A Closer Look: How High School Principals' Perceptions About Teacher Mindset Impact Instructional Coaching

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A CLOSER LOOK: HOW HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TEACHER MINDSET IMPACT INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

by

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It is almost difficult to believe this 3 ½ year journey is nearing a finish. I have so many people that deserve my heartfelt gratitude and thanks for their unyielding support as I began this program and all the way up to the completion of this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

Author: Short, Heather, T. Ph.D.
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Title: A Closer Look: How High School Principals’ Perceptions about Teacher Mindset Impact Instructional Coaching
Committee Chair: Marilyn Hirth.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how high school principals’ perceptions about the teacher mindset affects how principals provide teachers with coaching and feedback. The research was conducted using the theoretical framework of phenomenology. Data was derived from interviews with two high school principals who have extensive experience in teacher evaluations and coaching. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and confirmed prior to the coding process and data analysis. The study found a link between principals’ perceptions of teacher mindset and the coaching that ensued. This study pointed to that when principals’ perception increases, coaching effectiveness can increase. When teachers receive more effective coaching, they become better at delivering instruction. Creating better teachers helps students learn more which ultimately leads to increased academic achievements of students. These results, when combined with existing and future literature, may help improve principals’ perception abilities and coaching effectiveness toward their teachers, which may ultimately enhance the schools’ academic outcomes.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers committed to continuous improvement through a cycle of coaching, feedback, and reflection can, and often do, ascend to the level of a master teacher. While some teachers have qualities that may transfer more readily to the field of education, growth and improvement in teaching may only occur with systematic instructional coaching. As the instructional leader of the school, the principal plays a key role in coaching teachers toward reaching their full potential and ultimately improving the academic outcomes for all students. The role of the principal has shifted dramatically in the past two decades from that of building manager to that of instructional leader. As shared by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), “A highly effective principal can increase his or her students’ scores up to ten percentile points on standardized tests in just one year” (p. 10). In addition, schools with the strongest gains in student achievement are led by principals who have a mentoring mindset and who create a climate based on trust and collaboration, thereby building a strong learning community (Schlechty, 2012).

While a mentoring mindset may help lead to positive improvements, it is only one facet of mindset theory. As developed by Carol Dweck (2006), mindset theory contends that a person’s natural approach to challenging situations can determine outcomes. A growth mindset individual is someone who embraces challenges, and even failures, seeing them as pathways to learning. Growth mindset individuals believe that intelligence can be developed and enhanced throughout one’s life. Opposite that are fixed mindset individuals, who are more likely to believe that intelligence is a static quality and often fear failure or become easily discouraged (Dweck, 2010b). While Dweck (2006) has demonstrated that a student’s mindset plays a significant role
in his or her academic achievement, additional research indicates mindset theory applies to pursuit outcomes throughout a person’s life.

Instructional leaders should be aware that teachers with a fixed mindset may think that asking for help or training to improve their teaching would be viewed as a weakness. Those with a fixed mindset may be fearful of not being perceived as the ‘smartest person in the room’ in front of their students. They may struggle or be reluctant to accept new challenges (Dweck, 2006). Growth mindset teachers need coaching too, but the format, structure, and conversations will likely look different. Teachers with a growth mindset may be more willing to try new approaches, but they too will need feedback. It is the job of the principal to recognize mindset differences and create a pathway to success for all teachers. The best principals help all teachers make “practical leaps from theory to everyday instruction” (Searby, 2013, p. 28).

Fullan (2008) argued that the climate of the educational environment is set by the principal. Teachers should have complete confidence in their principal’s ability to guide them to their highest professional level of teaching (Schlechty, 2012). “The effective teacher depends foremost on an effective principal. Without strong principal leadership, whole school achievement is rarely possible or sustainable” (Routman, 2012, p. 57).

Principals who understand mindset theory and apply it to instructional coaching have the potential to build a collaborative school climate that results in improved academic achievement (Zepeda, 2014). Hull (2012) has determined, “Effective principals are more likely to provide their teachers with the support and motivation they need to be effective teachers” (p. 3). Consequently, this study explores whether principals who have an awareness of mindset theory and apply it to their coaching experience greater success in teacher effectiveness.
Statement of the Problem

One of the most important roles for a principal is that of instructional coach for teachers. As Knight (2005) suggested “Instructional coaching is not a quick fix, but when it comes to creating an exemplary faculty, quick fixes are rarely the answer. Instructional coaching involves dedicated, persistent, meaningful collaboration among teachers, coaches, and principals” (p. 21). Effective principals build strong relationships with faculty and determine how to scaffold each teacher’s professional development. As a complement to Dweck’s (2006) findings on student mindset and academic outcomes, research by Gero (2013) indicated teacher mindset may be a significant variable on professional learning outcomes. Teachers with a fixed mindset may well have the same obstacles as students with a fixed mindset and attempt to avoid challenging scenarios (Dweck, 2006). Similarly, teachers with a growth mindset may be more open to trying various lessons and strategies. Teachers with a fixed mindset may thus need a different type of coaching than those with a growth mindset.

An instructional leader can recognize teacher mindset characteristics by observing how teachers behave and engage with those around them. There are hallmarks of fixed mindset, and those must be recognized by a principal. Gerstein (2015) noted that a teacher with a fixed mindset may be concerned that students would question his or her intelligence if a mistake is made, whereas a teacher with a growth mindset is less likely to choose activities that limit the possibility of mistakes. For this reason and others, teachers with a fixed mindset therefore need coaching that is articulated differently than for those with a growth mindset (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013). For example, a principal who has a group of teachers characterized by a growth mindset (willing to try anything and openly discuss victories and failures as part of the learning process) may be more
inclined to coach those teachers. In contrast, a principal with teachers who are rooted in the fixed mindset may steer away from the coaching aspect of instructional leadership.

Strickland (2012) stated that teachers with a fixed mindset may “make quick judgments with little evidence” and “tend not to provide enough practice for improvement” (p. 8). These teachers consider their effectiveness with a performance mentality: you are either gifted at teaching (high performer), or you are not (low performer). This mentality does not leave room, in their minds, for a gray area where a principal might coach them from good to great. A principal who is aware of mindset traits can structure feedback in such a way that fixed mindset teachers begin to break down the walls they have constructed to insulate themselves, and then become open to finding new and different ways to teach (Supovitz, 2010).

If, perhaps, the most important attribute of a teacher is mindset, then it could be argued that being able to identify teacher mindset and coach around it might be the most important attribute of a principal (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013). In light of the substantial changes in education today that are related to increased accountability, the way a coaching experience is perceived is highly important.

**Significance of the Study**

Expectations for principals have significantly increased over the past two decades. National standards for educational leaders are now a primary focus in leadership preparation programs for licensure. The changes in standards and expectations reflect the demand for principals to be accountable for school success and responsible for teacher evaluation and performance improvement.
This study is significant because it brings to the forefront the concept of instructional coaching through the lens of mindset theory. Much has been studied and researched related to student mindset and overall achievement, however, Dweck identified an ongoing gap in the research of leadership concepts relating to principals, and mindset theory (personal communication, October 15, 2014).

This phenomenological case study involved an examination of how principals approach teachers differently when they perceive one teacher to be of a growth mindset and the other to be of a fixed mindset.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether a connection may exist between a high school principal’s presumed mindset of a teacher and the coaching process. Through investigation, this study illustrates important differences in the coaching relationship. Teachers may come into their daily roles with a presupposition on student ability. Principals may come into their daily roles with a presupposition of a teacher’s mindset. If that is indeed the case, how does the principal’s perception alter the coaching relationship between a principal and a teacher? Dweck (2010a) stated that “students with a fixed mindset tend not to handle setbacks well. They believe setbacks call their intelligence into question, they become discouraged or defensive when they don’t succeed right away” (p. 18), which links to Gerstein’s (2015) synopsis that teachers with a fixed mindset may be concerned of their students’ perception of their intelligence. With this information, the principal needs to be able to offer coaching to fit this personality type. In 2015, Dweck stated:

It might be difficult for teachers to create contexts of growth for students if the teachers do not believe in growth for themselves and are not rewarded for their own growth. If teachers
have fixed mindsets about their own teaching ability, they are likely to be threatened by low-performing students (who are not responding to their current teaching methods) and may be tempted to blame the students or the students’ ability for their poor showing. If, however, teachers believe that their own skills can be developed, each student provides an opportunity for them to learn more about their craft. (p. 244)

**Research Question**

This study focused on the working relationship between principals and teachers, and how mindset impacts instructional coaching. It was designed to inform as to whether instructional coaching is impacted by perceived teacher mindset, as reflected in the primary research question below.

**Research Question: How does a principal’s preconceived idea about a teacher’s mindset influence how that teacher is coached by the principal?**

**Definition of Terms**

**Achievement/Student Results.**

Student achievement is measured in many ways, both in form and summation, as well as formally and informally. Achievement results are analyzed to determine areas that are considered relative highs or lows in the data. Frequently, these results are taken into consideration when professional development or coaching sessions are established.

**Efficacy.**

A teacher’s/principal’s efficacy is related to self-perceptions of effectiveness and overall potential to help create better student learning.
Evaluation/Observation.

Observations relate to either a formal or informal scenario where a principal watches a lesson or enters a classroom. Frequently, notes from principal observations are referenced in developing a teacher’s overall evaluation.

Feedback.

Feedback is the information shared with a teacher relating to instructional practices in the classroom. Feedback can take on a variety of formats: informal notes/conversations, more formalized written notes submitted as part of an observation, and/or longer conversations where targeted information is shared.

Goal Setting.

This is the formal process where principals meet with teachers to discuss areas for continuous improvement. This is most effective when goals are measurable and clearly articulated.

Instructional Coaching.

This transpires after an observation when the conversation between the principal and the teacher focuses on developing the teacher’s skills. Coaching should be a two-way dialogue about increasing student achievement through stronger instructional practices.

Mindset.

A person’s belief about the potential for increasing any individual’s knowledge and skills. A person with a growth mindset believes that skills can be gained through hard work, effort, and practice. A person with a fixed mindset believes that intelligence is static and cannot be developed over time. Most people are on a continuum rather than being one extreme or the other (Dweck, 2006).
Motivation.

The force that drives a person to act or not act. Motivation manifests differently in people; some people are driven internally (e.g., motivated by their personality traits) while others are driven externally (e.g., motivated by situational pressures).

Professional Development.

Professional development activities are adult learning classes, seminars, and other information exchange venues that are provided by a person’s workplace or professional association which are specific to the person’s occupation. These are created to increase position/career knowledge and skills, and to help a person to become stronger and better in their position/career through networking.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy.

Any expectation, positive or negative, that can affect an individual’s behavior in a manner that causes the expectation to be fulfilled.

Limitations of the Study

This research was a qualitative study that included principals of a suburban high school in northern Indiana. Initial data were collected through an interview process; therefore, the results relied upon accurate self-reporting. Perceptions may vary related to mindsets and instructional coaching scenarios.

In addition, since the research was only conducted in one building, the results may not be generalizable and should not be readily applied to all scenarios. That stated, the point of this study was to deeply explore the nature of the coaching relationships within the walls of one building.
between two principals and specific teachers to gain greater insight for the instructional leadership field.

Summary

In the field of education, the majority of the literature on mindset theory relates the impact of student mindset on student achievement. This study elevates the concept by exploring the interaction between elements of instructional leadership and teacher mindset. According to the literature search, this study’s focus is unique and separate from the bulk of the studies related to mindset.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature and related materials on instructional coaching and mindset is presented. Topics in the literature review include: a) mindset theory; b) instructional implications of an understanding of mindset theory; c) the relationship between principals and teachers; and d) coaching models that have been proven effective. The purpose of this study is to determine whether a relationship exists between a principal’s predetermined belief about the mindset of a teacher and the subsequent coaching style utilized. The relationship between a teacher and principal has a direct impact on the level of trust and implementation of instructional suggestions. The teacher is still, by all accounts, the primary and most important learning pathway for a student; therefore, the impact on the quality of instruction has a huge consequence for learning (Schoenfeld, 2014). Ericsson (2007) concluded that “under the right circumstances, with a supportive environment, skilled and devoted mentors, and sustained, ability-stretching practice, most people can achieve at the very highest levels” (p. 3). The ultimate goal of the principal is to mentor and coach teachers to design and implement the best instructional practices possible.

