

RESEARCH BRIEF

The Power of Mindset: Using Culturally Responsive Teaching to Foster a Growth Mindset in English Language Learners

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Introduction

Students enter classrooms bearing experiences that have the potential to positively or negatively shape their outlook on education (Hammond, 2014). Educators' personal beliefs on ability can have a significant impact on academic achievement. Sriram (2014) defines a fixed mindset in regards to a students' belief that intelligence is unchangeable. A growth mindset, on the other hand, is defined by the belief that intelligence can be cultivated and improved (Sriram, 2014). English language learners (ELLs) are a growing population of learners in classrooms where teachers lack the proper preparation to deliver effective instruction (Clayton, 2013). According to National Public Radio-Education (NPR-ED), about one out of every ten public school students, or five million students, in the United States is an English language learner (Sanchez, 2017). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) amongst ELLs allows teachers to use students' linguistic diversity as an asset to their learning instead of as a limitation. CRT promotes the use of cultural frames of reference to filter curriculum content and teaching strategies in an effort to make the content more meaningful and manageable for students (Gay, 2010). The use of CRT with ELLs allows teachers to separate language from cognitive abilities by focusing on specific cultural and linguistic needs (Gay, 2010).

Background

The percentage of students classified as ELLs in public schools rose from 8.1% in 2000 to 9.5% in 2015 (National Center for Education

Statistics [NCES], 2018). Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), ELLs are required to demonstrate proficiency on math and reading standardized tests administered in English despite their language limitations (Robertson, 2016). Hammond (2014) links CRT and brain-based learning to establish connections between students' cognitive abilities and their socio-emotional well-being. The academic achievement gap between ELLs and their language proficient peers identifies the need for a more culturally aware and responsive pedagogy throughout the country.

Research

A study conducted in Chile by Claro, Paunesku, and Dweck (2016), looked into a nationwide sample of 10th graders with a focus on low socioeconomic status. This study sought to understand whether students had a fixed or growth mindset and the ways in which these influenced behaviors that impact academic achievement. The researchers determined that students with a fixed mindset were more likely to "avoid situations in which they might struggle or fail because these experiences undermine their sense of intelligence" (Claro et al., 2016, p. 8664). On the other hand, students with a growth mindset were more likely to see "difficult tasks as a way to increase their abilities and seek out challenging learning experiences that enable them to do so" (Claro et al., 2016, p. 8664). In regards to socioeconomic status, students with a growth mindset were seen to outperform their peers at any income level on standardized tests

(Claro et al., 2016). The findings depicted that students from lower income level were more likely to have a fixed mindset given the negative impact of living in poverty on their lives.

Dweck (2015) cites that "students who believed their intelligence could be developed (a growth mindset) outperformed those who believed their intelligence was fixed (a fixed mindset) (p. 20). An academic environment that embodies a growth mindset teaches students to persist and put forth effort despite the magnitude of the challenges they are facing (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). Students will more likely strive towards their maximum potential if they are taught to believe in their ability to overcome adversity. A growth mindset has the potential to help students look beyond their current situations and towards their ability to improve. Students who are able to focus on the learning process are able to develop a growth mindset and maximize on its educational benefits (Dweck, 2015). Adopting a growth mindset is a continuous process that requires awareness and willingness.



Recommendations

• *Using CRT and brain-based learning in the mainstream classroom to foster a growth mindset in ELLs* Teachers of ELLs are able to help students reach deeper levels of understanding by resisting stereotypes that have been established about diversity (Hammond, 2014). The implementation of CRT and brain-based learning begins with the continual development of a positive student-teacher relationship. Teachers should be intentional about using culture as a cognitive scaffold (Hammond, 2014). The focus should be on implementing instructional

strategies that foster independent learners.

• *Conducting more research and investigating the connection between student nationality and perceptions to help teachers provide more socio-emotional support to culturally and linguistically diverse students* More needs to be done within the realm of CRT and brain-based learning to ensure that ELLs throughout the country hold a growth mindset. Improved academic achievement of other groups who have been taught to have a growth mindset can be extended towards the work that is being done with ELLs. Researchers and educators should look into the ways in which brain-based learning and CRT relate to the socio-

emotional wellness of language minority students. The research will look into best strategies and practices that can be implemented in diverse classrooms in an effort to empower all students attain increased academic achievement. Establishing an inclusive school and classroom culture for ELLs requires knowledge on and concrete understandings of cultural diversity and individual learning styles.

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