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## Growing Mindset and Goals: A Blog Designed to Lead Intrinsic Motivation in Students

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Growing Mindset and Goals: A Blog Designed to Lead Intrinsic Motivation in Students

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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### **Abstract**

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Research conducted by Dr. Carol Dweck clearly demonstrates the importance of building a foundation of growth mindset in order to build resiliency in students. Not only does this resiliency help students overcome challenges but also supports students in building lifelong skills, such as: forming and carrying out goals, receiving and utilizing feedback, and increasing intrinsic motivation in a variety of settings. The educational blog designed for this project focuses on sharing research relating to mindset theory, gifted students, goal setting, feedback, intrinsic motivation in adolescents, and curriculum materials. It also provides educators with free resources to begin implementing a combination of these practices within their own classrooms. The blog will mainly be used by upper elementary school teachers but is flexible and accessible to professionals who work within a range of ages and educational settings. The overall goal of the blog is to provide educators with easy to understand information to begin fostering growth mindset, goal setting, and feedback with upper elementary school students, while also supplying educators with materials to support these same practices.

*Keywords:* Mindset theory, goal setting, feedback, intrinsic motivation, blog

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Capstone Overview

Education and students are not the same as they once were and have evolved greatly from when I was a child. When I compare my own experience as a young student in education, I see a number of differences to what students experience now. While the educational system often evolves for the better, there are some challenges both students and teachers face on a day-to-day basis. This capstone will explore a major question that comes to mind when I think of the educational system as it relates to intrinsic motivation in upper elementary school students: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* I wish to examine how growth mindset can be developed as a foundation prior to implementing goal setting and feedback as a practice to increase academic success and motivation in upper elementary school students. I find this topic extremely important as I grow in my own experiences as a teacher with upper elementary school students. Chapter 1 will approach this topic by presenting a rationale for the focused research project and will also provide a context for the capstone question and topic. By exploring growth mindset, goal setting and feedback, I desire to gain a better understanding of how to increase intrinsic motivation as it relates to academic success and to develop a set of helpful materials in assisting other educators in doing the same.

There have been many beneficial changes in the field of education, yet I struggle to pinpoint what feels wrong in our current educational system. I attended public school

from elementary school all the way through college and grew up in an era when technology in school was truly just emerging. We did not have one-to-one devices or cellphones with us at all times and the biggest distraction was the latest book I was working my way through. I often think back to my own experiences in education and remember being excited by what I was doing, as long as it was not anything math related. I often reflect on projects, field trips, papers, and other meaningful educational experiences I had during my time in school. I spent a lot of time participating in clubs and extracurricular activities which added to my educational experience. I loved participating in anything hands on. I have certainly enjoyed school and I was motivated to do well in most of what I was doing during that time.

As we move forward in the 21st century, it is important to understand how sustained attention, problem-solving, and intrinsic motivation have been affected by the many distractions students face in their everyday lives. One of the biggest concerns I have as an educator is maintaining student engagement and increasing student motivation. If a student is not engaged, then they are likely not very motivated by the task. This tells me the student is not ready to learn. If they are not ready to learn, I also believe I am not doing my due diligence as a teacher. It is vital to have a solid understanding of how I can increase the behaviors I wish to see in my students. In this day and age, it feels like there are many things to compete with within the classroom, such as friendships, technology, trauma, mental health, and human biology. As I ponder these daily distractions, I know there must be steps I can take to contend with such quandaries.

In my experience of working with children, I have spent extensive time studying behavioral psychology. I have worked to gain an understanding of how to increase or decrease behavior by analyzing antecedents, behaviors, and the following consequences. I believe this same method can be applied to the general education classroom and can be used to increase motivation. In this case, I want to gain a bigger and better understanding of how to increase intrinsic motivation as it pertains to upper elementary school students; and whether goal setting, as an antecedent, can influence the following behavior. This would be an important skill to keep within my toolkit as I move forward in my teaching career. As I have become more knowledgeable in education, I have found it is important to first establish a foundation of mindset theory with students prior to working on goal setting and feedback as a practice. Therefore, I wish to explore the research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* I would like to uncover what methods have been explored and the results that have been found. By doing this, I hope to refine how mindset theory can be used with students in combination with goal setting and feedback, and follow by effectively collecting, utilizing, and developing materials to be used by professionals within the field of education.

### ***Lifelong Skills***

Imagine a fifth or sixth grade student sitting in the middle of science class. It is another cloudy, January day and the teacher is passing back graded assignments. The assignments are passed back face-down and the students quickly glance over the comments before shoving them into the collection of old papers within their folders.



Internally, the students are thinking the same thoughts they always do, “I will do better next time,” or, “I am throwing this away before my parents see it.” It is possible these students have no reflecting thoughts at all. What is the point of the teacher providing feedback if the students do not use the feedback to their advantage? Do students lack the ability to comprehend this feedback and allow it to guide their learning, or do the students lack the internal motivation to improve their abilities? These are all questions I am faced with as a teacher to upper elementary school students.

As adults, many individuals take constructive feedback and use it to better themselves in the future. If there is no feedback being given, they will reflect on their own performance and work to create goals in order to improve. This can happen in academics, health, athletics, fitness, careers, or even in the personal life of an individual. For example, I have many goals set for myself at this very moment. Some are driven by passion and others are necessary goals I need to complete in order to live a successful life. I am passionate about the type of fitness I do and because of this, I am constantly wanting to improve my abilities. I pursue circus arts in my spare time and I currently have a goal to build my upper body strength so I have more stamina when I am performing on an apparatus. In addition to this, I have a specific fitness plan in place I have created so I can work towards building my upper body strength. This is a goal driven by my passions and internal motivations. On the other hand, I am currently remodeling my home and because of this, the house is disorganized and messy. This is not something I am passionate about but it is causing me some stress. I have a goal to create a better organizational system in certain areas of the house and to rearrange one of

the rooms so I can reduce the mess and, hopefully, reduce my stress. This is still a goal I have for myself and is also something I must get done in order to live a more productive life.

### ***My Experience***

I have become passionate about this topic and have been putting a lot of thought into it as I near the end of my fifth year of teaching. I often see my students respond to feedback in the same way I described above. Throughout my experience of working with students from preschool all the way through eighth grade, I have observed internal motivation beginning to decrease as students reach upper elementary school. In my experience, young students are excited by education, they consistently seek out information, and they are motivated to do well. This is quite the contrast compared to the upper elementary school students I spend the majority of my time with. My students take little time to reflect on feedback and rarely use it to improve their abilities in the future. While they may still maintain some internal motivation, it does not appear to last by the time they reach middle school.

I do believe this is partially due to the transition into adolescence, but also have to wonder if it is a lack of skills taught. Students learn in a concrete way throughout elementary school and often have an adult, whether it is the teacher or a parent, guiding them through their learning. As students move into adolescence, their learning becomes more abstract and they are given more freedom and independence in their learning environments. We often hear students should be leaders in their own learning and, while I agree with this, there is a possibility that not all students know how to lead their own

learning. Without support and a strong foundation, students are left alone to make sense of this major shift in their education. I fear this shift causes a disconnect with intrinsic motivation and learning. We begin to see a shift in mindset and less engagement in the classroom. Students do not understand or reject the feedback provided which causes a never-ending negative cycle within our education system. I want to break this cycle and create a more positive learning experience for the upper elementary school students I will serve in the future.