Mindset

Mindset is a concept wherein people are placed on a continuum based on their beliefs about where ability comes from (Dweck, 2010b). When asked questions about intelligence, genius, and talent, people generally give answers that lead you to their inherent belief about ability. Furthermore, a person’s growth mindset or fixed mindset indicates, in part, that person’s perspective on intelligence and approach to problem-solving (Dweck, 2006). Mindset can have
drastic implications for education because these beliefs by teachers can have a “striking impact on student achievement” (Dweck, 2010a, p. 14).

**Growth Mindset**

Someone with a growth mindset believes that intelligence can be developed through effort and educational or instructional supports (Dweck, 2006). Growth mindset people truly believe that intelligence is expandable and that ability can always be enhanced. Psychologists describe growth mindset with incremental theory, a belief that intelligence is malleable (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). Under incremental theory, through effort and education, and with proper advice and feedback, intelligence can be developed over time. In general, people with a growth mindset enjoy puzzles that have yet to be solved. Failure is not a crippling concept to them; it is feedback for how to improve. Brain research indicates there is a region of the brain associated with deep semantic processing, and research has demonstrated that people with a growth mindset display greater use of this region (Dweck, 2010b). McLeod (2007) further shared, “Deep processing involves elaboration rehearsal which involves a more meaningful analysis (e.g. images, thinking, associations etc.) of information and leads to better recall” (p. 1). Taken together, this demonstrates those aware of how to use semantic processing within a growth mindset approach move forward with the belief that a knowledge base can and should grow.

**Fixed Mindset**

The opposite of growth mindset is fixed mindset. People who have a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is a “static trait: some students are smart and some are not, and that’s that” (Dweck, 2010b, p. 26). Fixed mindset is also categorized by entity theory, “a belief that intelligence is flat and will have a predictable trajectory” (Blackwell et al., 2007, p. 246). Fixed mindset individuals may also feel threatened by the learning process, viewing it as a test of their
intelligence rather than an opportunity to grow. One of the biggest drawbacks related to this perspective is that they may avoid challenging situations, rather than concern themselves with failure, while also having “feelings of powerlessness or learned helplessness” (Dweck, 2010, p. 26).

Dweck (2010b) shares that we are all on a continuum regarding mindset. There may be aspects in which an individual is quite fixed, while in others they may be growth. Principals should be knowledgeable about the blend that may exist in teachers depending on the situation or content matter. It is also important that principals know each teacher in order to develop a relationship and individualized approach.

**How Feedback Impacts Mindset**

Views of psychology and beliefs have shifted over the years. The 1990s led people to believe that teacher praise could increase students’ self-esteem and thus give them the desire to improve. In their 2012 study, Yeager and Dweck found that praise without true value backfired. Specifically, they found that students entered difficult challenges with less resistance after teachers praised their intelligence. Intelligence praise focuses on the outcome, where process praise values the effort and dedication to improve. The researchers found, furthermore, that the type of praise had a definite impact on the students. Their study demonstrated that “intelligence praise compromised performance” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 311) and those children completed 30% fewer problems. They were also “more likely to misrepresent their scores, claiming that they performed better than they actually did” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 311). In contrast, those that received the process praise did markedly better on the final trial, and even asked for more difficult problems.
When giving feedback to students, the concept of praise could be significantly altered by incorporating the use of the phrase, “not yet,” which “suggests promise and potential” (Miller, 2013, p. 50) without setting the expectation of instant mastery. Children should be led to understand that it is not expected they know everything. To promote the idea that learning is fluid, teachers need to reinforce that the process is as valuable as the result. Dweck (2010a) noted that “praising students for the process they have engaged in, the effort they applied, the strategies they used, the choices they made, the persistence they displayed” (p. 16) yields much longer-term benefits than simply telling them they are smart. Dweck (2010a) stated that when teachers promote a growth-mindset approach in their classroom, students benefit from more meaningful work.

While most of the literature on mindset is focused on students, an implication could easily be drawn to how adults handle challenge, feedback, and response as well. Dweck (2010b) shares several tips about how teachers can successfully build a growth mindset. The first is about setting a classroom culture that creates learning situations that encourage long-term goals for students. This could be in the form of a long-range project that has frequent checks and feedback (Fegley, 2010). Another would heighten the idea of process over success by helping students understand that the journey is supposed to have setbacks (Miller, 2013); that learning is not always linear. There is a parallel here for teachers; taking risks in teaching may produce some setbacks, but new approaches take time to perfect.

**Cultivating a Growth Mindset in Adults**

When giving instructional feedback to adults, there is a clear parallel. If one could shift the audience of Dweck’s advice from teachers to principals, perhaps an entirely different school culture could emerge. Taylor (2002) suggested that, according to adult learning theory, most
adults provided with specific feedback in a trusting environment then want to improve. If one takes the findings with students on mindset theory and applies the improvement concepts toward teachers, the collegial environment may be elevated, which is a critical component of an effective school (Searby, 2013).

Gero (2013) stated, “One of the most important results in this study may be the emergence of teacher mindset as a significant variable in predicting teachers’ professional learning” and “this study provides evidence that teacher mindset has the potential to uncover powerful influences on the improvement of teaching” (pp. 133-134). Individuals who have served in the role of principal recognize that when given feedback about instructional practices, some teachers are quick to make recommended changes, while others appear to almost ignore it. Stenzel (2015) argued that “there may be a startling correlation between the teacher’s mindset and implementation of feedback” (p. 29). Further, “A teacher with a fixed mindset is so concerned with failure, they may avoid new challenges and prefer to repeat skills they have already mastered,” while teachers with a growth mindset “take feedback and evaluate it to determine how they can improve; they view effort as the major factor in success and thrive with new challenges” (Stenzel, 2015, p. 30).

The Link to Self-Efficacy and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

The theory of self-efficacy has long been linked to student performance in education. Shunck (2012) described people with a strong sense of self-efficacy as those who tend to approach difficult tasks as opportunities to master a new challenge. Adults with strong self-efficacy stay on task during adversity and have learned to recover in the face of failure (Brahm, Jenert, & Wagner, 2015). In addition, people who believe in one's ability persist through adversity are not as likely to view setbacks as impediments to eventual success (Bandura, 2003).
Personal self-efficacy is therefore needed when an individual is faced with a difficult task. Wentzel and Miele (2016) stated, “People with low self-efficacy may believe that things are more difficult than they really are—a belief that can foster anxiety and leave few choices for how to solve problems” (p. 37). The link between self-efficacy and self-fulfilling prophecy are evident.

Educators need to be aware of the factors that may impact academic success for their students. While determining a preset list of factors would be limiting, concepts include motivation, enjoyment, anxiety, and self-efficacy. While some factors are positive influences, others can be negative. Research by Brahm et al. (2015) indicated that fear of failure can increase the potential for academic failure. A teacher who recognizes students’ potential and scaffolds the student to achieve may make all the difference for a student who has anxiety about school. Another important factor to consider is the tie between learning and emotion. As discussed by Immordino-Yang, “Learning is dynamic, social, and context dependent, because emotions are, and emotions form a critical piece of how, what, when, and why people think, remember, and learn” (p. 17).

The theories of self-efficacy and self-fulfilling prophecy relate to teachers as well as students. An overlap exists between the primary components of growth mindset and positive self-fulfilling prophecy. Jussim (1989) found a “modest self-fulfilling-prophecy effect on student achievement and motivation” (p. 478) that was attributed to teacher bias. More teachers need training in the impact of growth mindset on student achievement. The principal and primary instructional leader should recognize the opportunities to cultivate growth mindset and work to create ways that best practices can be shared with teachers and incorporated into classrooms.
The Value of Error

Education is about learning, and learning is about growth. While we talk about the value of critical thinking, some teachers can be uncomfortable with the level of struggle it may cause. Miller (2013) describes the process as the “wobble”:

When engaged in the critical thinking process, one outcome is certain: Learning can rock the core of previous knowing, causing a shift in balance. The tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar creates a wobble. Because this invitation to change is uncomfortable, the dissonance requires management. The more students confront challenging learning tasks to experience this dissonance, the more likely they are to befriend it as part of the learning process. When learners accept that learning is about transformation and that some discomfort is inevitable, a trip to wobble world will leave them dizzy with new wisdom and experience, not inundated by the sensation of imbalance. No longer worried about failing, learners might let go of the easy answers and find comfort in the questions. (p. 52)

Educators who know how to teach students to “welcome the wobble” set up a climate for learning in their classrooms. If this is what we want for our students, why would we not want it for our teachers? What would better set the stage for a principal to encourage risk-taking among educators than promoting the idea that one only gets better at their craft by engaging in personal challenge?

The Role of the Principal

The principal has many responsibilities that fight for attention at any given time. Matthews and Crow (2009) asserted that a principal has eight major roles—learner, culture
builder, advocate, leader, mentor, supervisor, manager, and politician. The principal as a learner was included due to the importance of creating schools as learning organizations and communities. While these eight roles are all important, instructional leadership is significant. A principal must intentionally foster communication and collaboration about instruction within the building.

Schlechty (2001) argued that:

If the purpose of schools in an information society is to prepare students for a knowledge-based work force, then the ‘raw-material’ of the school is the curriculum and the student is the worker, thus making the teacher the ‘executive’ of the classroom. Our task, then, is to develop the capacity of principals to become CEO whose task it is to communicate the values and expectations of the school and then do what is necessary to help the decision makers (teachers) and the workers (students) do their jobs as successfully and harmoniously as possible. The leader facilitates the achievement of the organizations goals. (p. 147)

Principals committed to instructional leadership have a different level of interest when they enter classrooms. They are not there to merely act as bystanders, or even to quickly assess student engagement. A principal who acts with intention notices what’s going well in the classroom, makes notes on what needs attention, looks for patterns of strengths and/or needs, and creates next steps and actions (Routman, 2012). Powerful classrooms are the result of ongoing dialogue between the principal and teacher about how to take instructional practices to the next level. As noted by Schoenfeld (2014), “Framing questions are mere overtures to conversation”
and, to be truly successful, “research and practice can and should live in productive synergy, with each enhancing the other” (p. 406).

**Teacher and Principal Relationships**

Teaching instructors how to become masters of their craft should be one of the driving goals for any principal; in fact, much work goes into creating a principal who is a respected, trusted leader of teachers. There is a collaboration between teacher and administrator that can only be fully realized when understood and embraced by both parties. And while, conceptually, most would agree you can achieve excellence through deliberate coaching, trust is a predominant factor (Routman, 2012).

Price (2012) argued, “The tone of the school climate, especially the atmosphere of trust, is established by the building principal” and that “it is the supportive workplace that principals propagate for teachers that provides a successful learning environment; supportive administrators enhance collegial support and cohesion among staff” (p. 69). Building a trusting environment takes time, and a lot of deliberate attention. There can be nothing contrived, otherwise the relationship will feel unnatural. Truly, “the informal relationships and interactions between principals and their teachers that centrally explain leadership effects on school organizational climates” (Price, 2012, p. 69).

Some scholars contend that while trust is a central factor, teacher empowerment may be just as crucial: neither can stand in isolation. According to Moye, Henkin, and Egley (2005), “in order for supervision to be successful, a teacher must feel that the supervisor is there to serve them and help them become more effective teachers” (p. 266). If principal support is one part of the equation for teacher success, another part may be personality characteristics of the teacher. In
fact, “Empowered teachers may be more motivated, and seek to improve instruction in their classrooms. They may be more willing to discuss their practices with supervisors, and extend an open invitation to them to visit their classroom” (Moye et al., 2005, p. 260).

Routman (2012) suggested that trust, empowerment, and instructional knowledge are central to the ongoing dialogue about teaching and learning. She contended, “When the principal has built a solid foundation of trust and is highly knowledgeable, teachers welcome principals into their classroom as an extra pair of eyes and hands to strengthen their teaching” (p. 58). In direct contrast, “Distrust in the school context can be costly. In the absence of trust, people are increasingly unwilling to take risks, or demand greater protection against the possibility of betrayal” (Moye et al., 2005, p. 262).

