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GROWTH MINDSET LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN THE KINDERGARTEN
CLASSROOM

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Literacy Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

January 2020

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In Kindergarten, students receive one of their first exposures to formal literacy instruction. For many, Kindergarten is a big change from their early experiences. There are students that have been to preschool or daycare who have had experiences with literacy concepts, and those that have had no preschool experience or exposure to literacy concepts. Either way, Kindergarten can be an overwhelming change that can affect a student's self-confidence and belief in one's ability to learn.

The growth mindset, as described by Carol Dweck (2006), suggests that “everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (p. 10). I believe that as children start Kindergarten, they may benefit from learning strategies to help build a growth mindset. Many students come into Kindergarten thinking that they are unable to learn, or that the things we learn are too “hard” for them. This makes the beginning of the school year particularly difficult for some, and often tears are involved in much of the school day. I want to learn more about the growth mindset and how it can be used to help students believe in themselves and never give up. I also want to learn how to use this to support students becoming lifelong learners with the skills they need for success. Literacy is a great place to start with the growth mindset because it is the foundation of the Kindergarten curriculum. These observations have led me to my research topic: *How can*

using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?

In this chapter, I will review events and beliefs that have led to my interest in the growth mindset. I will discuss my early experiences learning to believe in myself at school, my first teaching experience, the importance of Kindergarten and why I teach it, and students that have helped support my interest in growth mindset.

First grade

When I think about my early experiences with literacy and growth mindset, I think of first grade. I had a great teacher named Ms. Leary. She helped me learn how to read and to trust in my reading and writing abilities. In her class, everyone was a reader and a writer, no matter their skill level. She believed in her students, and we started to believe in ourselves. She gave up her personal time during recess to meet with kids to help them with reading. I was in a group with her and two other girls from class to read *Amelia Bedelia* books. We had a great time together and I remember feeling like such a great reader.

Each day in Ms. Leary's class, we also had an opportunity to write. She allowed us to write about whatever topic we wanted and even taught our class about publishing. I got to create many stories and illustrations to bring home. At the end of the school year, we got to word process a story, which boosted my belief in myself as a worthwhile writer. Looking back on this experience, I believe Ms. Leary had a growth mindset and believed that students could also benefit from a growth mindset.

My First Teaching Experience

I do not think I will ever forget my first year of teaching. It was one of the best and hardest years of my career. I took a leap of faith and moved 70 miles from my family to a city I had never been to prior to this experience. I remember being so excited to start teaching... and then the kids came in the classroom on the first day. I was terrified. Who decided I was capable of teaching all these kids? However, over time, and with many failures, I learned. I learned strategies that worked best for my students and built up confidence in my abilities as a teacher. In retrospect, I realized that it took a growth mindset to keep going through each new situation and difficulty I experienced. I did not start the year with confidence and felt like I was struggling to balance all that needed to be done. However, I never gave up and I pushed through hard times. I learned what it truly means to develop growth mindset tendencies.

The Importance of Kindergarten and Why I Teach it

Kindergarten is the gateway to a child's formal school experience. It is an important and formative year. In Kindergarten, students are not only learning academic content such as math, reading, science, and social studies. They are also learning social emotional skills, manners, rules, how to be a student, and how to deal with problems and failure. Bouffard said, "Children don't develop social and emotional skills automatically; those skills have to be taught, and in every environment where children live, learn, and play, including school" (Bouffard, 2017, p. 22). These skills are just as foundational to student progress as the academic skills that they will continue to learn throughout their

school career. If students do not learn how to take turns, share, be kind to others, and deal with struggles, it can get in the way of their academic progress (Bouffard, 2017, p. 23).

Kindergarten is different than other grades. This is especially seen in the first six weeks of school. In all other grades, students have been to school before, but in Kindergarten, there is a wide range of backgrounds. Some students come in with full-day preschool or daycare experience, others half day experiences, and yet more for whom Kindergarten is their first experience away from a parent. For these reasons, the first six weeks are spent mostly on learning how to learn. Kindergarten is all about learning through doing. As the teacher, I model all the skills I want students to do, I also model my thinking. Each day is marked with much activity and practice of skills.

Many Kindergarten students come in believing they can not read or write because they do not know all their letters and sounds. One of the first things we learn is that everyone is a reader and writer. If you can look at pictures, you are a reader. If you can imagine a story, you are a writer. These are beliefs I talk to my students about early on. These fit in well with the growth mindset idea

I enjoy teaching Kindergarten. There is something about the wonder and trust of five and six-year-olds that sparks joy in me each day. I believe Kindergarten is the most important year for setting students up to succeed and to believe in themselves. Their minds are so open to learning in Kindergarten. It is important for students to know that I believe in them and that they have the power to believe in themselves.

My goal as a Kindergarten teacher is to set students up for lifelong learning and success. I take it upon myself to try to teach my students the love of learning. School is a

long process and having a love of learning will help students in all they do as their school career progresses. I have taught many students in my career, but there are some in particular that would benefit from this idea.

Students that have supported my interest in growth mindset

There are two students that come to my mind when I think of why I want to learn more about the growth mindset. These are students that really struggled with confidence and never giving up. The first such student is Malia (real names have been replaced in this paper). Malia came to Kindergarten believing that every time she made a mistake she was a failure. She would start crying and refuse to continue her work. I would try to encourage her, but her mind was made up. Over time, it started to impact her academic ability. She was capable of learning, but she had so little faith in herself that she would not even try. This was the first student that made me really think about the power that our mindset can have on our abilities.

The last student I think of is Darin. Darin came into Kindergarten with no academic skills. He did not even know the letters in his name or how to write them. Work on these skills started almost immediately. However, months passed, and although Darin could write his name, he still was not having success in recognizing the five letters in his name. This was very concerning, so I started to dig deeper and think about all the possibilities that could lead to this. Darin was very shy. He was afraid to speak up even when all he had to do was say his own name. Over time, I concluded that Darin might know more than he let on, but was afraid to share for fear that he might fail. Confidence

and the ability to work through failure are two things that would have helped him as a learner.

These students remind me how important my job is as a teacher. Students come into my classroom each year with their own personality and previous experiences that have shaped who they are. Teaching skills related to growth mindset could have supported these students and many others. This fuels my commitment to try growth mindset practices in my classroom to help support future students.

Chapter Summary

Kindergarten is an important time in a child's school career. It is their first exposure to the wide world of learning. It is an important time for a child to build up confidence and the ability to believe in themselves. I believe this will help them succeed as lifelong learners. Literacy is a key component to Kindergarten, so my research topic is: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?*

I learned in first grade that I could be a reader and writer. This helped me boost my confidence. My first teaching experience taught me that I can succeed in the face of failure. As a Kindergarten teacher, my beliefs have led me to understand the skills that are necessary to help students succeed in school. There have been a few students in my teaching career that have supported my interest in how growth mindset can support students academically.

In chapter two, the literature on growth mindset and literacy in Kindergarten is reviewed. In chapter three the methods for my research will be discussed. In chapter four,

I will share the results of my research. And in chapter five, I will discuss the conclusions I have based on my research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the growth mindset, “everyone can change and grow through application and experience” (Dweck, 2006, p. 10). Kindergarten is a key time for children to start learning about growth mindset concepts. It is their first formal schooling and a time where students can be overwhelmed and feel like they are not capable of doing things on their own. It is my goal to teach students the tools they need to develop a growth mindset where they try things, even if they are hard and believe they can do anything they put their minds to.

In this chapter, I discuss the main topics that help support my literacy question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students’ beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* The first section describes the mindset framework. It will begin with a definition of fixed and growth mindset. It will also discuss mindsets in the context of school and talk about what these can look like in the classroom. Next, it discusses the idea of the false growth mindset and the importance of both students and teachers having a growth mindset in the classroom. Last, I explore how growth mindset ties in with positive psychology.

The second section will discuss growth mindset language. This section begins with key components of growth mindset language. This will be followed by an

exploration of how teacher feedback impacts students. Last is a section on the classroom learning community and how it can support the growth mindset.

In the third section, I will talk about the socioemotional development of children between the ages of four and six. This section will start by discussing social emotional skills and self-concept of students ages four to six. Next, is a discussion of the emotional adjustment of starting Kindergarten.

The last section of my literature review will discuss emergent literacy. At the heart of emergent literacy in Kindergarten are skills involving phonemic awareness and phonics. These skills will be discussed in this section. This section will also discuss preschool predictors for success in Kindergarten, including pre-K and parent support. I will also discuss other important factors in emergent literacy including developing parent-teacher relationships and developing positive reader self-concept.

Mindsets

Mindsets shape the way we think about ourselves and what we think we are capable of (Ricci, 2018, p. 7). Mindsets frame the way we see the world and the situations that happen to us each day. Dweck (2006) said, “You have a choice. Mindsets are just beliefs. They’re powerful beliefs, but they’re just something in your mind, and you can change your mind” (p. 16). Dweck believed there are two mindsets that one can have about intelligence (2010, p. 26). The two mindsets are a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. She believed everyone falls into these two categories, but can be a mix of both, especially depending on the type of situation.