I would love to find answers to my questions and to explore the connection between mindset theory, goal setting, and feedback. I want to have a better understanding of how these strategies can be used to help improve internal motivation and student achievement. Overall, this area of research may help students to develop lifelong skills. Students can gain an understanding of what it means to have a growth mindset and use this ability to create goals. Additionally, they can learn how goals can help their academic achievement and how to successfully implement goal setting to achieve those goals. Feedback is a powerful tool and students can use feedback to help refine and expand their goals as they build upon their abilities. As a result, research in this area will help to improve student motivation and academic achievements.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* It also explored the rationale for the focus project and the context for the capstone question and topic. While many classrooms have access to a variety of resources and materials,

teachers are facing the challenge of captivating student engagement and motivation. Students face distractions, such as friendships, technology, trauma, and more. In addition to this, sustained attention, problem solving, and intrinsic motivation play a role in the engagement of an adolescent student. I am interested in pursuing this topic as I see goal setting and the use of feedback as a lifelong skill to be used by individuals in all areas of their life, including academics, health, athletics, fitness, careers, or in their personal life. I am interested in knowing how mindset theory can be a foundation to positively support goal setting and feedback. By investigating how mindset theory, goal setting, and feedback practices can be used to increase academic success and intrinsic motivation in upper elementary school students, I will collect and develop a set of materials to be used to assist educators in increasing academic success and motivation in their own daily practices. In Chapter 2, I will further investigate the existing research as it relates to mindset theory, gifted students, goal setting, feedback, intrinsic motivation in adolescents, and curriculum materials in an upper elementary school setting. I will also demonstrate important connections between each of the relevant topic areas throughout this chapter as these connections will provide a deeper context for the overall capstone project. In Chapter 3, I will provide an overview of the educational blog to be created as the capstone project. In Chapter 4, I will reflect on my project as a whole and review what I have learned as a researcher, writer, and learner.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Chapter Overview

The capstone at hand dives into the question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* The goal of this research is to further explore how mindset theory is necessary to develop in upper elementary students in order to support and strengthen academic goal setting and feedback utilized in the classroom. In this chapter, I will summarize and discuss essential findings from my research of the related literature. The focus literature includes the topics of mindset theory, gifted students, goal setting, feedback, intrinsic motivation in adolescents, and curriculum materials within the topic area.

As the education field advances, many practices are used without question in the classroom. Such practices might include practices developing and supporting intrinsic motivation in students. Practices commonly supporting intrinsic motivation often include mindset theory and goal setting. These can be used with a variety of age levels but are important to use with adolescents due to the shift in the type of learning students are exposed to during this time of their life. Although both practices in mindset theory and goal setting are regularly found in the education field, there may be little understanding to why these practices are important and how they can be best utilized to improve intrinsic motivation. According to Gollwitzer (2012) mindset theory began as a focused research area in the 1990s and has developed as a field of study since that time. This chapter will outline the highlights of such research, along with finding relations, and making

connections between mindset theory and goal setting literature. In addition to these topics, this chapter will also explore the significance of feedback in education, how mindset theory affects the receipt and utilization of feedback, and strategies of practicing effective feedback with students. Each of the aforementioned practices can be utilized to increase intrinsic motivation with students. The research in this chapter will begin by specifically exploring what the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as what factors can affect intrinsic motivation. Next, the chapter will state connections between the previous information and how mindset theory, goal setting, and feedback can benefit intrinsic motivation in adolescent students in an academic setting. Finally, the chapter will explore and summarize existing mindset theory practices and curriculum, as well as goal setting in educational settings to explore what strategies have been most effective in academic settings. This research will provide a foundation for best practices when developing resources to include within the blog to be utilized by educators.

To summarize, the capstone will explore the question - *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in upper elementary school setting?* Chapter 2 of the capstone will provide an overview of essential findings in the current research of mindset theory, gifted students, goal setting, feedback, and curriculum materials in an upper elementary school setting to support these best practices. These findings come from core researchers, educators, and authors, such as Carol Dweck, Alex Forsythe, Sophie Johnson, Kaitlyn McGlynn, and Janey Kelly.

### ***Mindset Theory***

Mindset theory is relevant and imperative for study when understanding how students will utilize feedback to support them in meeting their academic goals, as well as to strengthen their intrinsic motivation in education. When students harshly criticize their abilities, they limit the paths of opportunity to improve their capabilities from there (Mahmud, 2017). If their paths are limited, this greatly affects a student's ability to accept feedback and to create future goals. This also can compromise their ability to meet the original intentions they chose in their goal setting process. A growth mindset can have a large impact on the abilities of a student. For example, Dweck (2017) found when students engage in learning novel and difficult tasks out of their comfort zone, neurons in their brain can develop fresh and stronger connections, and over time, those students can become smarter. This result would not be the same if a student were holding a fixed mindset. This section will explore the essential role growth mindset practices play in education and intrinsic motivation, and how growth mindset strategies can positively affect student progress in executing goals.

A growth mindset has been all the rage within the education field. Where does a growth mindset come from? According to Gollwitzer (2012) mindset theory began as a focused research area in the 1990s and has developed as a field of study since that time. Carol Dweck is an American psychologist and professor at Stanford University whose work focuses on developmental psychology, social psychology, and personality psychology as it relates to perspectives of oneself and their abilities, and how their specific perspective affects the behavior a person portrays. As a result of this research Dweck (2012) presents a theory of two ways of viewing intelligence. One viewpoint of

intelligence, called a fixed mindset, views intelligence as predetermined and it cannot be changed. The second viewpoint of intelligence, called a growth mindset, views intelligence as flexible and alterable through a series of hard work (Bennet, 2013). These viewpoints can greatly affect a student's ability to succeed in a variety of areas, including academics. Students who have a fixed mindset may run into challenges and due to their mindset, they may sooner give up than students who have a growth mindset. Their resiliency is affected and may begin associating their failures with their own identity (Bennett, 2013). Students who possess a growth mindset have a greater resiliency when encountering challenges and use the experience to improve their efforts in the future. This is supported by research consistently showing how people will continue a plan of action for a longer period of time when they have optimistic feelings towards their ability to reach their set goal. This research supports developing and strengthening a growth mindset. As a result, goal setting is more likely to be successful for students and they will engage in it for a longer period of time in an academic environment (Brandstätter & Frank, 2002).

What does this mean for intrinsic motivation in students? By evaluating what mindset theory is and the difference between a fixed and growth mindset, educators are better able to understand how psychological processes influence the way a student ticks. A student may appear to be disengaged in a lesson, they may refuse to complete work assigned in the classroom, and a teacher may witness the student “shutting down” when a task is presented to them. This type of behavior may be seen as unnecessary or disrespectful to an educator interacting with the student. Although this may be the



opinion based on the appearance of the behavior, this is likely not an accurate judgement to be placed on the student and the behavior. This student may have encountered many occurrences of failure in previous environments which may be generalizing to the education environment where academic pressures are placed on performance. When the learner then finds themselves in a challenging situation for their abilities, the student is forced to respond and knows failure is possible. Even though this is a part of life and individuals face failure every day, the student may not have the ability to accept challenges, mistakes, and failures which impacts their ability to move forward in their education. Instead, educators must consider how those individuals need to develop the ability to accept challenges, mistakes, and failures so they are able to use these learning experiences to improve their skills in the future.

Imagine a student who has a growth mindset encountering a situation where they have failed their latest math test. Hopefully, the students would look at the situation and say to themselves, “How can I learn from this for the future?” or, “I tried my best and I can continue growing for next time.” In this scenario, the experience may have disappointed the student but has not disengaged the student. Instead, the student has received feedback for next time and the student can use it to create a goal for the future. The experience has not swayed their intrinsic motivation and may have possibly even increased their motivation for the future. Let us take a step back and picture a student with a fixed mindset encountering the same scenario. The student would likely look at the situation and say, “I hate math. I’m never studying for a math test again,” or, “I’m so stupid. Why did I even bother trying?” This experience has been extremely disheartening for the

student and has already predetermined how the student will act in the future. Instead of productively taking the feedback from the test, the student chooses instead to disengage from the experience and exits the learning process all together (Lou & Noels, 2017). This situation has crumpled their intrinsic motivation and thrown it away, possibly for good. This description illustrates the struggle students are facing internally and examining what behaviors they might exhibit externally. Teachers must consider what signals the students may be sending and what those signals might mean for their emotional state prior to continuing to push them to learn and set goals. This is true of all students.