**Effective Instructional Coaching to Teachers**

Strong teachers understand that good instructional coaching only happens with a true understanding of good teaching. As Jenkins (1988) explained, “The leader as coach conveys an image of one who is demanding, communicates high expectations, emphasizes good practice, provides appropriate feedback and strategies for improvement, praises accomplishments, and re-coaches failure” and, further, “coaching behaviors for leaders mean that they treat people as the integral focus for improvement” (p. 145).

Strong instructional leaders for teachers can greatly impact teacher classroom outcomes. When the trust factor between leaders and teachers has already been established, high-yield practices in instructional coaching should be implemented for the highest return. A report conducted and published by Hanover Research (2014) revealed that instructional coaching models should focus on holistic understandings and analytical thinking. In addition, the work of
Bambrick-Santoyo (2013) suggested that leaders can help teachers build their skills by making suggestions “short, actionable, with concrete guidance” (p. 71) and should focus on the concept of practice. He further asserted that “growth does not come through elaborate rubrics; it comes through small, easily applied changes” (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013, p. 71). Related to coaching activities that teachers feel are effective, Crawford (2015) stated that teachers “value choice, paired with personalized embedded formative feedback on their instructional practices, in a safe, collaborative environment” (p. 252).

Gero (2013) observed, “Improvement-driven teachers were most likely to practice critical reflection, read professional literature, and appreciate the value of teaching each other” (p. 135). He stated that with growth mindset teachers, “learning is important enough to these teachers that they are willing to risk making mistakes” (p. 135). As a complement to this finding, Stenzel (2015) found that mindset has an impact on development and response, but specifically, “When a person has a fixed mindset, the individual believes their capacity for growth is pre-determined and permanent. A growth mindset takes a different approach” (p. 38).

When a principal is working as an instructional coach, the goal should be to inspire the teacher to be better, not just provide advice. One challenge is to engage each teacher in purposeful conversations where both parties are equally invested (Lipton, 2007). “Successful coaching requires unique talents and sensitivities by the coach and a willingness and openness to the teaching being coached. The winning combination is only possible where high trust and expert teaching go hand in hand” (Routman, 2012, p. 59). The principal portrays “their indirect influence of teachers’ practices through the fostering of collaboration and communication around instruction” (Supovitz, 2010, p. 39). Stenzel (2015) argued there is a critical component to
coaching that principals should be aware of such that “if feedback is being provided but change isn’t taking place, the coach may need to consider if it is due to mindset versus ability” (p. 39).

All this points to the fact that it is up to the principal to create the optimal conditions for learning among staff. Creating educational leaders who can “provide opportunities for champions to emerge, recognize them for their drive and commitment to excel, empower them and display their abilities, and get them to help others to develop champion-like behaviors—that is the challenge” (Jenkins, 1988, p. 148).

**Critical Attributes of Professional Development for Teachers**

The importance of professional development over the life of an educator should not be undervalued. Rather, it could be seen as the conduit for infusing purpose into the mission. “Effective professional development enhances career development and focuses on instructional leadership, capacity-building, and personal renewal” (Zepeda, 2014, p. 298). A strong instructional leader knows that for professional development to be effective it needs to be sustained, focused, relevant, and job-embedded. The best principals know how to tailor professional development to individual teacher’s needs, just as we expect teachers to tailor instruction for individual students.

While conceptually most teachers understand that additional training can help them acquire new skills, some are reluctant or even opposed to giving up their time to participate. As related to research on professional development, Schoenfeld (2014) stated,

It is one thing to say, theoretically, that orientations are central and belief change slow; it is quite something else to try and achieve belief change. In attempting to do so and
studying what happens, one develops a more nuanced understanding of growth and change of belief systems. (p. 406)

A school leader must have cursory knowledge of the change process and how it is related to professional development; leaders must recognize that getting some teachers to buy into change is difficult. Getting teachers to try something new is often an art, but altering a practice in a classroom is never going to truly happen through a mandate. Leaders must change a teacher’s heart before they can change a teacher’s mind. Gero (2013) recommended that “by bringing teacher mindset into the early training of teachers, it is more likely to become internalized as an essential practice within the teaching profession” (p. 145).

Sound practice in professional development ties curriculum, student achievement, and training into one. “Professional learning should increase educator effectiveness and results for all students while aligning outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards” (Killion, 2012, p. 11). Killion (2012) recommended a seven step process for back mapping results-based professional development that includes: 1) analyzing student learning needs; 2) identifying characteristics of community, district, school, department, and staff; 3) developing improvement goals and specific student outcomes; 4) identifying educator learning needs; 5) studying the research for specific professional learning programs, strategies or interventions; 6) planning intervention, implementation, and evaluation; and 7) implementing, sustaining, and evaluating the professional development intervention. An example of professional development focused on fostering a growth mindset is shared by Fegley (2010) where it is the “atmosphere of professionalism that is the tipping point by allowing faculty to become experts in designing and presenting professional development” (p. 45).
The research discussed here demonstrates that an effective principal is one that uses both formal and informal data to recognize what professional development the teachers need, and then design programs in such a way to meet how each teacher learns best. It is through deliberate coaching, modeling, and peer-to-peer dialogue that the most effective learning takes hold (Price, 2012). The principal should know the school’s staff and their needs, and cut through any unnecessary training to focus on program elements that can lead to the most enduring educational changes. According to Fullan (2008),

When the school is organized to focus on a small number of shared goals, and when professional learning is targeted to those goals and is a collective enterprise, the evidence is overwhelming that teachers can do dramatically better by way of student achievement. (p. 76)

Principal-directed professional development is at the heart of instructional change in a school. When a principal is involved down to the granular level of instruction, teachers recognize a completely different level of engagement and joint-ownership of teaching and learning for themselves and their students. This should be the shared goal of any learning culture.

**Summary**

The research has demonstrated that mindset impacts educational outcomes. As shared in this section, numerous studies point out the advantages to students who are taught how to approach learning with a growth mindset. Dweck (2015) found that it is just as important for teachers to have a growth mindset in order to continue to progress in their field and develop their craft. Principals need to utilize this knowledge to pursue open conversations where teachers feel
safe in receiving coaching and are able to realize the eventual impact on increased student achievement from a positive principal coaching experience.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Design Framework

Phenomenology was the methodology used for this study. The goal of phenomenology, as stated by Patton (2002), is to create a “lived experience” and put a “focus on exploring how human beings makes sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness” (p. 104). Patton goes on to describe the importance of “participant observation and in-depth interviewing” (p. 104). The idea of using this method is to understand a person’s unique experience and then determine, through extensive analysis, whether components of that experience can be identified with a larger population. For this study, the principal-teacher coaching experience was analyzed and further areas for exploration through the lens of people in various settings in a similar structure were explored. This case study was focused on individual participants at the high school level.

Researcher Bias

With this research, it is important that I acknowledge my potential bias toward the study. I have over 20 years of experience in education and have worked with many principals and hundreds of teachers in areas related to professional development and training. Despite my efforts to remain objective, it is possible that my perspective in the study was influenced by biases from my background experience.

To prepare for this study, I read various research articles and dissertations to become informed of a wide range of related topics. I planned the organization of my study on my knowledge of Dweck’s work on mindset. This study is focused on the high school level, but in order to explore generalizability of the results, I worked with two colleagues within my
corporation who were conducting similar investigations at other school levels. Specifically, each of us independently studied one distinct level of school (elementary, middle, and high), and after our studies were completed we looked see if any parallels could be drawn.

Another form of bias might stem from my opinion that the best instructional leaders have a growth mindset from which they operate. I believe that people who are willing to take risks, learn from them, and utilize sound instructional coaching are more effective in the classroom. I believe the principals who can coach their teachers through compelling conversations create the strongest learning environments for students. To keep potential bias in check, I made notes in a journal before and after the interviews to challenge areas where I may voice my opinion and maintain objectivity when reviewing.

It worked to our benefit that our entire principal group had recently participated in a professional development session related to Dweck’s research on mindset theory designed by my two colleagues and me.

**Mindset Professional Development Session**

To create a solid background on mindset theory, a professional development session was created. This session was co-created with two of my colleagues also investigating the role of mindset in instructional coaching based on our learnings from Dweck and others. This voluntary session, which took place in February, 2017.

Our session began by discussing the concept of intelligence and the research shift that has happened in education from the timeframe of Alfred Binet to Carol Dweck. We then gave the basic tenets of growth and fixed mindset, sharing that most people are on a continuum. We discussed an interplay of mindset and motivation for students and adults alike. We highlighted
the concept that mindsets can change, particularly when explaining to students that the brain is a muscle that continues to develop and change over time. We spent significant time on the concept of praise, and how we can unintentionally set up students for a fixed approach to learning through our words and feedback. We ended our session by sharing research-based approaches that have proven to integrate a growth mindset in teaching. This session helped establish a higher awareness level shared by all, and helped create a common vocabulary for everyone.

We closed our session by giving information about our study and asking for volunteers who might be interested in taking part. The interested principals confidentially volunteered to engage in the study. The high school principals, after participating in the professional development session provided for our entire administrative team, identified two teachers each to consider as we worked through the study. While these two principals knew one another, they did not discuss the research during the process.

This session lasted approximately one hour and set the stage for the principals to begin considering how they perceive teachers in their buildings (see Appendix C).

**Participants**

For this study to be valid, the participants had to agree voluntarily. The goal was for the principals to self-identify. There was no coercion, and there was a conversation regarding the fact that this participation would have zero relevance in performance discussions at the district level. After asking for volunteers, two were chosen by utilizing the process of purposeful selection. This selection was based on both gender and experience; one male and one female were selected and both had the most experience in administration and coaching from the initial sample.
Each principal was from a large high school serving over 3,500 students located within a mid-size, Midwestern, suburban school district of over 10,500. The high school principals had served in instructional roles and evaluated teachers in various content areas for several years. Each had participated in the designed professional development freely and, after agreeing to take part, voluntarily selected two teachers: one perceived to be of growth mindset, and the other perceived to be of fixed mindset (the names of these teachers remained confidential during the entire study).

**Interview Protocol**

After the participants were selected as previously described, a confidential, one hour face-to-face conversation was scheduled for me to explain in-depth the process of the study, remind them of the primary tenets of growth and fixed mindset, and clarify the difference between a fixed mindset teacher and one that is just difficult to coach/reluctant to take advice. The principals were asked to create a list of teachers who they perceive to be of growth or fixed mindset (this list remained private). From this list, each participant selected two teachers they perceived to fall on opposite sides of the mindset continuum to focus on during this study.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather each participant’s experience and perspective. With the advice of our dissertation panel, five questions were developed to frame the interviews. The respondents were asked to give a complete description of their experience including thoughts, feelings and memories as appropriate. Participants were asked to further clarify their points when needed, and open-ended questions allowed them to discuss related topics not specifically covered in their answers to the structured questions. Participants were encouraged to answer each question fully, provide additional information and insights, and steer the conversation into new areas (see Appendix D).
They were also informed they could stop the interview at any time, and/or refrain from responding to anything that made them uncomfortable.

Both interviews took place in the principals’ office after hours during a time of little interruption. The goal was to create an environment where the principal was relaxed and not feeling the moment-to-moment pressure of the school clock. The principal was aware he/she was being recorded and that we could stop at any time. The principals were informed that while there were several predetermined questions that I planned to ask, the dialogue may veer a bit from those questions based on responses and natural follow-up. Throughout the interview, the principals were encouraged to share as specifically as possible their experiences and thoughts related to their interactions with each teacher.

While the audio recording tracked the actual words being said, I also took notes in a personal journal based on what I witnessed: facial expressions, body positioning, tone and inflection, and overall body language. The notes were used to supplement the comprehension of the audio recording during the transcription process I completed alone.

**Data Analysis**

Before engaging in the analysis phase, I sent an email of the actual interview transcription to both principals. The principals were asked to review these transcriptions and approve of them prior to any actual coding.

After having approval from the principals regarding the transcriptions, the coding process began. Open coding was utilized. Knowing the ultimate focus was to create a deep understanding of the experience, “themes” or “bins” were determined to chunk pertinent information together. From there, potential overlap was outlined and included in the description. This coding method
allowed me to draw additional information from the interviews that may have been previously overlooked. Journal notes, which were also kept confidential, were helpful as thoughts surfaced during coding.

