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**Coaching of a teacher in**

**growth mindset**

The effect on teacher

and classroom culture

**Impact on pupils:**

* increased classroom awareness of growth mindset
* increase in classroom engagement by selected pupils (using Leuven scale)
* observation of changes in children’s attitudes to challenge and failure as a result of teacher focus on growth mindset

**Impact on teacher:**

* coaching caused development of a growth mindset in the teacher, leading to self-reported increases in self-esteem and attitudes to challenge and failure;
* coaching in growth mindset led to an improvement in teacher interaction with parents and colleagues;
* coaching led to a strong teacher focus on growth mindset in pedagogy.

**Observations**

**Findings**

**Introduction**

The coaching took place during the summer term, and it was noted that there was not enough time to fully embed the principles of growth mindset; however, overall findings were positive. Interviews with the teacher and the school head teacher revealed that coaching had resulted in improvements in many aspects of the teacher’s professional life. The teacher described improvements in her own mindset, and indicated that positive changes in attitude had taken place in her pupils. The teacher reflected that the school had been aware of growth mindset prior to the coaching, but that it was originally seen as a bolt-on. Coaching had highlighted its value as a pedagogical tool.

The teacher works in a primary school in Clackmannanshire, Scotland and her class is a P5-7 composite class.

## Growth mindset coaching was provided to one teacher by a growth mindset coach over a period of five weeks. ‘Improvement methodology’ was used to study the coaching, with a view to understanding and learning from the process. Two theories of change were proposed: that coaching of a teacher would positively impact the teacher’s mindset and that the coaching would positively impact the mindset culture of the teacher’s class.

* full buy-in of teachers is necessary to embed principles of growth mindset. Training and ongoing support is required;
* growth mindset should be introduced early in the school session, and a large amount of time should be dedicated to embedding it within the school curriculum.



**Classroom activities focused on lessons about the learning pit.**

Coaching take place over a period of five weeks for one hour per week. Each coaching session was split into two areas: coaching of the teacher in how to apply a growth mindset to aspects of her own teaching and coaching of the teacher in how to create a growth mindset classroom culture. Classroom activities focused on lessons on the ‘learning pit’3, where pupils reflected on times that they had wanted to give up when faced when a difficult challenge. They discussed coping strategies; ways to get out of the learning pit.

**Methodology**

Research into development of growth mindset in the classroom became accessible to millions with the publication of Dweck’s 2012 book: Mindset: how you can fulfil your potential.1 Educators in America and in the UK have embraced the theories and strategies described in its pages. These focus on seeing failure as a learning opportunity, praising effort rather than achievements, the power of purposeful practice and development of strategies to overcome challenge.

A recent audit by Winning Scotland Foundation (the Foundation) revealed that while appetite for and interest in growth mindset is high in Scotland’s schools, there is a need for additional guidance and support to help teachers to understand, develop and embed growth mindset culture in schools.

We used improvement methodology to trial the use of growth mindset coaching in one primary school. Improvement methodology is a form of action research where practitioners lead improvements using Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles.2 After the initial planning stages, the teachers involved in this study implemented changes that they thought would lead to improvement. Measures were taken and monitored on a continuous basis. The action research reported here represents the first PDSA cycle; moving forward, the measurements will be used to inform future coaching trials.

**Background**

**We used improvement methodology to trial the use of growth mindset coaching.**

The teacher reinforced growth mindset ideas and language at every opportunity. Measurements were taken throughout the five week period: the teacher reported on her own use of growth mindset techniques in the classroom and measured the engagement of six pupils on a regular basis throughout the coaching period using the Leuven engagement scale (pupil engagement over a two-minute time period assessed on a scale of 1:5); the coach completed a process questionnaire after each coaching session; the coach measured teacher self-perception of feelings about different aspects of her job before and at the end of the coaching period and qualitative interviews with the teacher and the school head teacher took place after the end of the coaching period.



After her initial resistance to growth mindset, the head teacher quickly saw potential in growth mindset as a teaching pedagogy. She reflected that initially growth mindset is something that must be taught; but, had hopes that in time it would become part of the school ethos and culture. She saw potential in growth mindset coaching as a way to embed a growth mindset ethos throughout.

*“I felt we have to teach growth mindset, so these are the lessons that I’m going to do, and then I felt that I’d done them… I’ve got a display on my wall… but I’ll be honest and say I wasn’t really referring to it that much. It was on the wall and it was sort of forgotten about.” Class teacher*

*“At first, when I heard of growth mindset I was a bit kind of skeptical and though ‘oh, it’s just something else I’ve got to do.” Head teacher*

Interviews with the class teacher and the school head teacher revealed that teacher coaching in growth mindset was very successful. Although the school had previous exposure to growth mindset following a drive at local authority level, and there were posters around the school, both interviewees reflected that they had not initially been fully engaged in its implementation.