### ***Gifted Students***

A naive individual may state this is true of typical students but may inquire about the abilities of gifted students. One might think gifted students possess high intelligence so there is no need to focus on a growth mindset with this specific population of students. While this might seem like a logical explanation, it is important to know perfectionism is a common trait in gifted students. Gifted students are often given the message their self-worth is determined by their abilities (Mofield & Peters, 2018). Praise is delivered based on student abilities and students often connect this praise to their self-worth. When students perform exceptionally at a task, they are delivered particular praise which reinforces the positive perceptions they hold of themselves. When a student performs lower than they or others expected, they may be delivered constructive feedback or they may not be given the same praise they were aiming for. While most individuals would associate failure as a non-passing grade, this might mean a 95% for someone who aims for perfection. Although this event appears to only be a short-coming to the outside

parties, this still counts as a failure in the eyes of the student. An experience such as this can trigger a variety of emotions, such as shame, guilt, and inadequacy (Mofield & Peters, 2018). This results in gifted students attempting to maintain a perfect persona and when perfection is not achieved, the tie to their self-worth is severed. When gifted students do not reach their intended goals, they may have an increase in negative thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. These mirror the aforementioned thoughts used when discussing the fixed mindset, such as, “I’m so stupid. Why did I even bother trying?” Mofield and Peters (2018) refer to this type of thinking as cognitive distortions (p. 178). This may cause a perseveration on errors and past events rather than using this as a growing point and to set futuristic goals. As we can see, even students such as high achievers and gifted students can possess qualities falling under having a fixed mindset and it can ultimately affect their ability to cope with challenges and look for growth in their future goals. This demonstrates educators must work to implement a growth mindset practice with students of all abilities, rather than focusing on a select group.

Mindset theory plays a large role in understanding how students will utilize feedback to support their academic goals, as well as to strengthen their intrinsic motivation in education. Research such as Mofield and Peters’ (2018) demonstrates how students across a spectrum of abilities can negatively be affected by a fixed mindset and positively affected by a growth mindset. Academic abilities and self-identity in students are affected based on the resiliency students possess and their potential to use feedback to redefine their goals for the future. Without the practices of a growth mindset, the intrinsic motivation of students will suffer. Like a domino effect, this will affect the academic

growth seen in students - including students of all intelligence levels. Each of the topics discussed in this section is important to consider when studying how mindset theory can positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting. If educators want to utilize goal setting in their classroom, they must first consider how vital it is to implement practices supporting a growth mindset. If students have preconceived notions of their intelligence as an effortless, natural feature, then they will likely find academics challenging and throw in the towel when the first mistakes arise (Lou & Noels, 2017). Instead, teachers must first foster the idea that mistakes are not failures and instead are learning opportunities. As time goes on, these learning opportunities help to guide future goals set by the students.

### ***Goal Setting***

Goal setting is a vital practice for success in all areas of life. By setting goals, individuals are able to recognize areas in which they need improvement and follow up with a plan to progress their abilities within the specific area. For the purpose of this project, a goal will be defined as an action an individual deliberately intends to do. By creating a goal, individuals are setting a standard they would like to meet in the future. Goal setting can be focused on in areas such as academics, careers, athletics, fitness, personal life, and more. Not only is goal setting important for a young person in education but it can also be carried on as a lifelong skill. There is a strong connection between goals and performance, especially when goals are specific and challenging (Lunenburg, 2011). With strongly defined goals individuals can effectively improve their performance in a target area. It is important for individuals to willingly engage in

challenging goals, as well as meaningful goals (Doerr, 2018). Educators must consider the significance of teaching and employing goal setting with students while also building upon a foundation of mindset theory practices. This section will review the importance of utilizing goal setting in an academic environment in coordination with mindset theory practices and how goal setting relates to motivation in students.

As mentioned in the previous section, goal setting is a practice becoming more commonly used in educational environments. Although this is done with good intentions, educators must consider a variety of factors affecting a student's ability to create, complete, and revise goals. First, it is important to understand the connection between mindset theory and goal setting. The previous section explored how mindset theory consists of two different mindsets: fixed mindset and growth mindset. A fixed mindset is the idea that abilities are predetermined and no amount of work can change one's abilities (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). A growth mindset considers how abilities can grow through hard work and determination. While this can relate to a variety of abilities, this often relates to intelligence levels in students when discussed in an academic setting.

When students are asked to create an academic goal, they may look at this through multiple different lenses, depending on the current mindset they hold. According to Shim et al. (2008) there are multiple types of achievement goals, which includes mastery goals and performance goals (p. 655). Mastery goals are defined as developing academic competence. Performance goals are differentiated between approach-oriented and avoidant-oriented, with a focus on demonstrating academic competence as it compares to others. (Shim et al., 2008). Someone who sets mastery goals reflects

differently and might ask a question like, “Did my study habits support me in taking this test?” Someone who sets a performance-approach goal might ask a question like, “Does my score make me look smarter than others?” Someone who sets performance-avoidance goals might ask questions like, “What did everyone else get? Did I get the worst score in the class?” These types of achievement goal orientations align with the types of mindsets within mindset theory. A mastery goal connects to a growth mindset as this goal is looking at how past behavior affected present outcomes and is reviewing behavior as well as the result of a task. Mastery goals allow students to reflect on their performance and feedback in order to orient future goals. Finally, these goals are self-oriented and seek for future growth in one’s abilities by redefining the originally set goals. This positively supports the idea of having a coordination of practices to implement mindset theory and goal setting together. The same idea applies to the performance goals (both performance approach and performance-avoidance goals). When a student aims for either of these goals, they are not reflecting and giving focus to their own abilities and practices but rather their abilities compared to others. There is a negative connotation associated with both of these goals and they are fixed to how others are performing. This type of thinking limits students’ overall abilities and reinforces the perceptions that an individual with a fixed mindset has. In fact, these types of goals weaken student achievement throughout early adolescence while mastery goals boost student achievement (Shim et al., 2008). This is extremely important for educators to understand if they plan to implement goal setting with students.

Teachers must implement practices to support a growth mindset within their classroom in order to successfully execute goal setting with their students. A study recently done (Roy & Saha, 2019) discussed the implications of using goal setting as it may not be beneficial to students who do not attain their targets (p. 163). This study reviewed how goal setting works as a motivator for student performance in college students. Although this is older than the targeted population for the current research question, this is an important point to think about when considering how goal setting can be used as a motivator for student performance. As stated earlier, teachers must coordinate goal setting along with mindset theory practices to observe more success in students. By stating goal setting may not be beneficial to students who do not attain their targets, this suggests students are not resilient to encountering challenges, such as not meeting their goal or receiving constructive feedback as a result of their performance. Without the implementation of mindset theory practices, it is true a student may not be able to overcome such challenges but with the correct support, educators have the tools to successfully scaffold these skills in students.

Goal setting may seem like an easy practice to implement with students but there are many components to consider before adopting the practice into a classroom so as to avoid fewer challenges with students. In addition to coordinating a growth mindset practice, teachers will also want to make sure the goals are challenging, yet tangible. By doing so, educators will continue to build the motivation they are seeking in students and can begin fostering the life skill of goal setting skills in students. McGlynn and Kelly (2017) state teachers who want a goal setting to be effective should follow the guidelines

of SMART goals (p.22). SMART goals place a focus on making sure students create appropriate long-term goals. This can be done by making sure the goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. The benefits of goal setting happens in a variety of ways, including seeing improvement in academic performance and an increase in motivation. When students have the opportunity and support to engage in goal setting, students are also able to take ownership in their learning, which increases motivation (McGlynn & Kelly, 2017). If students are personally invested in their goals and abilities, this will likely push the students to work harder to meet those goals. This idea can be referred to as self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can help produce a more positive influence on achievement (Hsieh et al., 2008). Educators have the opportunity to promote self-efficacy through goal setting and to create a more personalized type of learning for students resulting in higher achievement (Demink-Carthew et al., 2017). Practices such as these will help students to begin engaging in tasks because they enjoy the problem solving within it and overall enjoy performing the task. This is exactly the type of motivation educators want to see for their students.