Once the coding was complete, a meeting was held with each principal to review the themes that emerged. From there, my Ph.D. colleagues were asked for their review of my data analysis to further control for as much potential bias as possible.

Summary

Patton (2002) stated, “Description forms the bedrock of all qualitative reporting” (p. 438). Using the framework of phenomenology, this study sought to identify the lived experiences of high school principals when it comes to teachers with very different mindset approaches. Using the preconceived determination of the principal of whether one is growth or fixed, data was collected based on the thoughts, actions, and coaching strategies of two principals. The analysis of the data provided insight to how a principal uses background knowledge to springboard a teacher to future success through instructional coaching.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of my research was to investigate principals’ perceptions about teacher mindset and how these relate to their instructional coaching. The research for this study was conducted between April and June of 2017. Two high school principals within the same corporation were interviewed in their individual offices at a time when no students or teachers were present. My research began as an initial structured interview meant to examine participants’ responses to predetermined questions, but the following semi-structured discussions provided opportunities to have those principals reflect on their perception and possible bias.

Qualitative Analysis

Principals in our district were invited to attend an in-service session about mindset theory to build common background. At the completion of the in-service, principals were asked to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. Once they had contacted me, we held an initial meeting where a general overview was shared regarding what the research would entail. Specific questions were not shared in advance with principals in an effort to not have them respond with any preconceived or inadvertently contrived answers.

Each individual interview lasted approximately one hour and as we began, in order to increase comfort level, I gave the principals the questions to review for about three minutes prior to discussion. I shared that while we would be working our way through those formalized questions, I would encourage them to give specific examples or tell individual stories that may help to complete the picture they were describing for me.
After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the recordings. Listening to each recording multiple times ensured that I could capture the exact statements of each principal and kept me from making assumptions about what I may have thought I heard. In addition, while the interview was being recorded, I kept a journal making notes of the nonverbal communication and body language as the principal answered each question. It became quite apparent that using both the verbal response in conjunction with the nonverbal communication was the only way to share the complete story.

The transcribed recordings were then shared with each principal in order for them to confirm their agreement. Both principals responded in writing that the transcripts were accurate.

**Coding Principal Interviews**

After reading the interview transcripts multiple times, I began the process of open-coding. Doing this helped me to organize and sort my data in order to discover common themes that would lead to further investigation. The process of coding served as my data analysis and helped me to utilize an analytic approach to develop the story. Even though each principal shared responses to the questions based on their personal perspectives, themes emerged. As with the member check when transcripts were shared, emergent themes were shared as well. Chapter 4 is the reporting-out of those themes that resulted from the interviews. The principals that volunteered to be part of this study were highly engaged in our conversation about mindset and instructional coaching. Both asked to see the results of the study at the completion. While the questions we started with were identical, each personality came forward as the interview progressed and the principal became more comfortable in the conversation.
Open Coding for Principal Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do you set goals with this teacher?</strong> <em>(Fixed)</em></td>
<td>So with the teacher who I believe is fixed, I really think about who that teacher is, and I have to think about what their interests are, so the very first place that I start when I start working with a teacher on who might be fixed, (or that might be a little bit more difficult to challenge for me) is to build a relationship with them. I try to put the ball in their court, so I’ll ask them questions about where they see themselves, where they feel that their strengths and weaknesses are. I ask them to self-evaluate- I ask them to have a casual conversation about their practice. I ask them to think about where they are now vs. where they want to be with their own pedagogy. I like to do is challenge this particular person-</td>
<td>Engaged Hand gestures Looking down and to the left (repeated gesture; multiple times)</td>
<td>It will be was always done a collaborative sense, meeting one-on-one usually. Usually the goals are set because (we) realize some deficiency. That's been identified together, and agreed upon, which I think is really important in setting goals and looking for development. You have to have a collaborative nature, we all work on it together, but you also have to stand firm when you find something that needs to be fixed or improved upon. That teacher might have a different idea of his or her current performance level. And so when they think that they might be better at something, you need to have data or samples to back up your claim, so that is how you come to some sort of consensus, and then again identify the goal together.</td>
<td>Looking down and to the left One leg crossed, then uncrossed Hand up by forehead Eyes squinting</td>
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Figure 1. Open coding chart for question 1 (Fixed).
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
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</table>
| **How do you set goals with this teacher?** (Growth) | It's really fun to sit down and set goals with this particular teacher because it is a lightbulb brainstorm, more just a stream of consciousness-all the things I am thinking or have dreamed up- the sky's the limit with this particular person. When I'm goal setting with this teacher, focus them in a little bit, and make sure that we're setting smart goals, we're setting realistic goals that we can manage/we can achieve, and then we build on those. | Lit up  
Big smile  
100% engagement | Same thing, collaborative effort where you come together to identify a need together, something probably seen this teacher is thinking about it. So you sit down together, come to agreement of what we see, brainstorm what resources we have-things she's done in class that works, what things she’s interested in exploring next. | Smiled  
Leaned in  
Hands in lap  
Sitting forward |

Figure 2. Open coding chart for question 1 (Growth).
How do you use data in setting goals with this specific teacher? (Fixed)

Principal A: I think this is the hardest part, to be honest with you... this is a really, really hard part. I think that this particular teacher doesn't necessarily see the value in data, and that comes from fear, comes from a lack of understanding, and a lack of really ever being willing to realize that numbers and data can show a much bigger picture, and it doesn’t have to be negative...it can be really positive.

I think they may think that it always coming from a place that is punitive, or that data is used to compare- you know them to someone else- or to poke holes in practice- or whatever the case may be.

So again, it’s being nont Threatening- being very intentional with my words, very intentional with my questions, and I will write my questions out for this teacher before we sit and we talk about anything- just make sure that I kind of have an idea of how I want to say things, or how to frame the questions that I have.

Principal B: So, I think it provides us with a baseline, a direction- and it gives us kind of a starting point. It’s the easiest thing to monitor- it’s something we can always go back to- are they trending up or trending down, or staying stagnant.

So, we will agree on some sort data, or even if we are looking at behavior we can use a time on task to really zone in on the problem. Like if the teacher is saying, “I’m just having a hard time controlling the class”- you can say here are some strategies and some things you can try- and then reaffirm those, and monitor those as the weeks pass.

Figure 3. Open coding chart for question 2 (Fixed).
Question 2 | Principal A | Nonverbal Comm. | Principal B | Nonverbal Comm.  
---|---|---|---|---  
How do you use data in setting goals with this specific teacher? (Growth) | So this particular person wants the data; they want to see everything in front of them. They want concrete evidence of what they're doing- | Smiling | Still to this point I feel the process is very similar- still checkpoints, benchmarks- whether it's for academics or behavior- you still monitor...still very similar, I don't feel like it veers off at all at this point between the two mindsets.  
This teacher is more mindful and takes greater ownership of the data. She monitors it way more closely, and I feel it is more meaningful to this person all the person- she will advocate a little bit more for herself- she wants me to know the work she's put in, and wants me to know the conversation didn’t fall on deaf ears. | Leaning forward | Smiling | Hands on desk  
Regardless of whether the data is a positive or negative reflection of the teacher- they absolutely, totally own it.
**Question 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do you feel about the process of evaluating this teacher?</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>(Fixed)</strong></td>
<td>So the process of evaluating teacher with a fixed mindset is tough. They again don’t see the value in it, they don’t think that I'm going to be able to help them. They think all this is a bunch of ‘fluff’ and you can come in at any time because it doesn't matter anyway. I have to be on my game with this particular person, I have to be ready to go. If I approach it and I’m not prepared, or if I don't really prepare and come ready to, you know, meet whatever challenges this person can throw at me, I am validating everything that they think about the process. I am just walking right into what they already perceive to be something that isn't helpful, or can’t lead to any growth for them. So it’s a challenge for me. It’s tough though- it’s a constant, like circle around this person to you keep them in a good place.</td>
<td>Arms crossed&lt;br&gt;Shaking head&lt;br&gt;Looking down and to the left&lt;br&gt;Squinting eyes</td>
<td>I feel like it’s necessary, I feel like we owe the kids, our students, the chance to have a really positive experience. It is our responsibility. If it really is an area of weakness, it is our responsibility to address that, and I feel good about addressing that with the teacher. If the teacher understands, they will open up, at least to me. I’ve never had anyone stand their ground and dismiss this whole process… (maybe one actually, that I can think of).</td>
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Figure 5. Open coding chart for question 3 (Fixed).
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3</th>
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<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How do you feel about the process of evaluating this teacher? (Growth)</strong></td>
<td>Sure, so I LOVE it because we can have such rich conversations about teaching and learning, from you know preconference evaluation to post conference, we’re digging into planning, this person wants to plan together. They want to come into a pre-conference and say, “Okay here are my goals, here is what I’m planning to do.” They want to share, share, share, share... and they want feedback! This particular person tells me exactly what they want me to come in and watch. This makes it really specific because they know exactly what they want, good or bad, they are comfortable with whatever. They're asking for that, they’re craving it.</td>
<td>Excitement in eyes</td>
<td>Right about now it turns into something really productive, you feel like you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing. This is what it’s supposed to be like. Teachers getting results, teachers coming along- things feel better (they aren’t perfect), but the teacher doesn’t dread coming to school, doesn’t dread seeing you in the hallway. This teacher knows that this coaching is what’s best for her and the kids. I think that’s a pretty good summation of how it is.</td>
<td>Bright eyes</td>
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Figure 6. Open coding chart for question 3 (Growth).
**Table:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How do you help coach this teacher to improve his/her craft?</strong> (Fixed)</td>
<td>Sure, sure- um... am I think a lot of times I flip the role intentionally, instead of me being the coach (you know with me being a coach myself- I do this with my players too), I will do it in a sneaky way, you know, ask the person to help coach me. I need your help with this, what you think about X, Y, and Z. I think questioning is one of the most important things that we can do- and sometimes your question leads to another question- and not having all of the answers is totally fine- as long as we are thinking- that leads to growth. And so again the biggest thing I do is just ask questions... and, and build capacity of leadership. This person has been here really long time. So tricking them almost into doing leadership coaching that I already know that they can do. You build on the expertise, but you plant seeds, you plant ideas in their head again by asking those questions.</td>
<td>Opened back up</td>
<td>So, I think you give a clear outline of the development plan, you agree to that and come to some terms. I think that you constantly have some conversations, and give opportunities to talk, provide other professional support to this person. Again, if you have somebody who is an expert in one area that can serve as a model/mentor- I think you look for that. I think you’re open and honest, and I think you have an attitude that this is what’s best for kids. You don’t shy away from conversation- sometimes it is a difficult conversation to have to tell something that you’re not cutting it, it’s not good enough. But approaching that understanding they are human too, and they probably want to be better.</td>
<td>Fidgeting in chair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Open coding chart for question 4 (Fixed).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do you help coach this teacher to improve his/her craft?</strong> <em>(Growth)</em></td>
<td>Honestly, I do a lot of the same things, it's just easier to go about it. I still default to questions, I still ask question after question after question, to help them ask the right questions and come to conclusions on their own. I also like to encourage this person to to coach others, and encourage them to collaborate with others, but I might stretch and push them. I want them to get out of their comfort zone. Another thing that I do, is I try to set them up for success when they are taking on those leadership roles too. I will give them challenges that I know that they're going to struggle with- and then we come back and we have really great conversations.</td>
<td>Contemplative Giving full consideration Looking up and to the right</td>
<td>This particular teacher is pretty easy, that person is more receptive to the strategies, I feel like this person will follow through- if you say here’s a good book to read, here’s something to try. This particular person cares, they set out to improve and even look for professional development activities to do on their own. It is much more pleasurable, it seems like it's much more professional, coaching this growth person- I feel you are going to get more out of that person; better performance, goal attainment.</td>
<td>Paused- looked up Nodding Thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Open coding chart for question 4 (Growth).
### Question 5