Growth and fixed mindsets. In the fixed mindset, individuals believe they have a fixed intelligence. In this mindset, success is gauged by how smart or talented you prove yourself to be. Effort is not a good quality and failure is proof you are not smart (Dweck, 2006, p. 15). “Often, when faced with a challenging situation, those with a fixed mindset work very hard to avoid failing or looking stupid, robbing themselves of rich life experiences” (Brock & Hundley, 2017, p. 7).

In the growth mindset, individuals believe that intelligence is changeable through learning. Stretching yourself and developing yourself to learn and try new things is seen as positive. Putting forth effort and learning from failure make you smart (Dweck, 2006, p. 16). According to Brock and Hundley (2017), “People with growth mindsets are more inclined to tackle challenges, and believe making mistakes and overcoming obstacles are integral to the process of growth” (p. 7). One of the most powerful ideas for those with this mindset is not yet. There is always room to learn something new.

Mindsets and the classroom. Mindsets play a big role in learning in the classroom. The way students and teachers think about learning and intelligence can impact achievement. Dweck (2010) talked about work she did with Lisa Blackwell and Kali Trzesniewski watching students transitioning to 7th grade and following them for two years. Over time they found that those students with a growth mindset performed better over time than those whose mindsets were fixed.

Because they believed their intellect could be developed, students with a growth mind-set focused on learning, believed in effort, and were resilient in the face of setbacks. Students with a fixed mind-set, however, worried more about looking

smart and not making mistakes, thought that needing to make an effort to learn meant that their intelligence was deficient, and became discouraged or defensive in the face of setbacks because they believed that setbacks reflect limitations in their intelligence. (p. 27)

Students with a growth mindset develop motivation to learn and a never give up mentality that helps them succeed. Those with a fixed mindset lack the resilience and belief that what they do not know, they can learn.

Teachers mindsets also play a role in success in the classroom. A teacher with a fixed mindset believes situations cannot change and hard situations are not their fault or are directed at them personally (Brock & Hundley, 2017, p. 10). In the classroom, a teacher with fixed mindset thinks the traits of students cannot be changed and they make judgments based on the traits they see in students. Once these teachers decide a student cannot be successful, they are not willing to change this belief (Dweck, 2010, p. 28).

On the contrary, “An educator with a growth mindset believes that with effort and hard work from the learner, all students can demonstrate significant growth and therefore all students deserve opportunities for challenge” (Ricci, 2013, p. 11). These teachers believe in teaching strategies and encouraging students to try harder (Dweck, 2010, p. 28).

False growth mindset. False growth mindset is when the idea of growth mindset is, “an oversimplification of what growth mindset is and how to develop it in young people” (Brock & Hundley, 2017, p. 11). The trademarks of false growth mindset are

only praising effort, telling students they can do anything, and blaming mindsets on students.

In her research, Dweck (2016) noticed that teachers were praising students for their effort even when students were not learning.

...the very students who most needed to learn about developing their abilities were instead receiving praise for their ineffective effort. Teachers need to tell the truth. They can acknowledge laudable effort, but they also need to acknowledge when students are not working effectively, and then work with them to find new learning strategies. (Praising Effort Alone section, para. 2).

On the subject of supporting students belief in themselves, Dweck (2016) believed that although students can do many things if they keep trying, teachers need to be careful about not making this an empty promise. Good teachers believe in their students and that they can reach high standards, but there is a lot of work involved in getting there (Telling Students “You Can Do Anything” section, para. 1).

Lastly, a difficult part of the false growth mindset is the belief that student mindsets cause a failure to learn things, and this is perceived as a child’s fault. Embracing a new mindset is a difficult process, and this is not only for children. No one is perfect and the process to a growth mindset is hard.

Claiming growth-mindset mastery is a big red flag that you don’t get it yet. The ability to understand what triggers your fixed mindset and experiment with strategies to handle those tricky situations is the true mark of a growth mindset (Brock & Hundley, 2017, p. 12).

Positive psychology. Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that closely connects to the idea of having a growth mindset. It refers in part to the idea that individuals can better themselves by developing their positivity and optimism (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, & DiGiuseppe, 2004, p. 163). One of the most prominent proponents of this field of psychology is Martin Seligman. Seligman called his explanation of positive psychology learned optimism. In his theory, he explained this by creating categories that people fall into called explanatory styles. Seligman (1990) said,

Your habitual way of explaining bad events, your explanatory style, is more than just the words you mouth when you fail. It is a habit of thought, learned in childhood and adolescence. Your explanatory style stems directly from your view of your place in the world- whether you think you are valuable and deserving, or worthless and hopeless. (p. 44)

Explanatory styles can affect how a child functions in the classroom, much like the growth mindset. Seligman (1990) believed that when people fail at something, they become discouraged. However, it is how long you let this discouragement last and what you do as a result that defines you as an optimist or pessimist (p. 137). “The theory clearly predicts that in the classroom... success will not necessarily go to the most talented” (p. 137).

In Seligman’s theory, he believed that when students performance at school is poor and they or those around them believe it is because they are unintelligent, their pessimism will get worse and worse and their grades at school will suffer as a result. Students need to learn to be optimistic about their abilities and believe that setbacks are

not forever and do not reflect on their future ability (1990, pp. 137-138). About this idea, Seligman (1990) said, “I have come to think that the notion of potential, without the notion of optimism, has very little meaning” (p. 154). This complements Dweck’s (2006) notion that “...the growth mindset lets people- even those who are targets of negative labels- use and develop their minds fully. Their heads are not filled with limiting thoughts, a fragile sense of belonging, and a belief that other people can define them” (p. 80)

Mindset summary Mindset is a key component in understanding my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students’ beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* In this section, I discussed what the growth and fixed mindsets are and the trademarks that define them. I also discussed the role that mindsets play in the classroom and its impact on students. Next, I discussed concerns revolving around the false growth mindset and how this affects both students and teachers. Last, I discussed the field of positive psychology and how this relates to developing the growth mindset.

In the next section, I will discuss growth mindset language and why it is important to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students’ beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* This section will include an exploration of the components of growth mindset language, trademarks of teacher growth mindset feedback, and the importance of creating a learning community in the classroom.

Growth Mindset Language

Growth mindset language is crucial in the process of developing a growth mindset. This is what gives teachers the ability to support a growth mindset in the classroom. Brock and Hundley (2016) said, “It’s critical that the teacher demonstrate the growth mindset to their students each day, modeling what it looks like and how to overcome a fixed mindset” (Growth Mindset in the Classroom Environment section, para. 1). There are many facets to incorporating growth mindset in the classroom that will be discussed in this section. These will include growth mindset language components, teacher feedback, and the classroom learning community.

Components of growth mindset language. Growth mindset language is more than just the words you say. It is a whole system of beliefs that has to be put in place. One of the biggest components that has to be put in place is to help students understand that failure and mistakes are not bad. They are learning opportunities. The growth mindset mentality says, “failure is can be a painful experience. But it doesn’t define you. It’s a problem to be faced, dealt with, and learned from” (Dweck, 2006, p. 33). Failure is not about getting something wrong, it is about what can be learned from it and how it can help you succeed in the future (Cheska, 2017, p. 19). In the growth mindset mentality, individuals change their thinking from “I can’t” to “not yet” (Brock & Hundley, 2018, Affirmation section).

Another trademark of growth mindset language is positive self-talk. In this concept, teachers should teach students statements to say to themselves to keep going when things get tough or they fail at something. These statements revolve around the

growth mindset (Cheska, 2017, p. 19). The way a person thinks about a situation and handles the outcome is connected to whether they have a growth or fixed mindset. This also frames how you look at it in your head. Adding the word yet to your negative thoughts can help frame them more positively (Brock & Hundley, 2018, Fixed vs Growth Mindset Self-Talk section). An example of a fixed mindset response is, “I can’t do this!” In the growth mindset, one might say, “I can’t do this, yet.”

In order to initiate growth mindset language into the classroom, it is also important for students to understand more about their brains. A key phrase students need to understand is neuroplasticity. Ricci (2013) described neuroplasticity as, “The ability of the brain to change, adapt, and ‘rewire’ itself throughout our entire life” (Brain-Based Research section, para. 1). This relates to the idea of developing a growth mindset. Cheska (2017) said, “Students become more interested in learning when they find out they can get smarter by rewiring their brains through study and practice” (p. 18). The way we think influences the way students learn and teachers teach. It also informs motivation and what we expect of ourselves and others (Ricci, 2013, Brain-Based Research section, para. 4).

Students should learn not only about neuroplasticity, but how the parts of the brain work and help students learn. “We routinely ask students to do the work of learning without ever teaching them how their brains will accomplish that work” (Brock & Hundley, 2016, Why Learning Brain Science Matters section, para. 1). Teaching students that their brain is a muscle that needs to be exercised much like the other muscles in their

body supports their understanding of the brain's importance (Brock & Hundley, 2016, Our Changing Brain section, para. 7).