To summarize, it is necessary for educators to consider the harmonious relationship between mindset theory and goal setting. Mastery and performance goals are often identified in students, and these can be connected to fixed and growth mindsets. Students who have a fixed mindset often state performance-approach goals or performance-avoidance goals. Educators must implement practices of growth mindset prior to or in coordination with goal setting in order to break these patterns of behavior and thinking. This is also important to consider in order to avoid discouraging students to



deepen their overall learning process. Their learning process can be increased through goal setting as it is effective in increasing academic performance and motivation.

Established practices such as SMART goal setting is important to consider in order to effectively implement goal setting. Goals must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. Through approaches such as this, educators will see students taking more ownership in their goals, their work, and their performance which will result in an increase in intrinsic motivation.

### ***Feedback***

In addition to having an understanding of how mindset theory can affect goal setting abilities in students, educators must take time to consider the importance of the feedback they are giving to their students and how feedback relates to the overarching objective of goal setting. By understanding how students think about and respond to feedback educators have the ability to create positive learning experiences for students (Forsythe & Johnson, 2017). Educators who implement mindset theory in their classroom as a daily practice may increase students' abilities to create solid and functional goals. From this point, educators have the opportunity to use feedback in a variety of ways to help students to continue to grow in their academic abilities. It is necessary for educators to scaffold the students' potential to receive and accept feedback. By doing this, students will be more likely to apply the feedback and utilize it to refine their original goal. This section will explore the significance of feedback in education, how mindset theory affects feedback, and strategies of practicing effective feedback with students.

Feedback is incredibly significant in education as it is given to students frequently and in a variety of ways. Feedback can be given verbally, in writing, with a facial expression, and more. Educators are constantly giving feedback through their interactions with students. Feedback must be constructive and given with a purpose in order for students to improve in their abilities. The purpose of solid feedback is to help students to become aware of their abilities and to use the feedback to make a behavioral change (Forsythe & Johnson, 2017). Feedback should be constructive in order to help students to recognize what they are doing well and to actively process what areas they may need to improve in. Without the presence of feedback or quality feedback, students will likely be lost in how to progress forward in their abilities. By implementing effective feedback practices, educators are supporting students to intentionally apply and enhance their skills in multiple areas to help them strive towards success.

There must be a foundation in mindset theory in order to effectively provide feedback to students. Students who have a growth mindset will be more likely to accept feedback from their instructors in comparison to students who hold a fixed mindset. Forsythe and Johnson (2017) discuss how critical it is to understand a growth mindset before implementing feedback in the classroom by describing how students' self-beliefs can affect their ability to accept and act on the feedback they receive from instructions. This means students who have a growth mindset are able to not only accept feedback but use the feedback for their benefit. Students who have a fixed mindset are not likely to accept the feedback which then results in a failure to use the feedback to improve their skills in the future. In knowing this, educators can see the connection between a growth

mindset and feedback. A foundation of a growth mindset will provide a solid learning base for students to build upon. If feedback is given, the foundation remains strong and is built upon. Without this foundation, an educator can expect the students abilities to crumble. By having a bigger understanding of growth mindset, educators are able to create a more positive learning experience for their students.

Not only is it important for educators to recognize and counter fixed mindsets in their students, it is also critical for educators to recognize the state of their own mindsets. According to Hanh and Weare (2017), teachers tend to focus on the needs of others before their own and forget to consider themselves and their needs. This can shift the implementation of productive practices with students. Even with the understanding of what mindset theory is, it is possible for teachers to engage in their own fixed mindset which interferes with their ability to provide effective feedback to nurture and sustain growth mindsets in students. For example, an educator might struggle to analyze the function of her students' behaviors when they are occurring in the classroom. The cause for this may be related to the fixed beliefs the teacher has about her students. If a student is over-confident about a test this may result in failure because the student does not engage in behaviors to support growth in their abilities, such as studying because they want to do their best even if they are feeling confident about their performance. A teacher may be trapped in a fixed mindset of thinking, "This student knows what they are doing," and not realize this type of thinking is associated with a fixed mindset. When a teacher has a better understanding of their own mindset, they can engage in practices to support a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset. In the scenario described above, a teacher

could provide feedback to the student to address the importance of studying even when they are feeling positive about how they might do. This continues to distribute feedback as students need it but also recognizes the importance of the mindset in both the teacher and the student.

In addition to fostering a growth mindset in students, educators must also practice effective feedback with students. What is the point of supplying students with feedback if the feedback is no good? As mentioned earlier, feedback can be given in a variety of ways, such as verbally, in writing, through an assessment grade, a report card, or even a facial expression. Students are frequently receiving feedback in an academic setting but are they consistently receiving quality feedback? Let's again take a look at mindset theory.

Through mindset theory, educators may walk away thinking they should always praise the effort and not the outcome. Is this beneficial to students? No, it is not. In fact, researcher, Carol Dweck, does not agree with this approach (Dweck, 2016). There are many positive outcomes from praising effort. This does not mean educators should say, "You're so smart," or, "Wow, you're amazing at this!" as this is not beneficial to students in the long run. It is a feel good praise at the moment but actually reinforces a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2016). Instead, educators should be using a combination of praise by praising the effort and other learning behaviors as it relates to the student's outcome. For example, the natural instinct might be to say, "Thanks for trying your best." This type of feedback could be considered positive but is extremely vague. It allows children to think trying their best was enough and does not give them direction for the future. This type of

praise is not effective and does not strengthen the growth mindset. A stronger approach would be, “I can tell you tried this strategy. Let’s go through your process and then see if there are other strategies to help us.” This tells the student their process was acknowledged, they have an opportunity to demonstrate it, and they also have the chance to work with the teacher to come up with additional strategies that might help them to be even more successful in the future.

Another important takeaway from Dweck (2016) considers how educators often only give students feedback when they have failed or when they are struggling with a task. This may act as a type of conditioning as students will begin to associate feedback with failure or their struggles. Feedback does not have to be limited to negative outcomes and can consist of both positive feedback as well as constructive feedback. Students may have completely aced an assignment and met their goal. Should teachers deliver feedback to that student? Of course they should! By delivering feedback to students in this situation, students are able to further think about strategies in order to help them to be successful and to associate feedback with a positive outcome in their learning. Students will continue to use those learning behaviors as an approach in the future and it maintains a positive relationship between the teacher and student.

Now, let’s imagine a tall building with many floors and, eventually, a roof. An individual can travel up those stairs until they reach the end but then will wonder where they are supposed to go next. They might sit at the top and wait for others to catch up to them, or they might even travel back down the stairs. This metaphor can easily be applied to education. The stairs represent the goals a student is working on. The railing of the

stairs can be associated with the feedback an educator is providing. The student can use the railing to support themselves as they move on in their goals. They continue traveling forward and building themselves up. Our hope is they would make it to the top of the stairs. Once they are there, there is no longer a railing so there is no longer a need for feedback, right? Wrong. Let's picture a door at the top of the stairs and the door leads to the roof with a helicopter. The door and the helicopter represents the feedback Dweck (2016) described. This student has put in a lot of effort and received amazing results. This deserves positive feedback to recognize the students accomplishments. From there, the feedback is no longer limited and can act as the door and helicopter for students. It can acknowledge areas of strengths for them to continue working on so their abilities do not come to a standstill. Educators must continuously deliver feedback whether it is positive or constructive feedback for students.

Notice the previous statement referred to feedback as positive or constructive, rather than using the word negative. Feedback should not be meant to tear down a student or reflect negatively on their failures. This type of practice would send students back to the fixed mindset educators worked so hard to overcome. Instead, educators must focus on the positive learning behaviors and accomplishments students are engaging in, as well as providing feedback to help students to grow. According to Schweinle et al. (2006), feedback should be frequent, elaborative, positive, and to help students to develop understanding. When educators implement this type of effective feedback, students are going to be more likely to engage in positive changes, to work towards their intended goals, and to view their academics as important (p. 288). When educators consider this

information, they should think about how often they are giving feedback, if it elaborates on the work students produce, if the feedback is positive, and whether it helps students to extend their thinking. This information is reinforced by research presented by Papi et al. (2019) whose research investigates feedback as both a teaching resource and a learning resource.