**How does this teacher respond to your coaching?**

(Fixed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So, they complain. They like to tell me why things can’t work, or what's wrong with the entire system, or to complain about other people.</td>
<td>Shaking head</td>
<td>So, this teacher would maybe give me lip service, nod and agree and work along with me, however, I don't think would devote time outside to really consider, or let this sink in... or to actually enact a plan.</td>
<td>Shrugged shoulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I clarify, I explain- maybe another side or things they don’t understand... but I also don’t shut them down either. I let them talk, I let them say their piece, and I think because I do that, again it builds trust, but they see me as someone who is honest with them. I won‘t tell them everything they want to hear- I will give them the “here’s why decision’s being made…”</td>
<td>Arms crossed</td>
<td>Would give halfhearted efforts, just enough to get by, just enough to to get over the benchmark, but not enough to really be better. More so just pacifying and then moving on to the next thing.</td>
<td>Shaking head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This particular teacher thinks that everything is some big conspiracy, and so by being intentional and non-threatening in my conversation, through setting goals and evaluations. I don't ever publicly embarrass this person, or call them out.</td>
<td>Looking down, shaking head</td>
<td>The teacher won’t change without some sort of intervention. What’s comfortable is what’s happened before, time and time again- and as long as there’s no major issues or complaints (from parents or other people), I think it just stays the same.</td>
<td>Fist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Open coding chart for question 5 (Fixed).
**Question 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal A</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
<th>Principal B</th>
<th>Nonverbal Comm.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How does this teacher respond to your coaching?</strong> <em>(Growth)</em></td>
<td>Really, really well. I think they crave it. I think that, more so than coaching, I feel it has developed into a partnership with this person. I don't feel like the coach and the player, I feel that we're the same team and we're partners. It's more organic because I think that because they're seeking out feedback, we have more interactions.</td>
<td>Shaking head yes Smiling Earnest</td>
<td>So this teacher would, maybe initially, because she was invested, be very emotional- I think realizing where your deficiencies are, and how difficult it is to grow and change, sometimes can be tough- that, was a difficult thing- but she really came along and kicked it into high gear. That teacher works hard, I think they are pretty relentless in pursuing what she needs to do. I think that teacher is impressed with her results, and proud of her results- and has a new demeanor and attitude. That person will advocate for themselves and the progress they are making, and also open up for suggestions on in the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Open coding chart for question 5 (Growth).
Themes

After creating the interview transcripts, reviewing the notes, and coding the transcriptions, several themes emerged from the interviews. Some of these themes were in response to specific questions that were asked, while others seemed to weave through the entire interview. The following themes emerged regarding the instructional coaching process of working with a teacher the principals perceived to be of fixed mindset versus a teacher they perceived to be of growth mindset:

1. Coaching preparation
2. Predetermined responses based on the teacher/principal relationship
3. Teacher response to feedback
4. Coaching dialogue
5. Praise/encouragement of the teacher
6. Emotional response
7. The influence of others

To enrich this phenomenological study, direct quotes from the interviews were used to support these themes.

Coaching Preparation

All principals in the district are responsible for teacher evaluations. The teacher evaluation process should have a strong link to each teacher’s professional development plan. Conversations between principals and teachers serve as the information conduit for teachers to learn solid instructional practices. For these conversations to be as valuable as possible, principals should invest in a level of preparation to successfully coach a teacher. The following
excerpts from the interviews provide a snapshot of what each principal was thinking when preparing for dialogue with teachers.

**Principal commentary:**

Principal A:

I will go in and out of their classroom many, many times; I will write my questions out for this teacher before we sit and we talk about anything- just make sure that I kind of have an idea of how I want to say things, or how to frame the questions that I have. If I approach it and I’m not prepared, or if I don’t really prepare and come ready to, you know, meet whatever challenges this person can throw at me, I am validating everything that they think about the process. I am just walking right into what they already perceive to be something that isn't helpful, or can’t lead to any growth for them; that's kind of how I'll start the process with goal setting and I found that, of course, if I'm really intentional about just trying to be relaxed and non-threatening, that I get more out of the staff member that I’m working with, and we get more out of them. When we have honest conversations when we set goals, we’re able to realistically work towards them.

Principal B:

You need to have already looked at the information, the data, in order to help, you still use checkpoints, benchmarks-whether it’s for academics or behavior- you still monitor.

**Predetermined Responses Based on the Teacher/Principal Relationship**

Early in the interviews it became clear that the relationship between the principal and the teacher was of critical importance. Both principals described remaining very open in their dialogue with teachers, and the pre-existing relationship framed much of what the principals expected to see/experience when coaching each teachers. It was evident that having a perception
of whether a teacher was of fixed mindset or growth mindset was a factor in how each principal felt the teacher would respond to coaching.

**Principal commentary:**

Principal A:

I think everything with this particular person is in their own head, in their own insecurity, their own fear of the unknown, or fear of change; I have to be on my game with this particular person, I have to be ready to go; I think that in our evaluation and in our post conferences, I really think that a lot of what this person does is a front. I think it is all a ruse to cover insecurity; but with the growth person, you can really see the passion for teaching, the passion for that person just being of a learner themselves and wanting to grow; I feel it has developed into a partnership with this person. I don't feel like the coach and the player, I feel that we’re the same team and we’re partners.

Principal B:

With the fixed person, oh gosh- she didn’t value the process at all, didn’t value her responsibility as a teacher, as a leader, in any sort of way; with the other I didn’t know what to expect, but knew this person had a real sound growth mindset; this is a person that would listen and at least start internally thinking about digesting what the conversation is, she took it to heart much more, and was invested right from the get-go.

**Teacher Response to Feedback**

Strong principals use feedback to help teachers improve their craft. Feedback should be information, and then that information should be utilized and framed as a way to make progress towards a goal. Often, feedback is given in a formal setting, such as in a post conference after an observation; at other times feedback can be more conversational. The responses given from the
principals depict how they viewed the teacher’s response to the instructional feedback and appear to show that fixed teachers are not open or responsive to feedback, whereas growth teachers solicit feedback.

**Principal commentary:**

Principal A:

With the fixed teacher, so, they complain. They like to tell me why things can’t work, or what's wrong with the entire system, or to complain about other people; something I’ve learned to do is, I don't ever let them say anything negative about, you know other people, or people in leadership roles; but with the growth teacher they want to share, share, share, share... and they want feedback, I think they crave it.

Principal B:

So, this teacher would maybe give me lip service, nod and agree and work along with me, however, I don't think would devote time outside to really consider, or let this sink in... or to actually enact a plan. Would give halfhearted efforts, just enough to get by, just enough to get over the benchmark, but not enough to really be better. More so just pacifying and then moving on to the next thing; but with the growth teacher, this teacher knows that this coaching is what’s best for her and the kids, this teacher is more mindful and takes greater ownership of the data. She monitors it way more closely, and I feel it is more meaningful to this person-she will advocate a little bit more for herself- she wants me to know the work she's put in, and wants me to know the conversation didn’t fall on deaf ears.
Coaching Dialogue

The back and forth conversation between a principal and a classroom teacher is often the most important component of the coaching process. When a principal sits down to coach a teacher, the principal should have a well-defined plan of the next steps the teacher should be ready to take towards the goal. Both principals spoke to the need for preparation and this dialogue in their interviews. The participants reported a similar process with both the fixed and growth teacher: identifying areas that need addressed, setting smart goals, and choosing goals that were measurable.

Principal commentary:

Principal A:

With the fixed teacher, I try to put things in their court, I try to put the ball in their court, so what I'll do is really ask them questions about where they see themselves, where they feel that their strengths and weaknesses are; I ask them to self-evaluate- I ask them to have a casual conversation about their practice. I ask them to think about where they are now vs. where they want to be with their own pedagogy; I'll be able to reference specific things that were of interest, or use those connections, so I know that they will understand where I'm coming from. But with the growth teacher, I have to focus them in a little bit, and make sure that we're setting smart goals, we’re setting realistic goals that we can manage/we can achieve, and then we build on those; we will bring out our data, we will sit down and look at will have pages and numbers- but just like with the fixed mindset person, we will attach it to student names, we’ll be really specific, but the questions that come out of using it are the most important, the most powerful part of the whole thing.

Principal B:
With the fixed teacher, the goals are set because we realize some deficiency. That's been identified together, and agreed upon, which I think is really important in setting goals and looking for development; it gives us kind of a starting point. It’s the easiest thing to monitor- it’s something we can always go back to- are they trending up or trending down, or staying stagnant? So, we will agree on some sort data, or even if we are looking at behavior we can use a time on task to really zone in on the problem; so that is how you come to some sort of consensus, and then again identify the goal together.

**Praise/Encouragement**

Part of a coaching situation will almost always offer a level of praise or encouragement since principals realize a teacher is likely to shut down or shut them off completely if the dialogue only appears negative or derogatory. Both principals discussed how they utilize praise to motivate teachers and help them improve. The responses indicated that with the fixed teachers, time was spent validating what they were doing that was working, prior to moving forward to goals, whereas this component was not evident when discussing the growth teacher.

**Principal commentary:**

Principal A:

With the fixed teacher, I remind them that there are a lot of things they are already doing- that they have really great things to offer; or say, I’m really struggling to coach someone else, what you think, or, what are some things that you do... and through doing that... they’re improving; so tricking them almost into doing leadership coaching that I already know that they can do. You build on the expertise, but you plant seeds, you plant ideas in their head again by asking those questions. Whereas with the growth teacher, I try to set them up for success when they are taking on those leadership roles; gave her a little bit of
advice about the people, especially knowing that some of the people might be a little bit more on the fixed minded side of things... things that I have learned from trial and error to set them up for success. I want her to get there on her own, and form her own conclusions, but I want to set her up for success if I know something that will help her grow.

Principal B:

With the fixed teacher I wanted to be more encouraging and offer some hope- and then move on to the responsibilities; and with the growth teacher, it was emotional, it was frustrating, I could sense that this person maybe cared, maybe more so, than the other… but right about now it turns into something really productive, you feel like you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing; this is what it’s supposed to be like, teachers getting results, teachers coming along- things feel better (they aren’t perfect), but the teacher doesn’t dread coming to school, doesn’t dread seeing you in the hallway; I’m super proud of her- it was the process… and that's the best example. She wanted to change her life and become a better teacher... it was her investment, her choice, and she did it. Very cool.

**Emotional Response**

Principals are human. Couple that with the fact that educators serve in a human-to-human business and there is no way one can eliminate emotion from what they do or how they do it, regardless of how pragmatic the intended approach. Both principals shared responses that indicated an emotional connection to the teachers they were discussing in the interviews. Information shared revealed frustration when working with the fixed teacher, but a definite sense of satisfaction when working with the teacher they perceived to be of a growth mindset.
**Principal commentary:**

Principal A:

So the process of evaluating teacher with a fixed mindset is tough; I think this is the hardest part, to be honest with you... this is a really, really hard part; it’s a constant, like circle around this person to you keep them in a good place; and some days I win... and some days I don’t. And I have learned to be OK with that. But with the growth person, fun to sit down and set goals with this particular teacher because it is a lightbulb brainstorm, more just a stream of consciousness- all the things I am thinking or have dreamed up- the sky’s the limit with this particular person; what I love about this person is that they give credit to the team- the team has created it.

Principal B:

Working with the fixed teacher was very disappointing, actually; but I feel like it’s necessary, I feel like we owe the kids, our students, the chance to have a really positive experience. It is our responsibility. If it really is an area of weakness, it is our responsibility to address that. With the growth person at first, it was kind of chaotic, but after work it turned out to be very nice classroom, a very nice place to be; I guess as an administrator, this person was someone I invested in over a couple years really and all I think that's probably the proudest I've been of any teacher.

**Circle of Influence**

Teachers within a school have influence. That influence can range in impact and can affect students and the colleagues with whom they work. Some teachers use that influence in a very positive, supportive way, while others use it more as a way to keep people from growing. Principals within a school also have influence, and this influence relates directly to both the
climate and the culture of the school. One principal spoke directly to what she called the “circle of influence,” while the other principal alluded to influence, couched in other responses.

