student responses as feedback for how they experienced the classroom, instructors can also be in the process of growth with students.

In the next part of the assignment, students are asked to evaluate and analyze one of their speeches that was performed over the course of the semester. By having students analyze a speech they can dive deeper into what they enjoyed or did not enjoy about the speech they chose for this assignment. By looking at the things that worked or did not work in the speech, students can start to develop their own sense of what they want or do not want to include in future public speaking engagements they may have. This is also an opportunity to solidify concepts taught throughout the semester such as: speech structure, delivery cues, persuasive elements etc. By asking students to identify these various elements, instructors can evaluate whether or not the student grasps the concepts that were discussed during class.

In the final section of the paper, students will reflect one last time on the goals that they set for the semester. This final reflection serves as an extended version of the check-in prompt assignments that students have done previously. By taking this time to see how much progress they have made (or not made) towards their goals, students can evaluate how they wish to move forward with them. If their mindset has been successfully shifted towards being more growth mindset oriented, the hope is that they will either continue to strive towards accomplishing the goal that they set or set a new goal entirely. This final reflection also allows them to evaluate the efforts they made to accomplish their goals. As the goal in growth mindset work is to praise

effort, it is important for students to understand that their efforts drive their success as well. By asking them to identify ways that they could have been more successful, students who fell short of where they wanted to be with their goals can start to process how they can be more successful in the future.

### **Section V: Growth Mindset Feedback throughout the Semester**

#### **Section V: Learning outcomes**

- Students will receive feedback with the understanding that it is meant to help them improve.
- Students, who receive praise for their efforts, and will continue to try their best even if things do not go as planned.
- Students will learn to seek out helpful resources if they are struggling on their own.

#### **Section V: Process**

As students complete assignments, it may be helpful to include a feedback message to get them in the proper mindset to receive feedback. A sample of one such statement is below:

The goal of this class is to help you learn and grow as a communicator and public speaker. Everyone comes in with different amounts of experience but through trial and effort we can continue to improve upon these skills. The feedback below is given with the intent to help you take the next step in your learning journey.

While such a statement is helpful to orient students in how to receive the feedback that they are getting on their assignments, it is still important that feedback is not given in fixed mindset language. Instructors must be careful to give feedback that praises efforts made, creative solutions, and use of available resources. An effort must be made to avoid statements that praise only the final outcome of the assignment and not the process that went into the student's success.

## **Section V: Discussion**

An important step in maintaining the environment of a growth mindset classroom is offering feedback to students in a way that encourages growth and rewards students for their efforts. When receiving feedback from their instructors, students may view critiques as something that they did wrong. However, the goal of a growth mindset classroom is to offer feedback in a way that encourages students to continue to grow and improve on their skills. One way to help students receive feedback in this way is to include a statement with all feedback that encourages students to incorporate that feedback into their next attempt or assignment. By including a statement to preface feedback given to students, they can better understand the purpose of the feedback. Encouraging students to be open-minded when they see responses to their assignments can help them become more growth oriented.

When giving feedback to students it is also important to praise students for their efforts and not just for success. Students have been getting messaging about their success their whole lives. While we cannot control what they hear about their success outside of the classroom, we can control how we communicate with them inside our classroom space. To continue to build an environment in which students are encouraged to grow, we must communicate and reward their efforts to get better. Praising efforts made to include class concepts, going above and beyond in their research, or creating a thorough outline for their speech can go a long way towards students continuing those behaviors for future assignments. By praising the effort that students put in, we can encourage more effort and more growth in the future.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

#### Next Steps

The next steps for the intervention laid out would be for it to be included in an introductory speech class. The intervention has been designed to be easily inserted into a pre-existing course. The growth mindset introduction lesson plan could be included during a class period designed to discuss classroom expectations, the reflection prompts and final assignment can either replace or be added onto already existing assignments, and the feedback statements can be copy/pasted onto student feedback forms. As previously discussed, this plan can and should continue to be improved upon based on student feedback. In the future it would be interesting to see if an entire course could be created using growth mindset interventions, but for now this 3-step growth mindset intervention is a starting point for creating a growth mindset pedagogy for introductory speech courses.

Another direction future research could delve into would be to compare/contrast different learning theories and potentially find ways to integrate them together. One question that came up in this research regards how students will know that they are growing. For the intervention laid out above, goal reflections serve as a way for students to check in on their own progress. However, Game Theory may provide more visible “checkpoints” for students to aim for in their own growth journeys.