Teacher growth mindset feedback. Teacher feedback is important in the process of helping students develop a growth mindset. It is important for the teacher to use the components of growth mindset language discussed above as they give feedback. Dweck (2007) said, "Praise is intricately connected to how students view their intelligence" (p. 34). One of the key parts of growth mindset feedback is being aware of the type of praise used when talking with students. Praising students for their intelligence perpetuates the fixed mindset, but praise based on effort (process praise) encourages the growth mindset. Dweck (2006) said, "Children love praise. And they especially love to be praised for their intelligence and talent. It really does give them a boost, a special glow- but only for the moment" (p. 178). On the other hand, "Process praise keeps students focused, not on something called ability that they may or may not have and that magically creates success or failure, but on processes they can all engage in to learn" (Dweck, 2007, p. 37).

Using process praise supports student's belief in themselves and their ability to learn as opposed to making them feel that praise means they are smart. To help students learn to believe in their ability, teachers must use and teach children how to value the process that leads students to learn new things (Dweck, 2007, p. 38). Teachers should also teach students about tools, strategies, and expectations for learning that they can use to support themselves in the classroom (Cheska, 2017, p. 19). Cheska (2017) said that as a teacher, "you should emphasize process rather than correct answers. By focusing on process, students understand that their abilities can grow with practice and effort" (p. 19).

Classroom learning community. Creating a positive classroom learning community is a key part of creating a classroom geared toward the growth mindset. “In this environment, everyone has something to offer, empathy is a core value, and collaboration, not competition, is heralded as the way to success” (Brock & Hundley, 2017, p. 113). One of the key components of creating a positive learning environment includes building teacher-student relationships where students feel safe and respect their teacher. In these environments, teachers aim to support students and value students relationships even if a student makes a mistake academically or emotionally (Brock & Hundley, 2017, Growth-Oriented Student-Teacher Relationships section, para. 6).

In a learning community, students also feel safe with their teacher and know that their teacher values effort and growth over academic grades (Brock & Hundley, 2017, Growth-Oriented Student-Teacher Relationships section, para. 4). This is important because a teacher’s job is to help students grow and learn. Walton and Cohen (2011) stated “Children’s sense of social belonging, including the quality of their relationships with students and teachers, is linked to long-term motivation and school success” (as cited in Boylan, Barblett, & Knaus, 2018, p. 18). This is important for teachers to remember as they support students.

One last component of a learning community is that students work together instead of competing . Students that collaborate build relationships, listen to the thoughts of others, are more truthful, and are more willing to take risks that might lead to failure (Brock & Hundley, 2016, p. 112). These conditions are indicative of the growth mindset. On building this type of community, Brock and Hundley (2016) stated, “If they (students)

don't feel supported or feel self-conscious in their academic endeavors, students are less likely to tackle new challenges and take risks in their learning" (p. 113).

Growth mindset language summary. In this section, I discussed the facets of growth mindset language. I talked about the key components of growth mindset language and how teachers can use this language as they give growth-oriented feedback. I also discussed the learning community and how this can help support a growth mindset classroom. All this information will help to inform my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?*

In the next section, I will talk about the social-emotional development of children ages 4-6. This will include information about the skills of social-emotional development at this age and how a child's self-concept and beliefs affect their perception of themselves. I will also discuss the social-emotional adjustment of starting Kindergarten.

Social-Emotional Development Ages 4-6

Social-Emotional development is at an important point as kids are getting ready to start Kindergarten. There is a delicate period of time in the first five years of a child's life that their brain is developing and taking in all kinds of influences (Jensen, 2005, p. 41). Social-Emotional skills at this age include self-regulation, self-control, and understanding emotions. These skills are crucial for students to understand and practice as they begin Kindergarten. "Success at school involves both social-emotional and cognitive skills because readiness for learning is affected by social learning, attention, and self-control" (Boylan, Barblett, & Knaus, 2018, p. 18). Social-emotional skills support students as they

start school. Dweck believed that mindset, social belonging, self-regulation, self-control, and resilience all promote long-term learning and motivation (as cited in Boylan, Barblett, & Knaus, 2018, p. 18) These skills are not learned automatically and need to be explicitly taught to students in all places they have contact with (Bouffard, 2017, p. 22).

Social-emotional skills ages 4-6. There are some social-emotional skills kids learn and need as they start Kindergarten. “Decades of research show that children who have stronger social and emotional skills are more likely to succeed in school in early childhood and beyond” (Bouffard, 2017, p. 22). One such skill that supports students is self-regulation. Self-regulation is a key skill for young children who are starting school. “Children with strong self-regulation skills are more successful in school because they are more focused and well behaved and have better relationships with both teachers and peers” (Bouffard, 2017, p. 106).

Another important skill for young students is self-control. This skill is what supports students as they listen, follow directions, raise their hand to speak, and keep their hands to themselves (Bouffard, 2017, p. 106). Without these skills, it is difficult for students to focus and succeed in the classroom. It is also difficult for teachers to teach when these skills are not present (Bouffard, 2017, p. 165).

One last skill that is important in the social-emotional realm of young children is understanding and appropriately using emotions to promote relationships. Social belonging and relationships are key factors linked to long-term success at school (Boylan, Barblett, & Knaus, 2018, p. 18). This includes the ability to understand one’s own emotions, as well as those of others. Key skills in this category include reading and

understanding emotions, managing strong emotions, and learning empathy. Because students have to develop the ability to use and read emotions, this skill can impact a child's ability to make and keep friends (Bouffard, 2017, p. 22). Self-concept can play a part in this.

Self-concept and beliefs of 4-6 year olds. The self-concept of young children is important to understand as they start school. This concept directly relates to a student's mindset. "The development of non-cognitive skills like mindset are essential to encourage agency and promote long-term learning and achievement" (Boylan, Barblett, & Knaus, 2018, p. 22). Self-concept in young children includes both academic and emotional elements that they use to judge themselves (Zafiropoulou, Sotiriou, & Mitsioli, 2007, p. 1313). As students start Kindergarten, they are coming in with beliefs about themselves that they have constructed from their experiences and messages they have received from others (Zafiropoulou, Sotiriou, & Mitsioli, 2007, p. 1316). One unique thing about students at this age is that they are generally positive about themselves due to the lack of life experiences that might lead them to think otherwise (Zafiropoulou, Sotiriou, & Mitsioli, 2007, p. 1315). However, there are some influences that can lead them to change their self-concept.

From a young age, children form many of the beliefs they have about themselves based on the influence of parents and other caregivers (Gunderson et al., 2013, p, 1526). According to Dweck (2006), "Parents' praise molds their children's mindsets.... Every word and action from parent to child sends a message" (p. 119). It is important for parents to learn the value of process praise. As opposed to person praise, which implies

that ability is a fixed trait, process praise implies that ability is changeable and is supported by effort (Gunderson et al., 2013, p. 1528). “Always praise a child’s willingness to try, effort, patience, and practice. Do not attribute success to ‘being smart’ or ‘being the best’ but to hard work and perseverance” (Ricci, 2013, Use Growth Mindset Praise section, para. 1).

On the opposite end of this spectrum, Haimovitz and Dweck (2017) did a study to see how parents’ view of failure can influence the mindset of their children. Parents were required to fill out surveys about their view of failure. Their children’s mindsets were also assessed. They found that parents who perceive failure as an incapacitating occurrence have children who believe their intelligence is fixed (p. 867). They believed that this may be because parents reaction to failure is more visible to children than their ideas about intelligence (p. 860).

One last factor to address involving students starting Kindergarten is the social-emotional adjust of starting formal schooling. “Early school transitions, such as the transition from preschool to Kindergarten, are particularly important because the attitudes and reputations that may be established at the outset of grade school may follow children through many years of formal schooling” (Ladd & Price, 1987, p. 1169). Children who have had prior school experience and experience working and playing with peers tend to have better attitudes about starting Kindergarten and have less anxiety (Ladd & Price, 1987, p. 1186). “Children with considerable preschool experience may well have mastered tasks such as separating from parents, accepting the teacher’s authority, meeting new peers, and negotiating group settings” (Ladd & Price, 1987, p. 1171). Because these

students have had exposure to the school environment, they do not have as many social-emotional demands as they start school (Ladd & Price, 1987, p. 1171).

Social-emotional development summary. In this section, I outlined the social-emotional development of 4-6 year olds. I explored the skills that kids of this age have and are working on, as well as how these students perceive themselves and their intelligence. Last, I touched on the social-emotional adjustment of transitioning from preschool to Kindergarten.

In the next section, I will discuss emergent literacy. I will outline the components of emergent literacy and how these are supported by student experiences prior to Kindergarten including parent support and pre-K experiences. I will also mention some other factors that contribute to literacy success in Kindergarten including parent-teacher communication and reader self-concept.

Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy is one of the early stages of reading development that typically starts in preschool and continues through the first part of Kindergarten. This stage of development is crucial in the reading process. There has been much research on this stage of development. Connections have been made between letter knowledge and success in reading as this skill predicts later reading success (Skibbe, Connor, Morrison, & Jewkes, 2007, p. 43). Much of this work is established in the emergent stage of literacy development

Components of emergent literacy. According to Gambrell and Morrow (2015), “Key foundational skills for emergent readers include print concepts, phonological

awareness, phonics and other word recognition strategies, and fluency” (p. 90). Two that are of most importance as students start school are phonological awareness and phonics. These skills will give them the building blocks for success as they begin to read.

Phonological awareness includes the ability to hear individual words in the context of language, as well as sounds in words. This also includes the ability to recognize syllables and rhymes (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p. 90). A key piece of phonological awareness for young children is phonemic awareness. This “refers to the ability to hear and manipulate the smallest units of sounds in the English language: phonemes” (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p. 90). These auditory skills support students as they begin the process of becoming readers. According to Nichols, Rupley, Rickelman, and Algozzine (2004), “Once readers acquire the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words, word recognition is then typically characterized as being capacity free, enabling the reader to focus on getting meaning” (p. 58). Some skills in this area include isolating beginning, middle, or end sounds in words and oral rhyming.

Phonics refers to matching letters correctly to sounds. This includes the skills of letter recognition and understanding the sounds that letters make (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015, p. 90). Some skills under this umbrella include letter sorts and matching upper and lowercase letters. As students master this foundational skill they can learn to decode words, which has continuing as kids get to intermediate grades (p. 170). As students become proficient in phonics skills, they can learn to read sight words and work on fluency, which will support them as a reader.

Literacy experiences prior to kindergarten. Preschool is an important stepping stone for students to learn beginning reading skills. Participating in early learning is an indicator for success in school. The brain matures quickly during the pre-K years especially when doing activities that support learning (Bouffard, 2017, p. 5). Gambrell and Morrow (2015) said, “helping young children to develop listening and speaking skills is one of the most important jobs of early childhood educators” (p. 92). Vocabulary development, especially through reading books to children, is a predictor of building vocabulary that pre-K students need to become readers (p. 93). Bouffard (2017) stated:

There is largely agreement about the importance of teaching preschoolers to identify letters and build some of the precursors to reading, like rhyming. Studies show that children who know at least ten letters in pre-K are usually on course to reading well in second grade. Another strong predictor of elementary reading is whether preschoolers know the sounds that letters make. (p. 134)

Overall, pre-K should make learning about reading and practicing language fun, while building skills that will support students as they start school (p. 146).

Parents also play a key role in helping students learn the foundations of emergent literacy. One key way that parents can support young children is through reading and talking about books with their kids from a young age (Bouffard, 2017, p. 142). Sénéchal and LeFevre (2014) believed that shared reading between parent and child predicts a strong vocabulary in Kindergarten (p. 1565). They stated that setting up a home literacy environment is, “consistent with the idea that what parents do at home matters” (p. 1563). In support of this, Whitehurst et al. (1994) believed that parents participating in literacy

with children at home supports a relationship between learning to read and comprehension (as cited in Yarosz & Barnett, 2001, p. 68). They also said that at home, “Shared reading and sound and letter recognition (preschool literacy activities) are related to emergent literacy abilities (such as language use, writing, linguistic awareness, and print concepts)” (p. 68).

Other factors that contribute to kindergarten literacy success. Besides the work that is done prior to Kindergarten, there are many things that can be done during the Kindergarten year to help support literacy success. One of these factors is developing a parent-teacher relationship. Brock and Hundley (2016) stated, “There’s no question parental involvement in a student’s education has positive effects” (Building Positive Relationships with Parents section, para. 1). Teachers should take the time to help parents understand what their child is learning and how they can support them at home. Doing so can make a big difference in the success of students (Strategies for Communicating with Parents section, para. 1). Strategies could include meeting with parents, emailing, providing newsletters, and sending activities home that they can use to support their students.

Another factor that can support Kindergarten success is building student self-concept in reading. In the previous section about social-emotional development, self-concept was addressed in terms of how students perceive themselves. It is important to note that self-concept in reading is also significant in supporting Kindergarten reading success. Walgermo, Frijters, and Solheim (2018) did a study on self-concept in emergent readers. In this study, they had students self-report on how they were feeling about

themselves as readers, specifically at the beginning of formal reading instruction in their first year of school (p. 92). In their findings, they discovered that students starting school all had a high interest in literacy, but those with poor skills had a lower self-concept than other peers. They also found that those with the strongest interest in reading had a high self-concept in reading, regardless of their actual ability (p. 96). According to Wigfield and Cambria (2010), those with high interest in reading are more likely to be more motivated and competent in reading in the future (as cited in Walgermo, Frijters, & Solheim, 2018, p. 97). In support of this, Ames (1992) believed that learning to read is one of the most important things that students learn to do in early school years. The longer students are in school, the more awareness they have of themselves as readers in comparison with peers. Any failures they have in reading can harm their reading self-concept (as cited in Walgermo, Frijters, & Solheim, 2018, p. 90). These ideas support the need to encourage students in adopting a growth mindset in their literacy ability (p. 98).

Emergent literacy summary. In this section, I discussed the foundations of emergent literacy skills. I also, discussed the implications of early literacy practice in pre-K and the home environment. Last, I discussed factors that contribute to emergent literacy skills and success in Kindergarten including parent-teacher relationships and reader self-concept.

In the next section, I will discuss my rationale for my research. I will explain how the research I have presented supports my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* I

will explain the key takeaways I have from the research I have laid out. I will also discuss how thinking about these things will support me as I work with my students and begin conducting my own research.

Rationale for Research

I have shared research findings about growth mindset, growth mindset language, social-emotional development ages 4-6, and emergent literacy. All of these topics inform my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* I will keep this information at the forefront of my mind as I begin to plan and conduct my own research.

There are a few key components I take away from this research that will support my own research in my classroom. First, I need to remember the key components of the growth mindset and practice using the growth mindset feedback explained in chapter two. From this, I will specifically be using process praise with my students instead of person praise from the start of the school year. Language related to the growth mindset is a cornerstone of my thesis work, so using the correct type of feedback with students will be imperative.

Next, I want to keep in mind the social-emotional needs of my students. In particular, I want to pay attention to their self-concept and whether it seems more in line with the growth or fixed mindset. After reading all the research, I also realize that previous experiences are going to impact my students as they begin their Kindergarten year. This will also include making sure I set up a safe learning environment in which my

students feel comfortable with both me and their peers. Keeping these factors in mind will support the work I do in my own research.

Last, I will spend the beginning of the school year getting to know my students as literacy learners. From the research I presented, I know that focusing on phonological awareness and phonics will support my students as they start their emergent literacy journey. I will also think about how my students perceive themselves as literacy learners, making up their reading self-concept. This may impact them as they learn new literacy skills. All of these factors together will support the work I do in my classroom exploring the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?*

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed research that has been done that will support my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* In my first section, I described the growth mindset and defined the key terms: growth mindset and fixed mindset. I also explored mindsets in the classroom and how this can impact how students and teachers perceive experiences. I also talked about the signs of a false growth mindset and how the field of positive psychology relates to the growth mindset.

In the second section, I presented the components of growth mindset language, specifically in relation to the classroom. I also talked about the best strategies for teachers to use when giving growth mindset feedback to students. Last, I discussed the importance

of the classroom learning community, and how to best support building relationships in the classroom environment.

In the third section, I discussed the social-emotional development of students ages 4-6. Specifically, I mentioned skills students need to support learning at this age, including self-regulation, self-control, and the ability to use and understand emotions. I also presented information about the self-concept of students at this age. This included information about how parents impact student self-concept at a young age and how self-concept relates to mindset.

In my last section, I discussed emergent literacy. I began with information about the skills related to emergent literacy, namely phonological awareness and phonics. I also showed how early literacy experiences in pre-K and at home impact the literacy ability of children starting Kindergarten. Last, I presented other factors that can support literacy success. These included strong relationships between parents and teachers and student self-concept in reading.

Chapter three, introduces methods for the research I will conduct to support my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* This section begins by presenting information about the research paradigm chosen, the setting of my research study, and participants in my research study. Next, chapter three continues with my procedures for research and presents the tools I will use to collect my data. I will also provide information about when my research will be conducted and how I will be using this time to collect data. Ethical considerations and data analysis methods will also be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The growth mindset concept is at the center of my research. In the concept of mindsets, Dweck (2006) said, “You have a choice. Mindsets are just beliefs. They’re powerful beliefs, but they’re just something in your mind, and you can change your mind” (p. 16). This is a concept I will model to my Kindergarten students. Kindergarten is a great time to introduce these concepts as students start the process of formal schooling.

Chapter three explains the pieces of my research process. The research process is discussed along with the research paradigm I have chosen and why it is the best fit for my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students’ beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* Also discussed is the main components of my research.

The next portion introduces the setting of my research. This is followed with information about the participants that will take part in my research. Also discussed are the procedures used to complete the research process, including timing and frequency. This is followed by the ethical considerations of my study. Then the tools used to complete my research will be introduced. This section also explains how this information will be used to analyze my data after my research is complete.