**Principal commentary:**

Principal A:

I think about this a lot with leadership, I think about this a lot with my team- is how people influence others. Everybody has a circle of influence, and I think both of these people have a huge circle of influence, both of these people that I talked about today influence others around them equally. I think that the teacher with the growth mindset has this group, and they are questioning, and it's not always positive, it's not always roses- sometimes it's really hard, tough conversations by that circle of influence- it is always respectful, it’s always moving, it’s always evolving. You can see that the impact is always coming to students and learning... and how can we be better, and how can we grow… and the person with the fixed mindset also has their circle. And they’re influencing people around them- but it’s why things can't work, or why things are bad, or whatever the case may be… and I notice that the growth mindset teachers are about students; they’re about learning. It’s about how they can be better to impact those things. Where the fixed mindset teacher’s circle of influence is about the adults most the time, and most of the conversations in the coaching I have to do, has to be redirected back to what we're here for, our mission to grow kids... and unfortunately, I feel like that circle of influence has a lot to do with the adults, and I don't know where I’m going with this, but it's an observation I think a lot about... and I think that as a leader, as an administrator, controlling those variables is really important. And really trying to make sure that growth mindset people are embedded, and are influencing, and are almost circling around those
with the fixed mindsets to keep things moving forward and evolving…So, anyway, I don't know... I don't have all the answers to that, but it's definitely something that I'm aware of, and I try to be very mindful of in coaching and leading.

**Body Language**

While no questions were asked related directly to body language, the story told by this investigation would be incomplete without sharing that this component ended up being one of the most fascinating parts of the entire research process. Since the conversation was being digitally recorded, I could focus my sole attention on the body language and nonverbal communication throughout the live interview. There is a complete story to be told with what was happening behind the words: the eyes, face, hands, posture, arms, and legs. When either principal was discussing the fixed mindset teacher, there were more stern facial expressions, more time spent in choosing specific words, and the body showed signs of frustration and sometimes even annoyance with the shaking of the head, the rubbing of the forehead, or the squinting of eyes. In contrast, when principals spoke of the growth mindset individual, their eyes were bright and they exhibited an engaged body posture, excited smiles, and animated gestures signifying happiness.

**Assertions**

The identified themes from the research provided insight into how principals may have preconceived ideas about the coaching process with a teacher based on whether they perceive the teacher to be of fixed or growth mindset. The themes are relatable and overlap in areas, which is to be expected given the context was instructional coaching and the process that ensues. A total of seven themes (coaching preparation, predetermined responses based on the teacher/principal relationship, teacher response to feedback, coaching dialogue, praise/encouragement of the teacher, emotional response, and the influence of others) were established from the research
questions, with an additional theme of body language being identified as a separate category. From these themes, three assertions have been developed to share the most relevant pieces of information drawn from the research to help principals in instructional coaching of teachers.

**Assertion #1.**

Principals prepare cautiously when coaching teachers they perceive to be of growth mindset versus ones they perceive to be of fixed mindset. Principals should spend considerable time in coaching preparation and coaching dialogue with teachers. When a principal has a belief that a teacher is of a fixed or growth mindset, he or she needs to be mindful of that construct when planning for that teacher’s professional growth.

Both principals could easily identify a teacher they felt was on the far end of the continuum of being “fixed” and another on the far end of the continuum for being “growth.” They both spoke to how they prepared for the goal-setting conversations and what dialogue they used when they coached these individuals. The principals were both quick to point out that the groundwork for those conversations looked a lot more like preparing for battle when thinking of the fixed mindset teacher. They talked about “being ready” and having data to prove their suggestions needed to be heeded. They seemed to have some predetermined responses for the conversation in case there was disagreement. Principal A commented,

I will write my questions out for this teacher before we sit and we talk about anything—just make sure that I kind of have an idea of how I want to say things, or how to frame the questions that I have. If I approach it and I’m not prepared, or if I don’t really prepare and come ready to, you know, meet whatever challenges this person can throw at me, I am validating everything that they think about the process. I am just walking right into what they already perceive to be something that isn't helpful, or can’t lead to any growth for them.
And Principal B stated,

Usually the goals are set because we realize some deficiency, and so when they think that they might be better at something you need to have data or samples to back up your claim.

Nearly the opposite was evident when talking about the coaching process for their growth mindset teachers. This process then appeared far more open, honest, and fun. In a segment talking about the conversation after an observation, Principal A said, “And the post conferences are really refreshing too, because it’s just another idea brainstorm.” Principal B stated, “I think that you constantly have some conversations, and give opportunities to talk, provide other professional support to this person.”

Regardless of whether a principal is looking forward to the goal-setting conversations/observations with any teacher, these conversations form a critical component in the process of teachers reaching new goals. It is of utmost importance that principals are prepared to professionally support all their teachers, not just the ones that are eager for feedback. The goal-setting process should be a systematic approach to working towards improvement. This is where the value of open, genuine dialogue in a professional setting should be an expectation that both parties are committed to through a shared vision about providing the highest levels of instruction to students.

This assertion contributes to the research literature supporting the value of targeted conversation between a principal and a teacher. Moye et al. (2005) stated, “Communication patterns influence teacher-principal trust” (p. 272) and once trust is established, “then, and only then, can we expect that timely support provided by supervisors will be accepted by employees” (p. 273). This was further supported by Price (2012) when she argued,
One way to improve student learning is to focus on improving the relationships between principals and their staff that produced satisfied and committed, and therefore more effective teachers. The benefits from trust and affective ties are central in this relationship process. (p. 69)

In addition, Aguilar (2013) stated,

Imagine that coaching is a dance with three movements. In the first step, a coach listens, a subtly complex skill. At some point a coach takes a step and responds to what she’s heard- primarily with questions to promote deeper thinking and reflection. In the third step, the coach might suggest an action or learning activity for the client to do alongside the coach or alone. (p. 147)

While the assertion is supported by research literature, it also adds to the field by encompassing the component of mindset theory. Each teacher (and the teacher’s mindset) should be taken into careful consideration prior to a principal engaging in the coaching process.

**Assertion #2.**

Principal/teacher relationships impact instructional coaching. The validity is in the phrase “perception is reality.” Often our background and experience cloud our judgment so that while individuals may go through the exact same experience, their perception of what occurred may not be identical.

Both principals gave examples of their individual relationships with teachers, but Principal A spoke directly to thoughts about fixed mindset teachers by offering,

A teacher with a fixed mindset doesn’t always believe that change can really happen, or doesn’t necessarily always see the value in conversations about teaching and learning... they like things how they are, or you know, they've been doing this for a really long time and, it is how it is... you’re going to get what you get, and it doesn’t need fixed. I think
they may think that it always coming from a place that is punitive, or that data is used to compare- you know them to someone else- or to poke holes in practice- or whatever the case may be.

The opposite picture was painted when Principal B described the coaching scenario when the growth teacher in the building was experiencing some difficulty by relating,

If the teacher advocates and says, ‘Look- I just don’t know what to do in this situation…’ so that made it a lot easier, the growth person was looking for ways to be better. Like if the teacher is saying, ‘I’m just having a hard time controlling the class,’ you can say, ‘Here are some strategies and some things you can try’ and then reaffirm those, and monitor those as the weeks pass.

The findings from these interviews illuminate that even prior to meeting to discuss goals, each principal had the personality of the teacher first and foremost in their mind. This may have been an unconscious or intuitive response but, nonetheless, the story begins there. Principals should set time aside to analyze their perceptions of teachers based on prior relationships, and they should do this analysis before the meetings. Principals need to be able to ask themselves if the teacher’s bias is significant enough that it impedes the underlying goal of instructional improvement for the teacher and, ultimately, in the classroom.

This assertion is supported by relative literature that exits in the educational field. As noted by Helms (2012), “the misalignment of perception by the principal and teachers is of paramount importance since all parties (teachers and principals) behave in accordance with their own perceptions and not how things really are” (p. 56). The multitude of research on perception is readily available in the field of neuroscience. In his book Deviate, Beau Lotto (2017) shared
that perception is not as likely to be what our eyes and ears tell us, more likely that it is what our brain makes us see and hear.

**Assertion #3.**

Nonverbal communication needs to be monitored when providing instructional coaching to teachers. Principals need to be mindful of their nonverbal communication and body language when involved in instructional coaching. There are a multitude of messages sent without the use of words in a conversation. As shared by Albert Mehrabian (1972), author of *Silent Messages*, 93% of daily communication is nonverbal. Examples of nonverbal communication can include voice inflection, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, posture, and proximity. Quite often, body language works to accent the actual words being used and can significantly impact the message. While there were no specific research questions asked related to this assertion, nonverbal communication by the principals underscored the emotional component of their perceptions and experiences.

When the questions being asked were related to the teacher each principal perceived as fixed, the body language was “negative” and possibly impaired the intended message (Genard, 2014). There was a definite shift in use of eye contact. Often, both principals looked away when speaking. Another commonality was the significant pause before answering a question, leaving room to question why they might be searching for the right words. Additional nonverbal responses were crossing and uncrossing the legs, rubbing the forehead, squinting the eyes, crossing the arms, and fidgeting in the chair.

The nonverbal communication when each principal was discussing the growth teacher was in juxtaposition to that of fixed. Both principals had fully engaged eye contact, with bright eyes signifying a level of excitement. They were fully engaged and smiling, leaning forward in
their chairs and nodding their heads in an affirmative way when answering questions and relaying information.

Principals should know that trust is one of their most valuable assets, and being aware of their nonverbal communication may help to lend credibility to the message they are attempting to deliver. For your message to resonate, the listener needs to believe you are trustworthy and invested in assisting them. Aguilar (2013) contends, “Coaching can build will, skill, knowledge and capacity because it can go where no other professional development has gone before: into their intellect, behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings of an educator” (p.8).

This assertion is supported by research in social sciences. A familiar term in the field of study of nonverbal communication is paralinguistics. This term refers to vocal communication that is separate from actual words used. Aguilar (2013) reported that up to 65% of what we communicate happens through nonverbals such as body language, pitch, and tone of voice. She further found that people give clues to their feelings or attitudes through a variety of nonverbal cues.

**Summary**

After the data analysis and open coding from the interviews were complete, this phenomenological study suggests that principal perception of whether a teacher is of fixed or growth mindset alters the instructional coaching. The assertions brought forth are supported by data from the interviews conducted with the principals. The principals were invited to share their experiences and perspectives, and both were honest about how they view their role as an instructional leader in the building. By identifying the themes of coaching preparation, predetermined responses based on the teacher/principal relationship, teacher response to feedback, coaching dialogue, praise/encouragement of the teacher, emotional response, and the
influence of others, it was clear that there were similarities and overlap related to perception of fixed vs. growth teachers. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter examines the findings and implications of this qualitative study. Included in this chapter will be an overview of the study, relevant literature to the research question investigated, limitations of the study, and recommendations made to further the study of how a principal’s perception of teacher mindset may impact instructional coaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a connection existed between a principal’s perception regarding the mindset (growth or fixed) of a teacher and the instructional coaching process. Through research review and investigation, this study depicted principals’ perspectives regarding teacher mindset and the instructional process with those teachers.

Methodology

The methodological structure selected for this study was phenomenology. The true value of this study was being able to delve into the minds of the principals involved to better understand their thought processes, their perceptions, and their lived experiences in the goal-setting and coaching processes with teachers. This case study was focused on participants at the high school level.

Participants

Principals volunteered to take part in this study, to ensure validity. Two were chosen by utilizing the process of purposeful selection: one male and one female were chosen and selected because they had the most experience in administration and coaching. Both principals were administrators in large, suburban high schools serving over 3,500 students each located in a mid-
size Midwestern city within a corporation of over 10,500 students. Both principals have served as administrators of varying content areas for several years and both participated in the professional development session regarding mindset theory. Each principal was informed that when answering the interview questions, they were to think of two teachers: one whom they perceived to be of growth mindset and the other whom they perceived to be of fixed mindset. (The names of the teachers were never divulged to the researcher).

**Research Question and Procedures**

This study investigated the relationship between a principal and teachers and was designed to inform whether instructional coaching is impacted based on perceived teacher mindset.

After the principals participated in the mindset professional development program, voluntary participation for the study was sought from the high school administrative team. After selected, a conversation was held to give an in-depth explanation of the study, remind them of the tenets of growth and fixed mindset, and ensure they could articulate the difference between a teacher with a fixed mindset versus one that is just difficult to coach. Each principal was then asked to select two teachers (one growth mindset teacher and one fixed mindset teacher) to focus on during the study.