Educators may use feedback as a corrective message related to a student's skill set while students may use it to gauge if and how they are progressing towards their goals. Both are important practices as long as they are working in coordination. This is the ultimate goal educators want when considering how to implement effective feedback in academics. Finally, educators must also consider how challenging tasks and feedback are for students. Feedback is given to continue to help students grow but there must be a correct balance between challenge and skill. Effective teachers must use supportive feedback and provide feedback considerate of the student's current skills. This will appropriately challenge the student and increase student motivation (Shweinste et al., 2006). By considering strategies such as these, educators are able to implement a more effective feedback practice.

To summarize, it is necessary for educators to have a complete understanding of feedback so they are able to implement it successfully with students. Educators are constantly providing feedback for students and, therefore, play a huge role in the perceptions students hold about themselves and academics. Educators must develop an understanding of how mindset theory affects feedback and create a solid foundation of mindset theory with students they are servicing. When students hold a growth mindset,

they are able to more willingly and successfully accept feedback. This will also develop the ability to utilize feedback in their learning in the future. Once a growth mindset is in place, educators can then provide feedback to students through effective practices. Some essential practices include providing frequent, elaborative, and positive feedback.

Feedback can be constructive and challenging to help students improve in a specific area but should also recognize the strengths of the student. Finally, feedback should help students to be engaged, intentional, and motivated to continue their learning for the future.

### ***Intrinsic Motivation In Adolescents***

Intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in academic performance in students, especially adolescents. Many variables can positively or negatively affect motivation for these students. Specific circumstances can affect intrinsic motivation in adolescents and this can affect the overall academic ability of students, as well as their ability to independently engage in academic goal setting. When students have the capability to set and work towards goals, this plays a large role in motivation as it explains why learners engage in various learning activities (Song & Grabowski, 2006). This section will first explore the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation while the second portion of this section will connect this information to how goal setting can be connected to student motivation and performance.

There is a significant difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, along with many factors affecting these types of motivation. These differences and factors are vital in understanding when engaging with students in an academic setting. When



educators possess this knowledge, it increases their ability to implement behavioral and teaching strategies to increase the motivation to learn in their students. To start, it is important to recognize the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is when individuals willingly engage in behavior to complete a task for its own sake while extrinsic motivation is behavior motivated by contingent rewards (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). When considering what this means, educators should have the understanding that intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual and is a natural process not heavily influenced by others or by a tangible item. Extrinsic motivation is often influenced by an outside source and could be anything from the attention of others to a money reward for doing well on completing a task. While both operate in motivating someone, intrinsic motivation is more natural and extrinsic motivation can be looked at as artificial. These rewards are often given to be a positive reinforcer in order to produce a desired behavior but in the long run, these rewards can actually work as a negative reinforcer (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). Educators will often engage in extrinsic motivators when wanting a certain behavior to occur in their students. Again, this may work in the short term but will not produce the overall result an educator wants for their students.

As discussed earlier, students will encounter many types of challenges throughout their education and more importantly, throughout the rest of their lives. Educators must support students in being able to approach and overcome challenges with a variety of strategies. This will reinforce skills students will carry with them throughout the rest of their lives. Educators can first do this by providing students with the support to develop a

growth mindset. This is the initial step to be taken to ensure students will have the endurance to take on said challenges.

As a growth mindset develops in students, they will begin to demonstrate a willingness to persist in the problem solving taking place in academics. To follow this, educators can begin to teach students how to set goals and utilize the growth mindset practices they were taught to reach those goals. One problem often occurring in education is the lack of goal setting, along with vaguely defined goals, pathways, and restrictions that, in turn, create an uncertainty for students who are in need of guidance to find solutions. In addition to this, adolescents are required to engage in more abstract thinking in their learning, rather than focusing on concrete concepts. This creates a more challenging learning environment for students and can sometimes result in a drop in motivation for students (Song & Grabowski, 2006). This continues to support the idea that educators must investigate and provide methods to assist students in the ability to endure challenges while also maintaining their intrinsic motivation. It is important to understand mindset theory will not support student achievement on its own.

Goal setting can be a huge motivator for students but the motivation behind the goal must first be understood. Students orient their goals to achieve specific outcomes. Song and Grabowski (2006) discuss at length the difference between goal setting orientations which include learning and performance. This is similar to the research stated in the goal setting portion of this chapter (Shim et al., 2008). Learning-goal orientation focuses on the process of learning, mastering tasks, and gaining understanding. Performance-goal orientation focuses on an individual's ability to perform

in comparison to others performing the same task. This research investigates which goal orientation is more likely to increase a students' intrinsic motivation to persist in their learning. The findings suggest learning-oriented goals are more motivating than performance-oriented goals. Educators can gather students will be more successful with their academic goals if learning-oriented goals are implemented as a practice. This type of goal setting will increase student success while also increasing student motivation. This ultimately relates to the initial understanding of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation as students who are learning-goal oriented seem to have a larger focus on intrinsic processes, such as the process of learning and gaining an understanding of concepts. Students who are performance-goal oriented place a focus on extrinsic motivators or pressures, such as performing to the standards of others. The relation between intrinsic motivation and types of goal setting processes done in the classroom are key to understanding how to functionally and successfully implement goal setting practices..

This section discussed the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As educators strengthen a growth mindset in students, they are able to approach the process of goal setting as a strategy to increase intrinsic motivation in students. Through teaching a growth mindset, students are able to develop a mindset to provide more endurance to interact with and overcome challenges. As students travel towards those challenges, educators can appropriately teach students methods of goal setting to fit the students' needs. It is important to understand different types of goal setting can heavily affect intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Through goal setting teachers are able to provide an effective practice for students to engage in problem solving while also increasing their

intrinsic motivation. Teachers must emphasize learning-oriented goals rather than performance-oriented goals. In the long run learning-oriented goals will be more intrinsically reinforcing for a student than performance-oriented goals. This is the outcome teachers must work towards in order to successfully connect intrinsic motivation to mindset theory, goal setting, and productive feedback.

### ***Curriculum Materials***

Curriculum materials in goal setting and mindset theory are pre-existing as these are not novel areas of study. It is necessary to review and comprehend currently developed materials as they relate to goal setting, feedback, and intrinsic motivation. By having a complete understanding of what already exists and is effective with students, materials can continue to evolve to successfully support educators in using mindset theory to positively support academic goal setting and feedback in upper elementary school settings to increase academic success in students. This section will explore existing methods of using mindset theory, as well as goal setting and feedback practices to explore what strategies have been most effective in academic settings.

As stated earlier, goal setting approaches are more likely to be successful if there is an established background in mindset theory. Instructors must first focus on engaging students in strategies to support a growth mindset. This foundation will aid students as teachers implement goal setting practices in the classroom. If students are engaging in self-sabotaging behaviors, it is recommended educators work with those students to make them aware of their behaviors (Forsythe & Johnson, 2017). This type of intervention supports students who have a fixed mindset. Educators should help students to develop

and strengthen alternative strategies to approach challenging events. This should be done proactively with students rather than reactively in order to avoid further frustrations for both the student and the teacher. This acts as a replacement behavior for the undesirable behavior students engage in when having a fixed mindset and helps students to transition to a growth mindset. Teachers can also implement mindset theory with students by introducing students to the idea of mindsets. This can begin by teaching students about the brain and discussing a growth mindset. There are multiple ways to do this but it is most important to present scientific evidence to students rather than telling students they should have a growth mindset (Yeager & Walton, 2011). This will help students to come to their own ideas and decisions regarding mindset theory. When students have a good handle on mindset theory, educators can then begin to implement goal setting practices to support the next step, which is goal setting.