Research Paradigm and Methods

I have decided to use qualitative methods of research to support my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* In qualitative method, a researcher explores a question collecting data such as observations and interviews. This method is an interpretive approach to research and requires the researcher to spend a sustained amount of time with participants in the study (Creswell, 2018, pp. 181-183). It occurs in a setting where behavior can be studied naturally by the researcher, who acts as the most significant instrument for data collection (pp. 204-205). The researcher is responsible for making sure they focus on participants and do their best not bring their bias into the data collecting process (p. 182). The more time the researcher can spend in the field, the more accurate their findings will be.

The qualitative method fits my research question well because I will be spending every day of the school week with my participants during my study. "This up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2018, p. 181). I will also be interviewing students at the beginning and end of my research to see if their feelings toward literacy change over time. In qualitative research, interviews and other open-ended data help the researcher analyze their research and make conclusions (Creswell, 2018, p. 181).

The Constructivist worldview lends itself well to my research. In this worldview, "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell,

2018, p. 8). My research focused on the participants in my study and how they made meaning. The meaning my participants made was influenced by their interactions with others and the context of the classroom. The meaning I created when analyzing data was based on the data I collected in my study.

Setting

The setting of my research was in the elementary school where I work. It is located in the Twin Cities metro area. The school had approximately 480 students ranging from pre K to fifth grade. The population is 12% white, 24% black, 7% mixed race, 7% Asian, 48% Hispanic/Latino, and less than 1% American Indian or Pacific Islander. Of this population, 12.9% participated in Special Education, 47.2% are ELL, and 80.6% received free and reduced price lunch. There was also 2% of students that were homeless. In 2018, 22.4% of students who took the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) were proficient.

In my school, there were 41 teachers of which 74% have degrees beyond a bachelor's degree. This school received Title I services to support students who struggled in reading or math.

Participants

The participants in my research study were my Kindergarten students. They were all be between five and six years old at the beginning of my study. I had 11 students. Six of them were girls and five of them were boys. I had one student receiving special education services, and four receiving Title I services in reading and/or math. All students participated in my study with approval from their parents.

Procedures

My research took place in the fall of 2019. I did my study for four weeks.. At the very beginning of my study, I interviewed each participant individually using the interview questions in Appendix A. Students rated their feelings about reading by pointing at the picture that best described how they felt. This picture scale was adapted from one that I discovered in my research process. In the scale explanation, McKenna and Kear said, “A pictorial format was elected because of its natural appeal for children and because of its comprehensibility by the very young” (1990, p. 627). This is one of the reasons I chose to adapt this scale for use in Kindergarten.

During this same time, I used growth mindset language with students. This included the way I interacted with students when they asked and answered questions whole group as well as when I was giving them individual feedback. Along with this, I taught students about the growth mindset and what it means. This included the use of process praise as opposed to person praise. For example, when a student asked if I like their work, I said, “You should be proud of your work” or “What do you like about your work?” as opposed to “good job” or “I am proud of you.” The purpose was to get students to think about and be proud of the process they were using to try something or to answer a question versus praising the student as a person for being smart and only putting value on having the right answer.

The first week of my study was spent conducting interviews with students to get to know them and get some baseline data for my research. Then I started implementing growth mindset language. Once I finished preliminary interviews, I taught students about

the key vocabulary of growth mindset language. This included terms such as growth mindset, fixed mindset, the concept of not yet, and the importance of the process over the outcome.

My observations took place during the literacy block as students were learning about and practicing literacy skills. These observations consisted of me taking notes about student literacy behaviors. I did observations once a week throughout the rest of my study. My observations were during whole group and independent practice times.

The last week of my study I interviewed students again and gave them the rating scale. I used these answers to help me see progress over time related to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* I then looked at all the data I collected and analyzed it for patterns.

Ethical Considerations

For my research, I considered what was best for the participants in my study. The students I worked with were in my classroom, and the work I did was about the language I used in my classroom. This change in language had the possibility to help students with no negative effects. Although I knew the names of all my participants, it was my responsibility to protect their identities. Therefore, any names used in my analysis and findings were changed to numbers. Before beginning my research, I received written consent from the parents of my students, as well as approval from my principal. I also got approval from Hamline's Institutional Review Board before any research began.

Research Tools

In my study, I used two tools to assess student progress related to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* I selected my data tools based on my question and the age level of the participants in my study. These tools helped me find patterns and see results over time.

The first tool I used was an interview with participants where they looked at a rating scale and showed me how they felt about their literacy ability (see Appendix A). This interview helped me understand student thoughts and feelings toward themselves as literacy learners. The purpose of the survey was to understand student feelings toward reading without having to verbalize. Giving clear and elaborate answers can be difficult for five and six year olds, so this helped me balance what students said with what they felt. This rating scale was also be given at the end of my study.

The second tool I used was observation. This tool helped me see student thinking in action. Observations of students took place during the literacy block and focused on observing student beliefs about literacy. I used my observations along with my interviews and surveys to make connections and conclusions related to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?*

Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis step of research focused on generating themes and making conclusions about my data. This step started out with sorting through my data and

discarding any information that seemed irrelevant to my study. As this step took place, organizing data for analysis occurred. Once the data was organized, I started sorting through the data to look for themes among the information I had collected from the interviews and observations. In particular, I used interview data to look for individual student growth over time and compare growth to other students. The rating scale used was a way to see progress in feelings and beliefs about reading over time to help generate themes. From this data, overall themes and ideas were grouped together to help support making some conclusions. I then summarized my findings and considered limitations and future research.

Chapter Summary

In chapter three I discussed all the factors related to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* At the beginning of the chapter, I talked about my research paradigm and why qualitative research is a good choice for my study. Then I discussed the setting of my study and the participants that will be a part of it.

The next section discussed the procedures and ethical considerations of my study. This was followed by a discussion of the tools used for research in my study and the data analysis that will take place at the end of the study.

Chapter four, discusses the results of my research related to the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* This chapter will focus on presenting the data that was collected in my

study as well as presenting themes that arose from the data. Synthesis of data and findings will also be present.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of my research related to the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* My research took place in fall 2019 in my Kindergarten classroom. There were eleven students in the study between the ages of five and six. I used a qualitative method that consisted of interviewing students at the beginning and end of the study and doing observations of students during classroom literacy time.

The chapter begins by describing the overall results of my study. Then it goes on to explain results related to specific student answers during the interview process at the beginning and end of the study. From there I describe the themes that arose from the data and how they connect to my literature review. I also discuss surprising results from the data.

Results

At the beginning and end of my study, I did an interview with students where students rated their feelings about literacy by pointing to a picture that represented their feelings related to the question (Appendix A). This scale was based on a format created by McKenna and Kear and is used to help me demonstrate growth toward my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* The full results of the interview process are in Figure 1.

The scale was scored from 1 point (low) to 4 points (high). There were a total of fourteen questions, with an overall possible score of 56.

		Student number
1	4	1. How do you feel about listening to the teacher read aloud in class?
2	4	
3	1	2. How do you feel about reading a book by yourself?
4	4	
5	4	3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?
6	4	
7	4	4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?
8	4	
9	4	5. How do you feel about reading the words in a book?
10	4	
11	4	6. How do you feel about starting a new book?
12	4	
13	3	7. How do you feel about someone reading a book to you?
14	4	
15	4	8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
16	4	
17	3	9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?
18	4	
19	2	10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?
20	4	
21	3	11. How do you feel about looking at the pictures in books?
22	4	
23	4	12. How do you feel about reading in school?
24	4	
25	1	13. How do you feel about learning from a book?
26	4	
27	3	14. How do you feel when it is time for reading in class?
28	3	
29	4	Total score
30	4	
31	4	Total score
32	4	
33	4	Total score
34	4	
35	4	Total score
36	4	
37	4	Total score
38	4	
39	4	Total score
40	4	
41	4	Total score
42	4	
43	4	Total score
44	4	
45	4	Total score
46	4	
47	4	Total score
48	4	
49	4	Total score
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87	4	Total score
88	4	
89	4	Total score
90	4	
91	4	Total score
92	4	
93	4	Total score
94	4	
95	4	Total score
96	4	
97	4	Total score
98	4	
99	4	Total score
100	4	

Figure 1. Interview results for beginning and end of the research study.

My study also consisted of observing students during the literacy block each week. I took notes on growth mindset language that students used and the ways I saw them grow during the observation period. All notes were taken during guided reading groups and independent work time.

Interview results. From an outside glance, the data looks very discrepant. Before the study began, I knew that it would be difficult to get consistent data from young children, and chose a simple interview to get the best data possible. In the scale explanation, McKenna and Kear said, “A pictorial format was elected because of its natural appeal for children and because of its comprehensibility by the very young” (1990, p. 627). Based on the data, many students scores went down from the first interview to the second. I attribute this to the age of the students and their ability to comprehend the questions and corresponding pictures. For example, student nine had an overall score of 38 during the first interview, but a score of 21 during the second. This seems discouraging from the outside, but based on observations of student nine, I saw great growth. This student said, “I’m proud of my project” and, “I tried my best and that’s all I can do.” These statements are indicators that this student is practicing the growth mindset.