The interview questions were developed in concert with my two colleagues. The interviews were used to gather evidence, experience, and perspective. The respondents were asked to give as complete a description as they could (including thoughts, feelings, and memories, as appropriate) when responding to the questions. Five questions co-developed with my colleagues framed the interviews, and there was unstructured time for further discussion.
During the interview, the statements were recorded digitally. In addition, I kept a journal where I noted body language including facial expressions, body positioning, tone, and inflection.

Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, I forwarded the word-for-word transcripts to both principals for review. After receiving approval from them, with no changes suggested, I began the process of open coding. Knowing the eventual goal was to have a deep understanding of their experience, “themes” were determined to chunk pertinent information. This allowed me to draw additional information from the notes on nonverbal communication in my journal.

Once the coding process was complete, a meeting was scheduled with each principal to review the themes. Finally, my colleagues helped review my notes and data analysis to control potential bias as much as possible.

Discussion of the Findings

The seven themes resulting from this study (coaching preparation, predetermined responses based on the teacher/principal relationship, teacher response to feedback, coaching dialogue, praise/encouragement of the teacher, emotional response, and the influence of others) have been reported separately, but are all interconnected and brought together in the three prevailing assertions. The assertions derived from these themes are meant to serve as recommendations to principals who have background knowledge in mindset theory as they move through the process of goal setting and coaching teachers. Each assertion has come from direct analysis of the data in this study.

Principals are the instructional leaders of their schools. Schlechty (2001) describes them as “the leader (that) facilitates the achievement of the organizational goals” (p. 147). As leaders, principals need to be cognizant of how to effectively coach all teachers to improve their
instruction. To do that, principals need to approach each teacher as an individual and tailor their coaching based on that teacher’s personality. Once a principal has determined in their mind whether a teacher is of fixed or growth mindset, their coaching strategies may shift. By building on what Dweck (2010b) found, that everyone is on a continuum when it comes to mindset, it may be prudent for the principal to remind teachers that setbacks are common and are to be expected, even valued. Regardless, the pursuit of providing high quality instruction should drive all principals; the most effective way to ensure this is through instructional coaching of teachers.

The principals interviewed were clearly able to articulate whether the goal-setting process looked similar or different in relation to their fixed mindset or growth mindset teachers. Through the teacher evaluation process established within the district, some components of the process are standard. However, when identifying specific goals or areas of deficiency, principals have latitude as to how to address concerns. Each principal understood the importance of goal setting and recognized it should be a collaborative effort. The major difference between goal setting with the fixed mindset versus growth mindset teacher was in the importance of having the data ready at the onset to be able to prove or justify why this was a necessary goal. Both principals relayed the impression that effective goal setting with the fixed teacher took more strategic thought, and both alluded to having to be mentally prepared for a potential negative interaction.

Measurable data should always be part of goal setting with teachers. Principals in the district have been trained by Solution Tree on utilizing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound) goals as related to school improvement (King, 2016). Principals work to ensure that goals are set that clearly define the objective, use evidence, provide a stretch to achieve, measure outcomes as opposed to activities, and have a timeframe for completion. Both principals stated they began the process with baseline data to get a sense of
current achievement, shared strategies and suggestions for improvement, and then addressed the progress monitoring component. For data to be helpful, it needs to be utilized. Collecting data without using it to draw conclusions and improve teaching is worthless and something educators should avoid.

The primary difference noted by the principals was in the way their fixed mindset and growth mindset teachers saw the value in data. Both principals revealed their fixed mindset teachers were less interested and ready to dismiss data, whereas their growth mindset teachers were eager for the information (even if it wasn’t glowing), viewing it as part of an ongoing process of improvement.

The teacher evaluation process should be a valuable endeavor in professional development. This is the golden opportunity for principals and teachers to have open and honest dialogue about teaching and learning. As Routman (2012) stated, “The effective teacher depends foremost on an effective principal” (p. 57). The conversation should include an exchange of ideas and should include helpful strategies from the latest research as well as from their colleagues in the field. The dialogue for these conversations should stem from frequent observations and multiple opportunities for feedback. The principals involved in this research shared that, with the fixed mindset teacher, this work was “tough” but “necessary.” These principals recognize that not all their suggestions will be welcomed, but know that in their ongoing efforts to improve instruction, they need to find a way to communicate the message. In contrast to that, with the growth mindset teacher this part was perceived by the principals as productive, collaborative, and filled with rich conversation.

Coaching teachers is a skill that some principals naturally do very well, while others need guided support. Much of the aptitude is based on the principal’s level of pedagogical knowledge,
but also in how their personality matches or clashes with the teacher (Robbins & Alvy, 2009).

The process of goal setting is now quite common among American schools for both teachers and principals alike. Goal setting is naturally linked to instructional coaching and can be used to increase both motivation and achievement. Locke and Latham (2002) argued there are hundreds of correlational studies that provide evidence regarding goal setting showing increased success rate in numerous settings, including education.

In an ideal dialogue, both the teacher and principal are involved in discussing very specific details about the instructional process, analysis of evidence, and articulation of future goals. Even when that dialogue is less than ideal, the principal needs to work through the process of getting the teacher to trust that he/she is truly there to help. That process may include asking questions that foster reflection, or giving specific feedback as a “game-plan” that underscores the goal of becoming better incrementally (Robbins & Alvy, 2009).

Coaching teachers is not a new concept; however, principals determine what approach to take. Often, the instructional coaching that happens is student-centered, based on student results and data. Other times, the coaching model is teacher-centered, based on observations made by the principal regarding the next steps for the teacher. Both principals relayed the belief that the growth mindset teacher sought feedback, while the fixed mindset teacher resisted it. While the approaches to coaching may shift back and forth, strong instructional supervision provides support for teachers to be as successful as possible. “Supervision is the development and refinement of a knowledge base and craft practice regarding effective teaching and learning. Supervisors provide resources and promote informal and formal conversations with teacher to affect curriculum, teaching, assessment, student learning, and professional development” (Robbins & Alvy, 2009, p. 83).
School-improvement research over the past several decades shows that there are several key factors that need to be present to enhance efforts towards improvement. Church (2005) identified trust as one of the central features sharing that “statistical evidence supports the positive impact of the relational trust built through leadership practices on student achievement” (p. 12). She provided the following specific aspects (Church, 2005):

In a context in which there is relational trust, teachers feel less vulnerable to try new practices and to make changes. In such a context, there are greater possibilities for collective teacher work and problem solving. Relational trust supports the development of group norms that create pressure and incentive for all teachers to engage in continual learning and enhancement of classroom practices. Without relational trust, teachers are more likely to remain in their classrooms, struggling on their own. With trusting relationships come stronger personal attachments and greater commitment to the purposes of the school, along with a willingness to expend greater efforts to accomplish group goals. (p. 12)

Creating an expectation that the principal’s role is to help teachers professionally fine-tune their instruction should be a goal. “To be successful, school leaders need to engage in conversations with teacher, using assessment data to diagnose strengths as well as areas in which the teachers need to modify their instruction” (Protheroe, 2009, p. 5). While the hope might be that all teachers are naturally reflective practitioners, some may be more reluctant to admit potential weaknesses. The savvy principal knows how to maneuver through conversations to build a trusting environment where they can help facilitate better instructional outcomes through professional coaching (Robbins & Alvy, 2009).
“There is a growing body of evidence that the use of high-quality, targeted assessment data, in the hands of school staff trained to use it effectively, can improve instruction” (Protheroe, 2009, p. 1). Principals should be analyzing the interface of assessment and instruction on a regular basis. In addition, they should be thinking about the coaching cycle and asking themselves what each teacher may need to ensure students are receiving what they need instructionally, recognizing that may look different for each teacher. Teachers may need help learning how to “assess their own work and its impact on their students” (Meyers & Rust, 2000, p. 34). Stiggins (2001) stated there are two conditions that are essential if schools are to effectively use assessment: teachers and principals need to understand mastery targets, and the faculty must be assessment-literate. The instructional leader of the building needs to create the structure for teachers to have these conversations and come to a collective understanding regarding the value of achievement data as evidence.

**Recommendations and Future Research**

While this study demonstrates a link between a principal’s perception regarding a teacher’s mindset and the instructional coaching process that ensues, further research would lend credibility to this claim. Principals interested in increasing student achievement through instructional coaching should look for ways to strengthen their skills. Additional research is necessary to lend credence to the assertions brought forth in this study, which are: a) principals prepare differently when coaching teachers they perceive to be of growth mindset versus ones they perceive to be of fixed mindset b) principal/teacher relationships impact instructional coaching, and c) nonverbal communication is evident when providing instructional coaching to teachers. If these assertions were shared and explained, further research could entail follow-up conversations with principals to determine whether having this information beforehand altered
their coaching style. Would starting the school year by sharing these assertions with principals enhance the instructional coaching setting?

Additional research could also include a quantitative measure wherein teacher perception is included. A questionnaire could evaluate teachers’ belief regarding how their principal perceives them, and whether that frames instructional conversation. A quantitative analysis of a pre-existing relationship (or presupposition of a person) could demonstrate altered sender-receiver communication. This would provide evidence to further the discussion into the power of human behavior. It would be valuable to see if better principal understanding of a teacher’s mindset would supersede the most valiant general efforts at instructional improvement.

This study could also be strengthened by broadening the scope and including more principals. It may prove interesting to find whether the research gathered here is supported when taken to a wider audience, or whether the prevailing themes from this study are condensed to this district. Researching a larger cross-study would make the argument more cogent.

While the interviews were all digitally voice recorded, a final recommendation would be to video record each interview. While body language was noted during the interviews, the ability to review and further map the cues to the verbal communication would have been enormously valuable. The information gained from the nonverbal communication was surprisingly helpful and, looking back, the availability to watch the interviews multiple times would have been welcomed.

**Limitations**

There are several recognizable limitations to this study it is important to acknowledge. First, this study was limited to the walls of one district. The choice was intentional because the principal set from which the two principals in this study were drawn had previous training and
exposure to mindset theory; however, a multi-district study may alter the findings. Second, increasing the size of this study to include more high school principals may provide confirmation of findings and new points of relevance.

Another limitation is that the participants knew the researcher. While every effort was made to ensure the interviews happened in a professional manner without persuasion, the pre-existing relationships may have modified the responses and/or conversation. If this study is replicated, a recommendation would be made to eliminate that variable.

A final limitation is that the interviews were not video-recorded. The researcher was caught off guard by the rich information that was shared nonverbally. While notes were taken regarding body language during the interview, it would have been far more valuable to be able to review the videos.

**Conclusions**

A principal’s perception alters his or her coaching style. This theme resonates through this study, and may be representative when looking outside the walls of education as well. As Liz Wiseman (2017) shared in *Multipliers*, “In twenty years of watching and coaching executives, I have observed how leaders’ assumptions affect their management” (p. 20). While that may be the case, one of a principal’s central responsibilities is to coach teachers to utilize better instructional strategies. These are crucial conversations, ones that should have immediate impact that transcends to lasting results for teachers and their students.

A tenet of a healthy school culture is an environment where teachers feel safe to take professional risks in order to grow (Robbins & Alvy, 2009). This risk-taking can lead to increased motivation to become better at one’s craft. The principal must set the stage for this culture and then can engage at the granular level to ensure success. Principals need to be able to
facilitate conversations with teachers in the coaching environment where they scaffold questions, suggest concrete strategies, brainstorm and collaborate, and empower their teachers through ongoing support. As stated by Church (2005), “The simplest and most effective way for a principal to create coherence in the school is to ensure that all initiatives contribute to enhancing student learning” (p. 98).

Just as people are on a continuum related to mindset, teachers are also on a continuum in their professional journey. While principals may have some teachers they consider to be champions, and others they perceive to be challengers, they need to understand the mindset of their teachers in order to elevate their coaching practices. “Although effective leadership does not involve a specific type of personality, it is true that effective leaders display specific behaviors when interacting with their colleagues” (Marzano, 2003, p. 176), and leaders need to be able to enhance interpersonal relationships with everyone. Principals should be equipped to provide appropriate, intentional coaching for all teachers to enhance learning; this is the ultimate responsibility of the building administrator.
CHAPTER 6. TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Introduction

At the beginning of this study, two of my colleagues and I wanted to investigate the same research question, while tailoring our specific research to one grade band. Steve Hope, now Assistant Superintendent of Goshen Community Schools, investigated our research question relative to an elementary setting. Jayson Snyder, now Director of Professional Development and Student Learning for the Penn-Harris-Madison school district, investigated the same research question relative to a middle school setting, and I investigated with a focus on the high school setting. Not only were we interested in discerning whether a principal’s perceived mindset impacted instructional coaching at the specific grade level each of us were investigating, we were exploring if there were common themes that emerged within one district from a K-12 perspective.