Goal setting is a way for students to take control of their own learning. While there are many ways to implement goal setting in the classroom, there are some specific strategies already researched as being effective in implementing with students. First, educators must understand, teach, and emphasize the difference between goal orientations. This includes learning-oriented goals and performance-oriented goals. Educators will want students to understand the difference between the two so students can be aware of their own thinking when creating goals. Are they considering their learning process and outcomes as it pertains to gaining understanding, or are they comparing their learning and outcomes to the performance of others? This is an important differentiation for both teachers and students to make in the goal setting process. To

follow this, educators can begin implementing the idea of SMART goals. SMART goals help students to increase their endurance when completing their goals while also helping students to create a more specific goal to improve their abilities (McGlynn & Kelly, 2017). SMART goals ask students to create effective goals by being specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. This type of practice requires students to think through the process they will need to go through to accomplish the goals they want to meet. It also gives students opportunities to review their strategies and their progress over an extended period of time. In combination with SMART goals, it can be helpful for students to use journaling as a way to set and track goals. Students can record their goals within their journal. This gives students a physical way to engage with those goals while also providing a visual for both the student and teacher. When students set goals, they may begin with vague goals. As students write these goals down, teachers can provide feedback and redirection to SMART goals to help students to be more clear about their goals (Elias, 2019). As time goes on, this practice allows students to track their goals so they are not neglected. Teachers can also work to implement individual check-ins with students to review their goals and journals as this will provide an opportunity to praise students and giving effective feedback can be helpful in supporting students to progress further in their goals.

When utilizing feedback as an educational practice within a school setting, there are many do's and don'ts to doing it successfully. To start, educators must show recognition of success and failures to effort and the use of problem solving strategies an individual used prior to reaching the outcome. This should be done rather than attributing

successes to intelligence as this makes learning seem passive and as if it is out of the control of the student (Dwyer, et al., 2010). Educators can also engage in productive feedback by being specific about the learning behaviors they would like to reinforce by discussing strategies the student used. Feedback should not be delivered for meaningless accomplishments or weak efforts as this reinforces a work ethic that will not be productive for the student in the future. Finally, feedback should not be given to recognize intelligence in students or to just comfort a student. These are not effective practices for teachers to employ and will harm the students overall abilities. By utilizing feedback correctly, educators are more likely to see an increase in resilience and higher academic achievements (Dwyer, et al, 2010). These practices will increase growth mindsets and student motivation.

### ***Discussion***

Chapter 2 explored the literature to support the research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* The purpose of an educator is to provide students with a quality education and skills to benefit them throughout their lives. The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates how educators can create a solid foundation of learning for students through mindset theory, goal setting, and feedback. These practices focus on social, emotional, behavioral, and academic areas, which in turn produce skills to build growth mindsets, resilience, endurance when facing challenges, and intrinsic motivation as it relates to academics.

The research uncovered in the literature review supports the initial research question. By understanding and utilizing mindset theory practices in the classroom, educators are able to create a culture of awareness, understanding, and growth. Students have the opportunity to understand the flexibility of the brain and how a growth mindset strengthens their brain and their skills. Students will continue to face challenges throughout their academics but must develop strategies to support them in overcoming any adversities they encounter. Educators can begin to support students in this area by utilizing growth mindset practices and supplying students with information to help them form their own understanding of how mindset theory works. Through this process students develop a powerful skill to help them transition into academic goal setting.

The research question considers how academic feedback can be used in an upper elementary school setting. Research has been done with a variety of ages and skill levels (as well as content areas) to demonstrate goal setting as a successful practice to be used to increase intrinsic motivation in students. Educators must utilize practices that provide students with the correct knowledge prior to setting goals. Again, it is vital for students to have a growth mindset when setting goals as students who have a fixed mindset will not have the resilience to face challenges and will likely not progress in the goals they place for themselves as they will feel defeated before they have even begun. By implementing growth mindset practices, educators are setting their students up for success in goal setting. This includes educating students about the difference in learning-oriented goals and performance-oriented goals, which fall in line with beliefs in mindset theory. Students should set learning-oriented goals as this type of goal setting will continue to



reinforce a growth mindset while also developing an understanding of learning as a process and how learning behaviors promote academic success. Students must take an active role in their learning and should self-orient their goals rather than being fixed on how their outcome compares to what others want. As educators continue to build student comprehension in goal setting, they can also begin to develop best practices to provide students with applications to successfully implement goal setting. Such practices include SMART goals to develop more rigorous and focused goals while also using journaling as a method to track and reflect on their goals over time. Each of these practices supplies students with opportunities to lead their own learning, to engage in an individualized education, and to improve their intrinsic motivation as it relates to academics. Within these practices of goal setting, educators can also utilize feedback as a practice to continue building students towards success.

Feedback is utilized by educators on a daily basis and through a variety of methods, such as verbal feedback, written feedback, or even just body language the educator demonstrated. Due to this, it is vital to understand the role feedback plays in education and how to effectively utilize feedback to support student learning. The literature explored in Chapter 2 provides us with information to sustain those ideas. Educators must first understand feedback should be used to positively reinforce behavior and to also correct behavior. This is not to be done in a negative or shameful way but in a constructive way to make students aware of what they are doing well and where they need to work on strengthening their skills. The way feedback is given can influence the perceptions students have about themselves, which again supports the idea that mindset

theory needs to be established in a classroom in order to productively distribute feedback. Instructors must provide feedback frequently and elaborate on their feedback so students are not left feeling confused or frustrated. In addition to this, educators must also provide challenging feedback to positively motivate them to push their learning to a new level. This will result in engaged, intentional, and motivated learning behavior from students.

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 of the current capstone reviews the question *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* The goal of this chapter was to explore the importance of mindset theory practices and how these practices support goal setting and feedback practices in an upper elementary school setting. The literature demonstrated the significance of mindset theory in the classroom as it is a necessary practice needed to build a foundation for students in their learning. Students who hold a growth mindset become more resilient and can endure adversities that they face in their academics. This mindset gives students the abilities to more successfully implement goal setting practices, such as learning-oriented goals, SMART goals, and journaling. Together these practices provide students with a more engaged learning style and improves intrinsic motivation when students are transitioning from concrete to abstract learning. This type of learning subjects students to a wider variety of challenges and requires students to engage in problem solving more frequently. By setting goals, students are functionally approaching abstract learning with a mindset to support and allow them to critically think about and apply the best learning behaviors to help overcome those challenges. Educators can help to continue supporting students by

providing feedback to guide students towards their goals. Essential practices in feedback include providing frequent, elaborative, and positive feedback. Educators should implement feedback that is both constructive and challenging, while also recognizing the strengths of the student. These practices will help students to be engaged, intentional, and motivated for their goals and future learning opportunities. By considering the practices explored in this chapter, teachers are able to achieve the goal of providing a rich and quality education for their students.

Chapter 3 of the capstone will provide an overview of a proposed project utilizing the information gathered in this literature review. The project will demonstrate the importance of creating a foundation of mindset theory with upper elementary school students and how this foundation benefits the implementation of goal setting and feedback in the classroom. The project will supply educators with materials to utilize the best practices stated in the research above. These materials can be used to increase intrinsic motivation in students and to help students to be successful and intentional learners in their education.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the capstone project with the goal to implement mindset theory to positively support academic goal setting and feedback in order to increase intrinsic motivation and academic success in an upper elementary school setting. I wish to create a platform where educators can explore research in each of these areas in an easy to use way. This platform would present the information demonstrating the effectiveness of developing a foundation of growth mindset and follow by implementing goal setting and feedback. In addition to this information, the platform would also have a variety of ever-growing materials accessible to educators who wish to implement these practices within their classroom to increase student motivation and academic success. As a result, I have designed a blog where all of this is possible.

In this chapter, I will begin by providing a rationale for the creation of the blog and follow by providing an overview of the project while also briefly discussing the qualities of the blog. I will then discuss the blog content and design as it is used to support the research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* Next, I will outline the audience I foresee using the blog and developed materials. Finally, I will provide a deeper project description, the intended audience of the blog, and how I will determine the effectiveness of the blog.