This intervention was designed under the assumption of in-person classes. However, with recent events and more classes moving to online formats, more research needs to be done in regard to how these interventions would work virtually, specifically in creating an environment for students. With in-person classes, the instructor has much more control over the physical



space of the classroom and can do their best to ensure a safe learning environment. In a virtual setting, students may not be in spaces that they feel comfortable or may receive the type of feedback that growth mindset work tries to avoid from their surroundings. Another potential difficulty is that growth mindset work requires buy in from students. Developing the type of relationship with students that you need for this work to be successful may be more difficult in a virtual setting rather than in person. The type of connection felt by students and teachers can differ drastically depending on the setting. Research into growth mindset in a virtual class would be interesting to see what adaptations could be made in attempt to recreate the environment necessary for this type of intervention to be successful.

A final avenue of research that could be explored is how growth mindset would affect different populations. Although not the focus of this research, there was suggestions that growth mindset work could be more effective on students coming from less privileged backgrounds. Those students may have heard more negative talk about their abilities or their places in life than their more privileged peers. This negative talk about student abilities may affect their performance in difficult classes. More research and interventions directly focused on diverse populations could be beneficial to make students coming from less privilege feel more comfortable and have greater success in the classroom.

### **Limitations**

This research being presented is an early look at what growth mindset teaching could look like. As such, there are a few key limitations. First, the intervention being presented here today is purely speculation based on the themes found in literature review. Because the intervention plan has not been conducted in a classroom setting yet, there are no data to show how successful this intervention would be. The obvious next step for this research would be for it

to be integrated into an introductory course and to use the growth mindset quizzes that students take as a pre/post test to see whether or not students' mindsets shifted over the course of the class. Once those data are collected, this research can be expanded upon and adapted as necessary.

A second key limitation for this research is that it relies heavily on students to buy in to the interventions. Encouraging students to seek out intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic motivation is a difficult task. Students will enter the classroom with a wide variety of personalities and mindsets. As an instructor doing this type of work, you can create the structure for growth mindset to flourish but at the end of the day it is up to the students to do the work and decide whether or not they feel as though they have grown.

### **Conclusion**

The growth mindset intervention laid out here is a first step in creating a pedagogy that encourages students not only to learn the concepts from the subject material but also to enjoy the process of learning and growing. By incorporating a method of teaching that fosters an environment of effort and creative solutions to challenges, instructors can attempt to change students' preconceived mindsets about what is possible for them. To do growth mindset work, instructors must fully buy in and do their best to create an environment that fosters the mindset they hope to see from students. By introducing the concepts of growth mindset from the beginning of class, instructors can take an important first step towards this environment.

The goal setting assignment and check-ins are designed to give students agency over what areas they would like to grow in and how they choose to strive toward that growth. By including students in this process, they will have more ownership over whether or not they achieve the goals they have set for themselves. Instructors can help with this process but at the

end of the day students must put effort into their own growth. Regularly having students check in on their progress towards those goals can help students take small steps towards the goals that they have set for themselves.

The final paper assignment serves a dual purpose. First, it allows students to see the final product of the efforts they have made over the course of the semester. Giving them a chance to see where they started compared to where they are now can start to show them how much growth they are capable of. In doing so, the hope is that they will choose to continue on this path towards growth outside of the classroom as well.

The second purpose of the final assignment is to serve as a post-test for students' mindsets over the course of the semester. This information can be valuable for instructors to see whether the growth mindset interventions worked as intended. Using this information, instructors can make changes to the intervention as needed. By having students comment on their experiences and what worked well, this feedback can guide ways to improve on the interventions or the course as a whole. Just as much as students are asked to grow throughout the course of the semester, instructors utilizing growth mindset theory must also continue to grow in their use of such a pedagogy.

Finally, by being mindful of feedback in the classroom, instructors can encourage students to respond positively to feedback they receive. Including a statement prior to the feedback can be helpful to students who may view feedback as things they did wrong rather than opportunities for growth. Having a reminder prior to feedback can help to put students in a different mindset when reading that feedback. In the feedback it is important for instructors to ensure they are avoiding communicating in fixed mindset ways, such as praising only the end product rather than the efforts that went into the assignment. By giving feedback based on

students' conscious efforts to include class concepts, resources, and practice, instructors can communicate in ways that reinforce the growth mindset.

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