Analysis of interview results. Contrary to the overall results, I saw much growth in specific students. I think it is important to mention that I have a very young class this year and as a result came into Kindergarten with very few age-appropriate skills related to listening and comprehension (Figure 2). It is also notable that one quarter of my class consists of English Language Learners for whom English is not their primary language at

home and of the students in the study, all but two receive free and reduced price lunch (Figure 3). Although this does not directly correlate to academic ability, in this case it is an indicator of lack of access to books and literacy practice at home for many of my students.

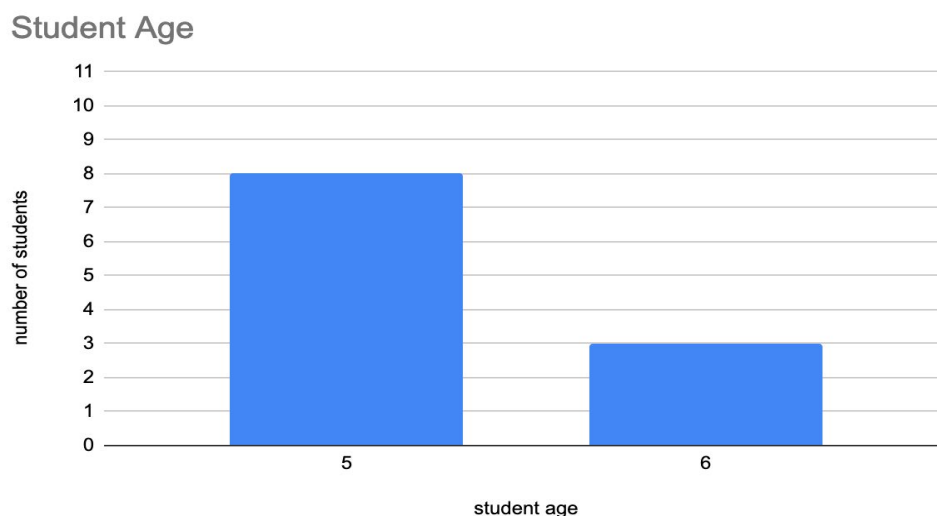


Figure 2. Ages of study participants.

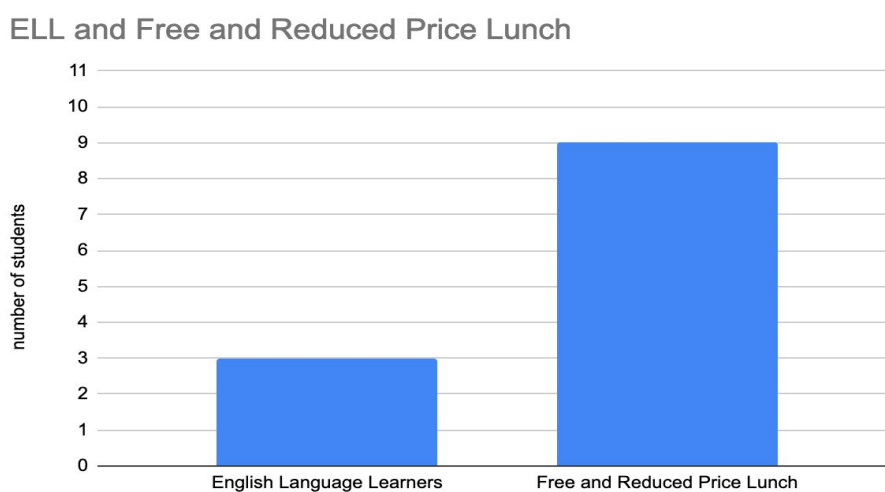


Figure 3. ELL and free and reduced price lunch status of study participants.

I have chosen some specific student's answers to some of the questions in the interview that demonstrate the growth they made over the course of the study related to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?*

One question I wanted to look more closely at from my interviews was question five which was How do you feel about reading the words in a book? I wanted to look specifically at this question because it deals with reading which is an activity young students typically lack confidence in and are just starting to work on in the fall of Kindergarten. Students one, three, and six had scores that went up from the beginning to the end of the study (Figure 4), but there were eight students total whose scores went up or stayed at the highest possible score.

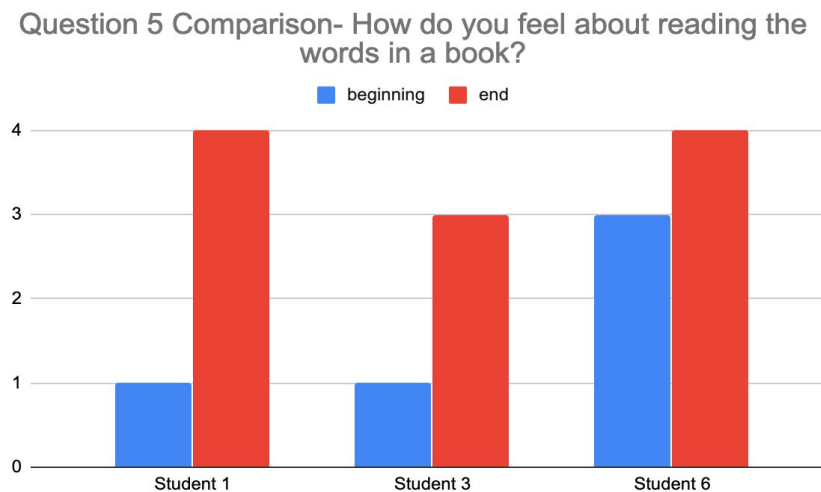


Figure 4. Question 5 student comparison of scores.

Students one, three, and six all came into the study as non-readers. Throughout the process they built up confidence that they could learn to read the words in a book. These

students made comments during my observations such as “I will try,” and “I never give up when reading is hard.” Their ending scores showed me that they truly believed they were capable of learning how to read.

Another question I wanted to look at in relation to my research question was question thirteen. This question read, How do you feel about learning from a book? I chose this question to analyze further because it addresses the belief that you can learn from reading. For this question, seven students scores went up or stayed at the highest score possible. The most notable students were students six and eleven. These students scores both went up by at least one point (Figure 5).

Question 13- How do you feel about learning from a book?

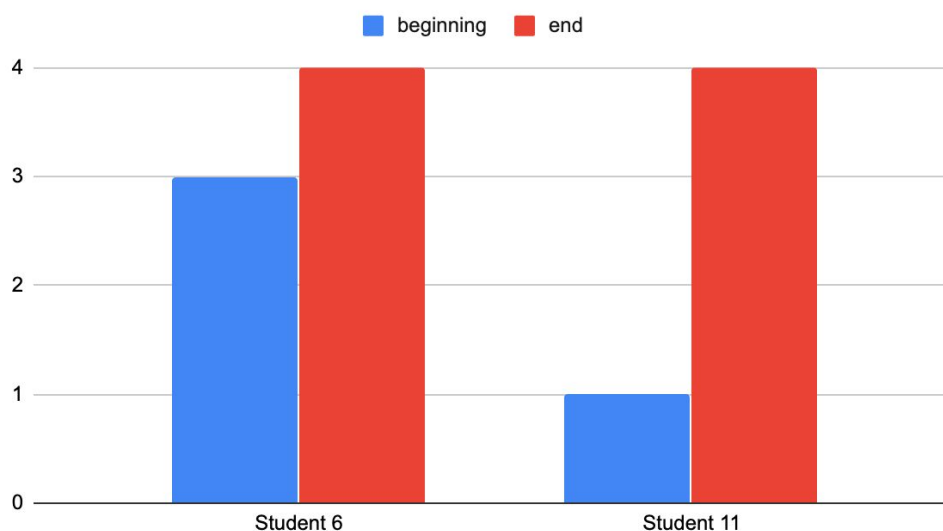


Figure 5. Question 13 student comparison of scores.

These students both exhibited growth that demonstrates they are learning the growth mindset. Student six and eleven started Kindergarten with no preschool experience. They

had minimal knowledge of what school is about and did not know any literacy concepts such as letters, sounds, or how to even look at a book. Student eleven made a significant jump over the course of the study from a score of one to four. This student told me during one of my observations that she knows how to learn now because learning means you keep trying until you get it right. She also told me that learning is like riding a bike because you can't get better unless you practice. Student six showed great resilience during many of my observations when he kept trying to read the words in his book even when he continually got them wrong.

The last question I wanted to analyze was question fourteen. This question read, How do you feel when it is time for reading in class? For this question, eight students scores stayed the same or better. Students four, six, and nine had increases in their scores (Figure 6).