#### *Rationale and Overview*

Originally I wished to create a curriculum to be used in a classroom setting but soon found myself considering if a curriculum was the best way to use the information learned in my research. I want to provide educators with a modern and easy to access tool that is simple to understand and applicable to what is currently taking place in our world. I decided it was best to shift the purpose of my project to be reflective of teachers' needs and in a way that will actually reach them. I have created a blog with the intention of connecting and sharing the previously mentioned research in order to support educators in developing growth mindset, goal setting, and feedback practices with their students. This blog also includes information on how these practices can develop intrinsic motivation and academic success in adolescents. Not only does the blog provide educators with the necessary information to utilize these practices but it also houses easy to use materials for educators to access and implement. These materials are reflective of existing research in the areas mentioned above. The next section will cover the content within the blog and the development of the website.

### ***Blog Content and Development***

The content of the website was carefully considered in order to best support the research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* This section will further discuss the content considered in order to develop the blog format of the project.

Upon exploring the existing resources within the research areas, I have concluded it is best to develop a foundation of mindset theory prior to implementing goal setting and feedback as a strategy to increase intrinsic motivation and academic success in an upper

elementary school setting. As discussed in the previous chapter, goal setting is a common practice in schools but without the right foundation, it is not effective. Adolescents often deal with a difficult shift from concrete learning to abstract learning in education, which can cause frustration and a decrease in motivation (Song & Grabowski, 2006). Students must continue on with this type of learning for the remainder of their lives and educators can support them with these future challenges by fostering a growth mindset in their classrooms. This step is critical as mindsets and self perception can greatly affect students' abilities to create goals and accept feedback in a school setting (Forsythe and Johnson, 2017). When a foundation of growth mindset has been developed, teachers can begin to utilize goal setting and feedback practices with students as a method to increase self motivation in academics. Together these practices create a successful learning experience for students where they are able to take charge of their own education. These practices will also develop lifelong skills in students and will be applicable to all areas of their lives.

To start, it is vital for educators to understand mindset theory must take place and be active in a classroom prior to implementing goal setting and feedback practices with students. Yeager and Dweck (2012) suggests two types of mindsets: fixed and growth. Educators should make students aware of different types of thinking without suggesting students should have a growth mindset as it may make students skeptical or aversive to the practice (Yeager & Walton, 2011). For students who engage in a fixed mindset, educators should help students to become aware of thinking that is considered fixed and how they can alter their thinking with a replacement behavior (Forsythe & Johnson,

2017). By utilizing best practices, teachers can help create a culture of growth mindset in their classroom. Following this, educators can implement practices of goal setting and feedback to increase academic awareness, improve performance, and strengthen intrinsic motivation. There is also a strong connection between goals and performance, especially when goals are specific and challenging (Lunenburg, 2011). One method highly recommended to implement with students is SMART goals. McGlynn and Kelly (2017) state teachers who want a goal setting to be effective should follow the guidelines of SMART goals. SMART goals place a focus on making sure students create appropriate long-term goals. This can be done by making sure the goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. This method backs up the idea of making goals specific and challenging.

By understanding and considering the information above, I was able to conclude which information is most necessary to include within my blog. Experienced educator and blogger, Tom Sherrington, recommends choosing a clear identity and style while calling on a set of reliable resources rather than trying to include too much (2013). He also encourages new bloggers to find a balance within their writing so they do not drive their audience away with too much or too little information. This advice has helped me in deciding I will summarize information gathered in my research, create lists, provide outlines of best practices, and include quotes from scholars and researchers. The next section will provide a more detailed description of the project.

### ***Project Description***

This project is designed to assist educators in building a foundation of mindset theory in a classroom setting, followed by utilizing goal setting and feedback to positively increase student intrinsic motivation and academic success. While there are many resources an educator can turn to, blogs continue to maintain popularity within the education community. The purpose of the blog is to provide educators with accessible information and research surrounding growth mindset, goal setting, and feedback, while also providing materials that can be used in a logical order to increase student motivation and academic success. The materials available incorporate the information learned from the aforementioned research in order to encourage best practices to be used with students.

The blog will be divided into three sections: a homepage, a page titled, “Growth Mindset and Goals,” that includes relevant information and research, and a page titled, “Free Resources,” dedicated to free and usable classroom materials. To start, the homepage will consist of a summary of why the blog was created, information about the creator of the blog, and the intention of using the blog. The homepage will provide an overview of the blog so educators can easily determine what information they will find and how they can benefit from utilizing the research and materials included within the blog. The information and research page will provide an overview of the research done in Chapter 2 of the project and a discussion on how each of these practices compliments one another in developing intrinsic motivation and academic success in upper elementary school students. In order to provide educators with a positive and engaging experience, this page will summarize and organize necessary information from articles listed within the research in Chapter 2, relating lists, outlines of best practices, and quotes from



scholars and researchers. Finally, the materials page will be made to include downloadable materials and external links to resources which can be implemented to develop growth mindset, goal setting, and feedback in the classroom. Examples of materials included within this page would be: related media, classroom decor, class discussions, activities, and materials to support individual students and/or teachers. These materials will reflect the research discussed within the blog while also providing teachers with the necessary tools needed to implement the practices of focus. The following section will discuss the target audience for the final blog.

### ***Audience***

As students grow into adolescents, they are required to think more abstractly in their learning. This shift from concrete concepts can create a more challenging learning environment for students and can sometimes result in a drop in motivation for students (Song & Grabowski, 2006). By combining and implementing mindset theory, goal setting, and feedback practices, educators can effectively and efficiently create a supportive classroom environment to boost student achievement and motivation. The goal of the blog would be to provide educators with an easy to use platform that houses necessary information and materials that can be utilized quickly and effectively within their own classrooms. The research done to support this project investigated a variety of age levels and subjects areas. The blog encompasses said research to be utilized in a general education classroom with upper elementary school students as the targeted participants. The reason for this is because of the shift educators see in the learning that takes place for adolescents in a school setting. While the intended audience of the blog is

geared towards upper elementary school teachers there also needs to be an understanding that all teachers have the ability to adapt and use the developed curriculum for students of all grade levels.

### ***Timeline***

The timeline of this project took place over a total of eight months. The initial research done for the background of the project took place from February of 2020 through May of 2020. During this time, the literature review was completed and research was collected to provide the foundation for the creation of the blog. Beginning in February of 2021, the formation of the blog took place. I began by researching which website builder I would use to create my blog and continued to develop connections within my research for my final project. Following this, I created the rough draft of my blog by brainstorming, narrowing down which information I would include in the blog, and the finer details of how each of the pages within my blog would be formatted. I officially began to build my blog beginning in late March and continued to build throughout April of 2021. Although I have completed the blog for the capstone process, I would like to continue building and maintaining my blog as I continue through my career as an educator.

### ***Assessment***

There are multiple ways in which I plan to assess the success of my capstone project and how it benefits the education community. Within my blog, there are two places in which educators can further connect with me. One area is listed on the home page and is titled, "Want To Connect?" This feature gives visitors the opportunity to

provide their name, email, and a comment. Comments may be positive, constructive, and/or give me the opportunity to continue building connections with others within the education community. This will help me to assess the content, layout, and helpfulness of my blog. Another area within my blog that allows me to conduct an assessment would be on the third page entitled, "Free Resources." On this page, there is another opportunity for visitors to provide their email in a feature named, "Want to Hear More?" This feature would allow me to assess the success of my blog as I would hope to build my number of subscribers to the blog over time. The final way in which I will measure the success of my blog would be within the website builder under my account. I have the ability to view reports relating to my website and receive information, such as: summary reports, site traffic, and site activity. Not only will this tell me how many page views I have in total but also the amount of unique visits have taken place on my blog. This helps me to analyze what type of traffic my blog is receiving, trends in when I receive more visitors, and follow by using these trends to continue building the success of my blog. Each of these provides a unique and reliable way for me to assess my blog over time.