We were intentional at the beginning of our work in keeping our study focused. We met to discuss and create our original research question, as well as the five questions that we asked our participants in the interview. While we knew interview conversation would ensue from those starting points, we planned to cross-reference the responses back to the original questions.

Prior to asking for volunteer principals to participate in the study, we conducted a district-wide professional development session on mindset theory. This ensured that a common language and understanding were developed prior to embarking on the research. This session was developed to lay the groundwork necessary for principals to have a clear understanding of the research behind Dweck’s theory about what mindset is, as well as what it is not. Currently, “mindset” is one of the buzzwords in education, but there are far too many misconceptions and
misunderstandings around the term. We felt, after meeting with Dweck, that we needed to spend a significant amount of time dispelling the rumors prior to beginning interviews.

After the session, we asked for volunteers and began to schedule interviews. At the completion of the interviews and individual coding, we met to team code to reduce any bias. After several meetings, we created a list of common themes that came across in all of our research relative to how principals approach the coaching process for teachers they perceive to be of growth mindset versus the teachers they perceive to be of fixed mindset.

**Themes Across K-12**

After individual coding of our results, the three of us met to cross-code and look at the responses each other had received during the interview process. We looked question by question and analyzed the responses based on whether the principal was reflecting about a teacher with growth mindset, or one of fixed. We found it telling when certain words and phrases ended up in all our research when principals were responding to questions.

The first theme that seemed evident was that of coaching preparation. All the principals interviewed described the preparation for principals working with growth versus fixed mindset teachers. While principals stated they always spent time preparing for goal-setting/observation/evaluation conversations, when referring to the teacher of fixed mindset, they used phrases such as “being prepared for battle” or having “an argument prepared in anticipation of conflict.” The meetings with the teacher of fixed mindset were obviously viewed as far more adversarial, where the principals felt they needed to brace for almost certain pushback or resistance. On the other hand, when discussing the preparation for meeting with growth mindset teachers, the principals expected a much more open dialogue where data was the starting point for the conversation, but not viewed as a limiting factor.
The next common theme was in the actual coaching dialogue. All principals discussed that this discussion began with outlining the development plan and narrowing a focus to specific targets for all teachers. But as the principals stated more specifically, when working with a fixed mindset teacher the dialogue was more directive based on data and focused more on learner outcomes. Contrary to that, when working with the growth mindset teacher, it was more of a collaborative, collegial, reflective conversation that was far more teacher-centered. Several principals even admitted they give the growth mindset teacher “more room for freedom” for interpretation and application of the coaching concepts.

A third theme was what we identified as the principals’ predetermined response of the teacher when discussing the value of coaching. The principals interviewed again used similar verbiage to describe their expectation of teachers’ responses. Teachers of growth mindset were described as “invested,” people that “take ownership” of their data and want feedback to improve, whereas teachers of fixed mindset were described as not “valuing” the feedback and “not feeling the conversation mattered.”

The fourth common theme was in the communication style described by each principal. Principals shared that when working with teachers of growth mindset, they used a “conversational, open approach” that was collaborative. They stated they often started with questions, listened to the responses of the teacher, and let the teacher lead the conversation. When asked how the conversation transpired with the fixed mindset teacher, all principals admitted it was “more direct” or “directive.” Several principals noted that their coaching sessions with fixed mindset teachers were much shorter than those with growth mindset teachers.

The final, and perhaps most telling, common theme was based on the emotional responses of the principals when describing their conversations. When describing the
conversations with teachers they perceived to be of fixed mindset, the principals used words such as “tough” or “disappointing,” clearly signaling they did not feel the coaching was ideal or even necessarily productive. On the other hand, when describing teachers of growth mindset they used words such as “fun” or “exciting.” There was a sense of pride that came through when principals shared about these conversations, a sense of passion that sparked.

Looking at this with a K-12 lens gave us a clearer definition of just how powerful a principal’s preconceived opinion is as related to teachers. When we ask ourselves, does human nature get in the way of instructional coaching? In a word, yes. Instead of a dynamic, two-way conversation between committed professionals, it can end up being a perfunctory component of a principal’s job. Jussim (1989) shared that after researching self-fulfilling prophecy, teacher expectations may predict actual student outcomes. We question whether the same could hold true for the principal-teacher relationship. However, if principals were to approach coaching a fixed mindset teacher armed with research from Shunck (2012), they may be more inclined to see it as a challenge to overcome by successfully coaching a teacher who they perceive to be of fixed mindset.

Conclusion

Based on our research, a principal’s perception on whether a teacher has a growth or fixed mindset has a definite impact on their instructional coaching style. Their bias may impede the overall goal of high quality instruction. Further, their outward demeanor and nonverbal communication may well signal to the fixed minded teacher their preconceptions. It would serve principals well to be conversant with how they may come across to teachers as this may be a barrier constructed prior to the first goal-setting conversation. As the primary instructional leaders for the school, principals must become aware of their bias so they can work to overcome
any obstacle that may be standing in the way of coaching their teachers to the highest levels of student achievement.
REFERENCES


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Meyers, E. & Rust, F. (2000, June 30). *The test doesn’t tell all: How teachers know that their students are learning*. *Education Week*, 34, 37.


APPENDIX A. CORRESPONDENCE TO ACCEPTED PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for volunteering to be part of the study on principal’s perceptions on teacher mindset and the impact of those perceptions on instructional coaching. You have now been selected as a participant in this study. As a voluntary participant, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in one or more interviews with a principal investigator. These interviews will be conducted in your office at a time that is convenient for you. Each interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Interviews will be recorded using a digital recording device. The interviews will be secured in a locked cabinet in a secure room.
- Review transcriptions of the interviews, checking for accuracy and adding any insight for the principal investigator.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may leave the study at any time. During the interviews, you may elect not to answer any question.

During the interviews, it will be important not to divulge the name of any teacher being discussed. Details of coaching particular teachers will be done referring to the teachers only as numbered individuals to protect their identity.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact Jayson Snyder at the following email address:

hshort@purdue.edu

Respectfully,

Heather Short
APPENDIX B. RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

A Closer Look: How Principals’ Perceptions About Teacher Mindset Impact Instructional Coaching
Dr. Marilyn Hirth, Associate Professor
Educational Leadership
Purdue University

What is the purpose of this study?
You are being asked to participate in this research because you volunteered to share your perceptions regarding teacher mindset and instructional coaching. The purpose of this study is to explore your perceptions about teacher mindset and how those perceptions influence your coaching. Interviews will be utilized to conduct the research.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in interviews. I will be asking you questions and gathering your feedback. The interview session(s) will be audiotaped and transcribed.

How long will I be in the study?
The research study includes an interview lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. If a follow-up conversation is warranted, there may be another interview scheduled.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
The risks are minimal and no greater than would be encountered in everyday life. Breach of confidentiality is a risk related to the research. The risk is a possibility, but safeguards are in place as described in the confidentiality section of this form.

Are there any potential benefits?
There are no direct benefits to you, but this research study has the potential to change the professional development and training provided to principals as educational leaders become more aware of how their perceptions affect the way they work with teachers they observe and evaluate.

Will I receive payment or other incentive?
There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
The research records will be stored in a secure, locked location accessible only to the researcher. The interview audio recordings will be erased six weeks after taping. Transcriptions of the data gathered will contain no identification of you and will be kept indefinitely. All identifiable information concerning student learning outcomes will be removed by you before sharing the data with the researcher. The project’s research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight.
What are my rights if I take part in this study?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or, if you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please understand that participation in this study will not have an impact on your job status.

Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?
If you have questions, comments or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact the principle investigator, Dr. Marilyn Hirth, Associate Professor, College of Education Beering Hall of Liberal Arts and Education Room 5134, 100 North University Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2098, mahirth@purdue.edu or any of the graduate students, Steven Hope, hope0@purdue.edu, Heather Short, hshort@purdue.edu, or Jayson Snyder, snyde138@purdue.edu

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email (irb@purdue.edu) or write to:
Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032
155 S. Grant St.,
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

Documentation of Informed Consent
I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above. I will be offered a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

______________________________  _____________________
Participant’s Signature  Date

______________________________
Participant’s Name

______________________________  _____________________
Researcher’s Signature  Date
APPENDIX C. MINI PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSION (PREVIOUS PARTICIPANT TRAINING - MINDSET)

Slide 1

Mindset & Leadership:
How does mindset affect instructional coaching?

Slide 2

The concept of intelligence
Slide 3

Fixed Mindset  
Growth Mindset

- Dr. Carol Dweck, Stanford

Slide 4

Slide 5
What creates motivation?

Often, that answer can be directly linked to how individuals view their own intelligence...

MINDSET

But the best news...MINDSETS can CHANGE!

Research supports that students who are taught about the brain being a muscle, and how the brain continues to develop and change over their lifetime start to think differently about ability.
Slide 9

How Do We Praise Students?

MINDSET

___________________________________

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___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

Slide 10

Growth or Fixed?

"I really like the way you tried all kinds of strategies on that problem until you finally got it."

"See, you are good at this subject. You got an A on your last test."

"You really studied for your test and your improvement shows it."

"Look at how smart you are."

MINDSET

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

Slide 11

Growth or Fixed?

"I love how you stayed at your desk and kept your concentration in order to keep working on that problem."

"You are one of the top students in this class."

"Great job. You must have worked really hard at this."

"This is easy. You will get this in no time."

MINDSET

___________________________________

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___________________________________
Have you heard statements like these as you are in and out of classrooms?
- In your mind, can you picture the teachers who are saying them?

Approaches to integrate growth into teaching...
- Praising students for taking risks and persevering
- Emphasizing positive improvement and growth mindset in the classroom
- Using formative assessments, self-evaluation, and assignment revisions
- Encouraging multiple strategies for learning
- Changing language used in classroom instruction and feedback
- Supporting peer-to-peer learning
- Setting process goals and individual student expectations
Seeing those approaches, talk with a colleague about a teacher in your building that incorporates those instructional strategies...

Don’t use names. Rather, concentrate on the behaviors you observe.

Now, think of a colleague who uses fewer of these techniques. …

Don’t use names. Rather, concentrate on the behaviors you observe.

….now what?

MINDSET
Resources
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you set goals with this teacher?
2. How do you use data in setting goals with this teacher?
3. How do you feel about the process of evaluating this teacher?
4. How do you coach this teacher to help him/her improve their craft?
5. How does this teacher respond to your coaching?
December 20, 2016

To whom it may concern:

Excellent teachers and administrators never stop learning. They're always exposing themselves to the latest educational tools and information in order to help their students and schools advance to the next level. It is for these reasons that I support Mr. Steve Hope, Mrs. Heather Short, and Mr. Jayson Snyder in their doctoral research.

I also recognize and support Mr. Hope, Mrs. Short, and Mr. Snyder conducting their research and interviews with the staff of Penn-Harris-Madison and at the buildings located within the Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation’s district.

It is my pleasure to support my colleagues in the Purdue doctoral program.

Sincerely,

Jerry Thacker, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
VITA

Heather T. Short

EDUCATION

2017 Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana
Ph.D. in Educational Leadership

2001 University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana
M.S. in Administration

1994 Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
B.S. in Elementary Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2017 Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, Mishawaka, Indiana
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

2007-2017 Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, Mishawaka, Indiana
Director of Professional Development and Student Learning

2004-2007 Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, Mishawaka, Indiana
Principal, Prairie Vista Elementary School

2003-2004 Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, Mishawaka, Indiana
Assistant to the Principal, Prairie Vista Elementary School

2001-2003 Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, Mishawaka, Indiana
Director of Gifted and Talented

1994-2001 Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation, Mishawaka, Indiana
Teacher, multiple grades