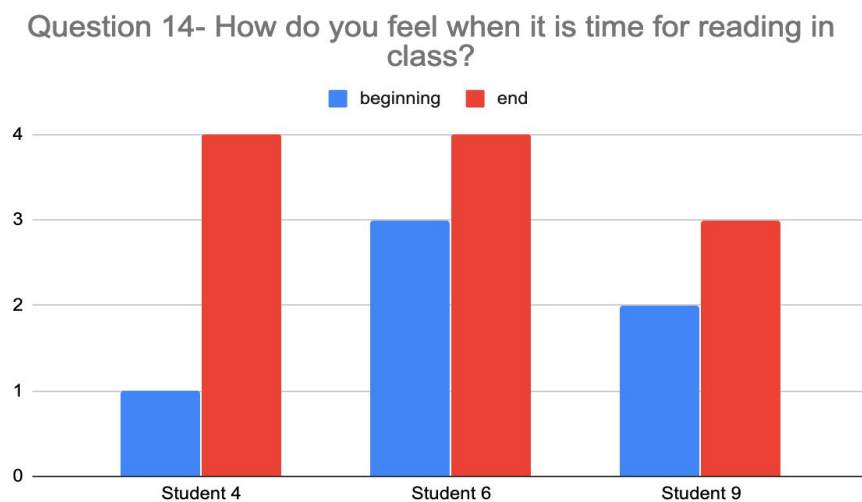


Figure 6. Question 14 student comparison of scores.

These three students demonstrated a key component of the growth mindset which is the power of the term “not yet.” Even though these students struggled with literacy concepts and had many failures, they all kept trying and made progress in their beliefs about literacy by the end of the study.

Based on the overall highest possible score of 56, six students scores went up throughout the course of my study. Of these students, three scored a 56 on the final assessment. One student, student six, was of particular interest to me when looking at overall findings of my interviews based on my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?*

Student six is a student that entered the school year with no pre school experience and no early literacy skills. As mentioned in my literature review, Walgermo, Frijters, and Solheim (2018) did a study on self-concept in emergent readers. In their findings, they discovered that students beginning school had high interest in literacy, but those with poor skills showed a lower self-concept than other peers (p. 96). Student six came in showing this to be true. This student had behavior issues as a result of his frustration with his inability to understand literacy concepts. Over the course of the study, student six showed great improvement with growth mindset concepts. Slowly I started to see him give up less frequently and say he would keep trying instead of just getting angry. Based on his overall results, he showed improvement or stayed consistent in each of the fourteen questions he was asked (Figure 7). His overall score went up by six points, giving him the highest score possible on the rating scale.

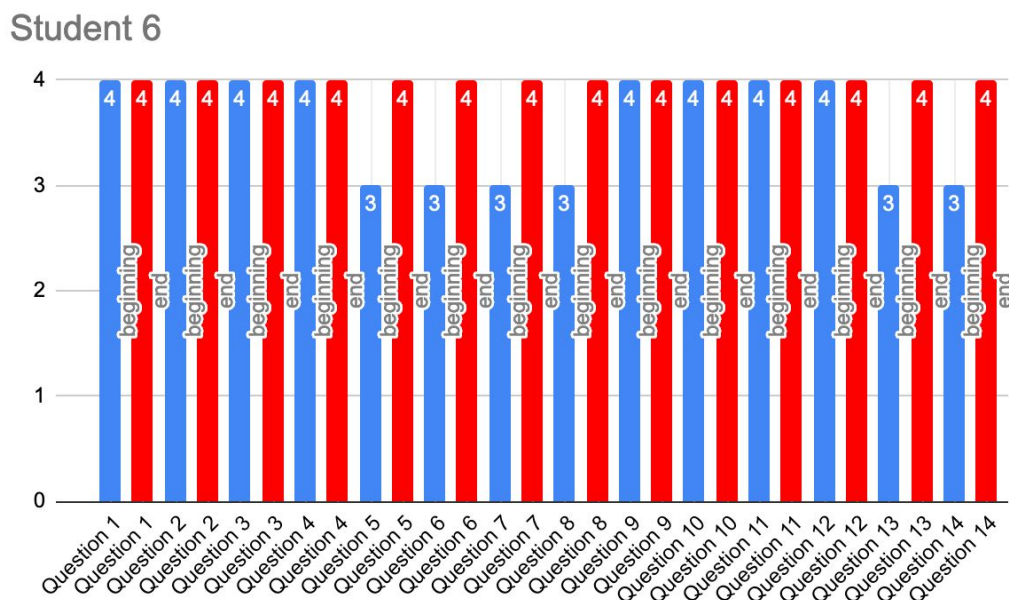


Figure 7. Student 6 comparison of scores from beginning and end of the research study.

Observation results. All of the students in my study showed progress in their literacy beliefs as a result of my study based on the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* From what I saw over the course of my study, all students were impacted in a positive way by the use of learning and using growth mindset language.

Each week of my study, I observed students during one independent work time and one guided reading group. I wanted to see if their language was different when they had teacher support versus when they were on their own doing literacy work. I heard students using growth mindset language at both times. For example, on multiple occasions student nine made mistakes in his work and said, "Oops, I made a mistake, but I'm not going to cry, I'm going to try it again." I heard this same thing in many forms

from other students. Student six said, “When I make a mistake, I say I just don’t know how to do it right, yet.” These quotes and many similar ones I heard reflect growth mindset language. They show that students are not afraid to make mistakes because they can learn from mistakes. These thoughts also show that students are resilient and can bounce back from difficulties they encounter.

Analysis of observation results. When I first began my study, there was one student that was using growth mindset language words without having been taught what it is. This was a student that had experience with literacy skills prior to kindergarten. The rest of my students were new to the concept, but caught on quickly. After teaching my students about what it means to try and get better with practice, there were many connections made. Some students talked about learning to ride a bike while other talked about learning to walk. Once they were able to make the connection to literacy, there was a plethora of times during each observation that students used the words “I’ll try” or “not yet.” There were also many times students told me they were proud of their work instead of leaning on me for assurance of their ability.

Overall findings. My observation results coincided a lot with my interview results. There was a strong correlation between higher self-ratings on the interview and positive self-talk and use of growth mindset language. For example, all students whose scores went up in question one and thirteen (which deal with listening to and reading books) exhibited positive literacy behaviors during observations relating to these areas. This was also true of students that had an increase in overall score on the assessment. Many of these students were observed not giving up during new and more difficult

literacy concepts. There were also things they said, such as, “I can read this book!” and “I don’t know how to read this word, but I will learn!”

Themes and Patterns

A few themes and patterns relating to my research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students’ beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* arose as I analyzed my data and compared it to my literature review. One was the correlation between emergent literacy practice and growth mindset language. The other was positive self-concept and the growth mindset.

The biggest theme I saw throughout my study was the correlation between student prior experience with literacy skills and their use of growth mindset language. In my literature review, there is a section on the impact of emergent literacy and preschool and home experiences that lead to student success. Knowing the background of the students in my study, I could see how this impacted my results. Students with little to no previous experience with emergent literacy tended to score lower on the interview questions than those with some knowledge on these. One good example of this was student eleven. Student eleven came in with no preschool experience and the lowest score on the interview rating scale, but her score went up by ten points over the course of the study. I attribute much of this to the confidence she built in her emergent literacy skills over time.

The other pattern I noticed was that of self-concept and its connection to growth mindset language. In my literature review I analyzed social-emotional development and how student self-concept is shaped at a young age. This self-concept is shaped by early experiences and the self-concept of students' parents. I have many students who came

into the study with a low self-concept in relation to their literacy skills. As soon as I started using growth mindset language in relation to literacy, I saw students start to try harder and not give up so easily when things were hard. When I started to teach students that the process of learning is more important than getting the right answer, they took some pressure off themselves to always be “right.”

The only data I noticed that surprised me was the overall scores at the end of my study. Based on my research, students in Kindergarten tend to have a positive self-concept because of their lack of experience with failure, but I did not find this to be completely true. I was hoping that all scores would go up on the interview questions by the end of the study, but many went down. Since I did see growth in all students based on observation, I attribute this to their young age as well as some lack of understanding because of their home language.

I found that my themes were especially prevalent because of the population involved in my study. When I first started planning my research study, the students in my class all came from a background where they all had preschool experience and literacy rich family environments. After a change in schools, the population of my class changed drastically. Most students in my study had little to no preschool experience or family support. A quarter of the students also did not speak English as a first language. I believe these factors impacted the conclusions I came to.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the results of my research study on the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in*

Kindergarten? It started out by discussing the results of my interview process. It then went on to analyze this data and give specific examples. Next, there was a discussion about the observations that were done throughout the study with some analyzing of results. Next, this chapter discussed the themes and patterns that came up from the results. These included the correlation between preschool experience and growth mindset as well as self-concept and the growth mindset.

Chapter five will discuss the conclusions that were made based on my study results. It begins with a discussion of the major learnings of my research study: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* Then it will talk about the influences that the literature review had on my research process. Then connections from the literature review to the data will be presented. The implications and limitations of my study will also be discussed. This will be followed by ideas for future research projects and how the results of the study can be used in my classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter begins with the major learnings I had as a result of conducting this research study on the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* It will then talk about the influences that the literature review had on my research process and make connections from the literature review to the data. In the next section, the implications and limitations of my study will be presented. It will end with ideas for future research projects and how the results of the study can be used in my classroom.