### **Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to give an overview of the project to be conducted and the methods used to support the proposed research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* This project is intended to support elementary education teachers, particularly teachers working with adolescents. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of implementing the educational blog as my final capstone project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reflection

#### Context

Throughout the capstone, I have focused on the research question: *how can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* Chapter 4 will reflect on my growth and the unexpected findings throughout the process. It will also discuss how I will communicate my results, how the education profession will benefit from my capstone project, and the limitations and future research to come from the project.

#### *Growth as an Educator*

At the start of my capstone process, I was unsure of what I would uncover. My daily routines and interactions quickly sparked a desire to learn more about goal setting and growing internal motivation in upper elementary school students. I quickly began to tie together the topics of goal setting, mindset theory, feedback, and intrinsic motivation in adolescents. This certainly pushed me outside of my comfort zone as these topic areas are different from what I have previously been interested in. I am so happy I chose to explore goal setting and internal motivation as I have learned a great deal along the way.

As a researcher, I learned it is okay to change the final product from your original idea(s). I had first intended to develop a curriculum as it related to the research question: *How can mindset theory positively support academic goal setting and feedback in an upper elementary school setting?* What I soon discovered was a ton of great materials already existed and this put a halt to the idea of developing a curriculum. Even so, I still

felt it was my responsibility to take the connections I had made in my research and put it into a format for educators to easily access. Teachers are lifelong learners, as well as incredibly hard workers. From my experience, I know teachers do not always have time to dig through research in the way I had for the capstone project. They are busy grading papers, attending meetings, creating their own materials, and most importantly, they are teaching! I wanted to be sure the product of my research was an accessible, inviting, and beneficial project for all educators. Although my original idea of creating a curriculum did not turn out, a new idea was born and I was able to create my blog. This idea helps me to truly follow the steps of the scientific method, with the most important step of communicating my results.

As a writer and learner, I am able to walk away from my capstone project with a sense of pride and accomplishment, which I will carry with me throughout my life. Although writing has always been one of my strengths as a learner, I have never put together such a large piece of writing. If I had been asked to write a fifty-some page paper just three years ago, I probably would have laughed at the idea. Writing fifty pages seemed impossible and I certainly was not confident in my ability of doing so. As I near the end of the writing process, I am amazed by my abilities and have seen my writing grow immensely. For example, I am now confident with my abilities in writing academically as it applies to the education field. My strength has always been in narrative or persuasive writing, and I have not always found it easy to write informatively. The opportunity to independently conduct such a large research project and then follow with the informative writing has really stretched my abilities and I am so grateful for this

experience. In addition, I have also found going through the research and writing process has also further opened my eyes to what it takes to be a great researcher. The planning, research, dedication, and the time it takes to sit down and write such extensive work is quite amazing. I am in awe of the individuals whose careers are dedicated to furthering areas of research that benefit our lives on a daily basis.

### ***The Unexpected***

When I first began my research, I knew I would be diving into goal setting, feedback, and internal motivation. What I had not expected to review was mindset theory. The terms fixed mindset and growth mindset were familiar to me but I did not hold much knowledge on the theory, the research, and the importance of the area until further investigating mindset theory. As I learned more, it became clear mindset theory plays a fundamental role in most areas of education. For example, research within the area of growth mindset tells us students who hold a fixed mindset and may sooner give up than a student who has a growth mindset. While this information easily clicks, I had never considered how their resiliency can be affected and these students can begin associating their failures with their own identity (Bennett, 2013). On the opposite end of the spectrum, students who possess a growth mindset have a greater resiliency when encountering challenges and use the experience to improve their efforts in the future. This theory can be applied to most areas of education, whether this is in content areas, with specialists, or even in social interactions with peers. The information above stands out to me because I see it as being applicable to all ages and subject areas. If I wanted someone to talk away with one piece of information from my blog, this would be it because it

sparks a flame of wonder. As an educator, I read this and immediately wanted to know and understand more. By comprehending the information above, it opens up the door for opportunities to help students develop lifelong skills. Of course, this is just a starting point and many important steps follow this understanding.

Another piece of stand out research comes from the area of goal setting and intrinsic motivation. At the start of my research, I did not realize there were different ways of goal setting and this could affect the overall intrinsic motivation of students. Song and Grabowski (2006) describe the difference between learning-goal orientations and performance-goal orientations with learning-goal orientations being focused on the process of learning and performance-goal orientation focused on one's abilities as it relates to the performance of others. Not only does this information tie back to mindset theory but it also demonstrates the importance of fully understanding goal setting in order to increase intrinsic motivation. Without this understanding, educators may be blind to the motivations behind student goals or may not see the results they are hoping for their students.

### ***Communication in Education***

My research has led me to a tremendous amount of valuable information which will continue to guide my teaching throughout my career. I am certain I have made the right choice in my project as it has allowed me to develop a platform where I am able to consistently and clearly communicate my results. Oxford Languages (2021) defines a blog as, "A regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group, that is written in an informal or conversational style." By creating a blog, I

have provided a platform to educators where their knowledge can continue to build and grow. I see a blog as an ever evolving resource, which proves to be necessary as we see our world changing each and every day. This regularly updated resource provides educators with useful research and materials they may not always have time to seek out on their own. I know this is a resource I would turn to as an educator.

### ***Benefits of a Blog***

The education profession can be frustrating, especially when resources are limited. When considering my project, I see a blog as a benefit versus a hindrance. To start, the information and resources (with slight modifications) are applicable to all ages and subject areas. This is a benefit as many websites, curriculums, and materials tend to benefit a specific age or subject area. Next, the platform is easily accessible to educators around the world. With access to the internet and to a device, teachers can look at the blog just about anywhere. The blog was designed to provide information as a summary to give educators an easy-to-read overview while also providing the references within a list format for individuals to use in case more information was wanted or needed. Finally, not all educators are able to access necessary materials to use in their classrooms. Oftentimes, we hear of teachers spending their own money to access resources for their students. This is a hardship no teacher should have to take on, which is why I decided to offer free resources within my blog. I hope by doing this, I am offering a more equitable experience to both teachers and students.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***



In the future, I hope to see my blog continue to grow. Behind the scenes, I am able to see the amount of visits on my blog. I would like to see this number grow larger over time as this would demonstrate the interest others have in learning about such topics. I can work on achieving this outcome by promoting my blog on social media sites, such as TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Teachers Pay Teachers. I can also share my findings with other educators by discussing it within professionals in a variety of environments (graduate school, work, at professional development opportunities, etc.).

There are some limitations to my project. While I would love for all educators to have access to the blog, we do come across areas where access to the internet and to devices is challenging. I want my project to be as accessible as possible but I cannot be blind to the inequities we face within our society. Through the pandemic we have found that many do not have access to these items which some take for granted. This also is true of the resources within the blog. The resources are provided as a PDF, which can be used as a digital or printed copy. Again not all have access to technologies where a PDF copy may work for them and/or may not have access to a printer in order to supply their classroom with the materials provided within the blog. While these limitations exist, I hope the future research projects listed below could support those in need.

I would love to further develop the ideas and research in future projects. One idea I would like to explore is a published guide (physical and digital) to support teachers in implementing the practices described throughout the capstone. While the ideas may be easy enough to understand, it can sometimes be challenging to implement practices without more context. A guideline would provide more detailed descriptions of the focus

areas within the project, examples, activities and games within each area, and also outlines and assessments to further guide the implementation of growth mindset, goal setting, and feedback to increase intrinsic motivation. A follow up idea to this would be a professional development class or course with similar intentions to the blog and guideline but with the overall goal of opening discussion, providing face-to-face connections and experiences, and allowing educators to learn in a setting that might work best for their learning style.

### **Conclusion**

As I conclude the capstone process, I am incredibly excited to re-enter the world of education with a new perspective. I am walking away with a wealth of knowledge I know will be of great benefit for the remainder of my career. I look forward to sharing this knowledge, not only with close colleagues, but educators across the world. I will march forward knowing teachers can provide a new outlook for their students and I look forward to taking on this outlook as well. My research is not done, nor do I ever think it will be. I am thrilled in knowing this is just step one in my lifelong journey of learning as an educator and I cannot wait to see where I end up.

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