**Findings**

**The head teacher quickly saw potential in growth mindset as a teaching pedagogy.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Aspect of job | Pre coaching | Post coaching |
| Writing reports | 6 | 10 |
| Interacting with parents | 5 | 8 |
| Parents’ night | 5 | 9 |
| Confidence | 6 | 8 |
| Teaching | 8 | 8 |
| Planning | 7 | 8 |
| Collegiate time | 7 | 9 |
| Career long professional learning | 8 | 10 |



**She felt that her confidence with colleagues also increased.**

Interviews with the class teacher and the school head teacher revealed that teacher coaching in growth mindset was very successful. Although the school had previous exposure to growth mindset following a drive at local authority level, and there were posters around the school, both interviewees reflected that they had not initially been fully engaged in its implementation.

*“It’s definitely improved her confidence and it feels like it’s improve her feelings of leadership and being part of a team.”*

The head teacher noticed a marked improvement in the teacher’s confidence. She described how the teacher had started volunteering during parental engagement sessions and for helping with challenging timetabling tasks - again these are things that she wouldn’t have done before.

*“I’d quite like the challenge actually – I’d like to push myself, and that’s because we’ve been learning about growth mindset and pushing yourself out of your comfort zone.”*

She felt that her confidence with colleagues had also increased, and was open to leading a collegiate session on growth mindset; something that she would not have considered prior to the coaching.

*“… where it was a lower score, it was related to parents. So as you can see my results have really improved, and I think it’s been just talking things out with the coach and talking about why I don’t feel confident and (the coach) giving me strategies.”*

The class teacher was asked to expand on the values given during interview.

**Impact on teacher**

At the start of the coaching, the class teacher assessed her feelings about various aspects of her job using a scale of 1-10, where 1 means not happy and 10 means very happy. This exercise was repeated at the end of the coaching. Table 1 shows that values increased substantially in some cases.

**Table 1**



*“There is one boy who went from twos and threes to fours and even a five. He’s had a few incidences of crying and being in tears ‘I can’t do maths, I’m not good at maths’. But now I can say ‘well that’s ok because when you go into the learning pit you do feel anxious, you do feel upset.’ Well, he’s not cried since we’ve learned about the learning pit. He will say ‘Oh yeah’; you know he’ll accept that ok I am allowed to feel anxious and upset and I need to do something to get myself out of it.”*

As a result of the growth mindset focus, attitudes began to change. The teacher overheard children in the class talking about growth mindset.

Children are invited to write a response on their annual report cards, and two children wrote that they were looking forward to the challenge of next year and being pushed further.

The teacher-assessed Leuven engagement score was taken for six individuals seven times over the five week period. Measurements were taken during mental arithmetic lessons on a regular basis. The initial plan was to use a randomly selected group of pupils; however, the teacher reported difficulties in monitoring children sitting in different areas of the classroom, so the measurements were taken on a group of pupils who were sitting together. Average engagement of these pupils during the arithmetic activity rose from 3.5 to 4.2 during this time.

The teacher highlighted the increasing Leuven score of one of the six children in particular, and used it to illustrate the impact on that child.

**The teacher overheard children in the class talking about growth mindset.**

**Impact on class**

The teacher carried out a series of lessons on ‘the learning pit’. She also consciously used growth mindset language and principles in her teaching throughout. Using a scale of 1 - 5, where 5 represents very much and 1 represents not at all, she reported that her use of growth mindset techniques in the classroom rose from 3 to 5 during the measurement period as her confidence rose.

During interview, the head teacher reflected that many of the pupils in the class can display a fixed mindset.

*“If you ask them to go to a football tournament or a chess tournament, they won’t go because they know they won’t win.”*

We acknowledge the energy and efforts of the teachers at the primary school in Clackmannanshire who were involved in this work. We are grateful to Sonia Grant of mindsetuk for providing the coaching described in this case study. Sonia Grant is project lead for growth mindset in Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

**Acknowledgements**

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**References**

**Both the teacher and headteacher maintained that believing in growth mindset is critical to successful implementation.**

Even more fundamental than timing, both the teacher and the head teacher maintained that ‘believing in’ growth mindset is critical to successful implementation. This observation highlights the dangers of tokenistic growth mindset implementation, with superficial training and posters handed out to teachers for their walls. It is clear that thorough training and ongoing support is necessary.

*“I feel it has been a little too late almost. So if this was August I feel like I would be able to spend more time focusing directly on this and I would like to give it more time and then reinforce it throughout the year and work on it and really build on it.”*

Improvement methodology is a form of action research, where teachers in schools are supported to implement change using their own ideas and on their own terms. Several areas emerged during the coaching project that could be tweaked for subsequent PDSA cycles.

In the planning phase for the project, it was decided that the Leuven scale measurements would be taken on a daily basis with a group of randomly selected pupils. The teacher later decided to collect data less frequently and with a group of pupils who sat at the same table. This highlights the need for teacher autonomy over data collection; they know their own capacity and available time.

The teacher reflected that the timing of the coaching, which took place in the period between Easter and summer 2016, was far from ideal.

**Observations**