Major Learnings

I learned a lot through the process of researching, planning, and conducting this study based on the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* The research process for the literature review gave me many new insights into the topic of the growth mindset that I did not understand before. Finding specific information that relates to the age group I work with helped support me as a teacher. Learning more about social-emotional and academic development of young children gave me a broader understanding of my students. The research I did about literacy experiences prior to Kindergarten and the impact home life can have on students also made me more aware of what feelings my students bring with them into the classroom.

Conducting the research study portion of my capstone was a fun and informative experience for me. I do not always have an opportunity to meet with students one on one to talk about how they feel about literacy concepts. I found this to give me much insight into the feelings of my students and the experiences they have previously had in literacy. Observations helped me see how resilient young children can be and how they can adapt to positive thinking quite quickly. It is encouraging for me to see this as a teacher.

When I first started to plan this study, I was working with a population of students where most students had access to preschool and came in understanding basic emergent literacy concepts. At the time of my study, the population of students I worked with came from families that could not afford to send their kids to preschool and did not teach emergent literacy concepts at home. This impacted my study and helped me understand my findings in a way I did not expect. I did not realize when I began my study how big of an impact previous experience with literacy and growth mindset would have on my data and findings.

Literature review influences. There were two big parts of the literature review that proved to be most important for my capstone work. The first was the section and research about self-concept of 4-6 year olds. This proved to be important because I was better able to understand the minds of my students and what is age-appropriate for them in terms of growth mindset ideas. It also was important because it helped me understand the population of my students better in light of the results of my study.

Another part of the literature review that impacted me the most was the section on emergent literacy of young students. This gave me a better understanding of literacy

concepts that could be used to illustrate the findings in my study. It also gave me a lot of insight into the effect that pre-kindergarten school and literacy experiences can have on a child in Kindergarten.

Of all the sources I used in my study, there were two authors that impacted my research the most in a positive way. The first was Carol Dweck. She is a leading researcher in the concept of growth mindset. Reading her book on mindset helped my research more than any other source. Her book also impacted me as a teacher and a person in a positive way. The growth mindset can have a positive influence on anyone that adopts it.

The other author that impacted me the most was Mary Cay Ricci. Her works, based specifically on growth mindset and children, showed me the power of the growth mindset can have on children starting at a young age. Her books helped me decide on the research question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* Her books made me believe in the power of a growth mindset for helping students succeed in school and beyond.

Connections and data. For me, this research study could not have come at a better time. As I stated previously, the population of my study was not what I originally expected it to be. As I was writing my literature review with my previous work environment in mind, much of the information on preschool experience and growth mindset seemed like it was not a big deal since my students all came in with preschool experiences. After my student population changed, I realized how important previous

experiences with school and growth mindset can be to a student's Kindergarten experience.

In looking back on my data, I feel it is in agreement with the findings of my literature review. I saw first hand how important school experiences and home environment are to a child's growth mindset in relation to literacy skills. I also quickly saw how powerful modeling the growth mindset to students could be for them. I was amazed at the resilience and positive self-talk I saw from students as a result of the words I used and the questions I asked them. I quickly saw process praise as a tool that helped students build up their belief in themselves.

Implications and Limitations of Study

There are a few implications and limitations from this research study based on the question: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their literacy ability in Kindergarten?* First of all, it is important to note that this study showed that the growth mindset can be learned with practice and modeling. By setting up an environment that fostered positive self beliefs in academic ability, students started to believe that they were capable of doing things that seemed difficult to them. It is also important to note that using process praise as opposed to person praise helped students understand the value of trying things over always wanting to have the "right" answer.

One of the limitations of the study was the time constraint. Four weeks was not nearly enough time to fully see the benefits of using the growth mindset with students. Doing a much longer study would help to show growth over time and the long term impacts of adopting a growth mindset. The growth mindset can not be adopted

overnight, so a study over months or years could show the true impact that the growth mindset can have.

The other limitation that came to mind was getting real data from young children. With students not understanding all the interview questions and just pointing to their answer without necessarily thinking about the question, the data was inconsistent.

Future projects. Future research projects about the growth mindset could continue the work of understanding how growth mindset could impact academic growth. It would be interesting for future studies to add in data about academic growth over time and compare it to interviews and observation data. Other future research could also include background of students (preschool, home life, etc.) and see the correlation between that and the data showing progress toward a growth mindset.

Using results. The results of this study have and will continue to better inform my teaching. First, I feel like I have a better understanding of the mindset of my students as a result of my research. I will use this information to continue encouraging the growth mindset in students and foster a growth mindset in those still struggling to adopt this idea. I am also using the results of my interview questions to better teach each individual student. Those who are concerned about reading the words in books on their own or don't believe they know any literacy concepts we have learned will get extra encouragement in those areas.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of the major learnings from my research study: *How can using growth mindset language impact students' beliefs about their*

literacy ability in Kindergarten? This included the ways I grew as a teacher from this experience. The chapter then went on to talk about the influences that the literature review had on my research process. Then connections from the literature review to the data were discussed. In the next section, the implications and limitations of my study were presented. This was followed by ideas for future research projects. Last, this chapter discussed how the results of the study can be used in my classroom.

This research study gave a lot of insight into using the growth mindset with young children. I hope that it will be as beneficial to inform teaching strategies for others as it was for me. The growth mindset can be a powerful tool for children and adults of all ages both in the field of education and beyond. All it takes is the belief that you can do anything if you put your mind to it and never give up.

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Appendix A- modified Rating Scale from McKenna & Kear

Adapted from

McKenna, M. C., Kear, D. J. (1990) Measuring attitude toward reading: a new tool for teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 43(9), 626-639.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey Directions for use

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey provides a quick indication of student attitudes toward reading. It consists of 20 items and can be administered to an entire classroom in about 10 minutes. Each item presents a brief, simply worded statement about reading, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each pose is designed to depict a different emotional state, ranging from very positive to very negative.

Administration

Begin by telling students that you wish to find out how they feel about reading. Emphasize that this is *not* a test and that there are no "right" answers. Encourage sincerity.

Distribute the survey forms and, if you wish to monitor the attitudes of specific students, ask them to write their names in the space at the top. Hold up a copy of the survey so that the students can see the first page. Point to the picture of Garfield at the far left of the first item. Ask the students to look at this same picture on their own survey form. Discuss with them the mood Garfield seems to be in (very happy). Then move to the next picture and again discuss Garfield's mood (this time, a *little* happy). In the same way, move to the third and fourth pictures and talk about Garfield's moods—a little upset and very upset. It is helpful to point out the position of Garfield's *mouth*, especially in the middle two figures.

Explain that together you will read some statements about reading and that the students should think about how they feel about each statement. They should then circle the picture of Garfield that is closest to their own feelings. (Emphasize that the students should respond according to their own feelings, not as Garfield might respond!) Read each item aloud slowly and distinctly; then read it a second time while students are thinking. Be sure to read the item *number* and to remind students of page numbers when new pages are reached.

Scoring

To score the survey, count four points for each leftmost (happiest) Garfield circled, three for each slightly smiling Garfield, two for each mildly upset Garfield, and one point for each very upset (rightmost) Garfield. Three scores for each student can be obtained: the total for the first 10 items, the total for the second 10, and a composite total. The first half of the survey relates to attitude toward recreational reading; the second half relates to attitude toward academic aspects of reading.

Interpretation

You can interpret scores in two ways. One is to note informally where the score falls in regard to the four nodes of the scale. A total score of 50, for example, would fall about mid-way on the scale, between the slightly happy and slightly upset figures, therefore indicating a relatively indifferent overall attitude toward reading. The other approach is more formal. It involves converting the raw scores into percentile ranks by means of Table 1. Be sure to use the norms for the right grade level and to note the column headings (Rec = recreational reading, Aca = academic reading, Tot = total score). If you wish to determine the average percentile rank for your class, average the raw scores first; then use the table to locate the percentile rank corresponding to the raw score mean. Percentile ranks cannot be averaged directly.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

School _____ Grade _____ Name _____

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

1. How do you feel about listening to the teacher read aloud in class?



2. How do you feel about reading a book by yourself?



3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?



4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?



Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

5.

How do you feel about reading the words in a book?



6.

How do you feel about starting a new book?



7.

How do you feel about someone reading a book to you?



8.

How do you feel about reading instead of playing?



Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?



10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?



11. How do you feel about looking at the pictures in books?



12. How do you feel about reading in school?



Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

13.

How do you feel about learning from a book?



14.

How do you feel when it's time for reading in class?



Elementary Reading Attitude Survey Scoring Sheet

Student Name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Administration Date _____

Scoring Guide

4 points	Happiest Garfield
3 points	Slightly smiling Garfield
2 points	Mildly upset Garfield
1 point	Very upset Garfield

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

Score: _____