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OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
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(2020 – 2021)

Developing and Understanding Language to Foster a Growth Mindset Amongst Pupils in a Primary Classroom.

Patricia Dunne

A Research Dissertation submitted to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice)

Date: 24th September 2021

Supervised by: Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich

Declaration

I certify that this research, submitted for the degree of Master of Education, Maynooth University, is entirely my own work, has not been taken from the work of others and has not been submitted in any other university. The work of others, to an extent, has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Patricia Dunne

Date: 24th September 2021

Abstract

Our awareness of and attitude towards our language can have a significant impact on our daily lives and our engagement with each other, the curriculum and the environment. Every child has the potential to be exceptional. It is our responsibility as educators to assist them in discovering and fulfilling their potential. To achieve this aim, we must shift our mindsets and trust in our ability to increase learning for all students. As I began to reflect on this, I realised that this was the perfect opportunity to examine if I was truly encouraging a positive growth mindset in my classroom. I have had my class for the past two years and from the beginning some of the children struggled to show positive self-esteem, lacked the ability to face challenges and viewed their mistakes in a negative light. I wanted to foster a greater sense of self-worth among the children through my practice.

The self-study action research project aimed to explore the benefits of teaching positive language to children to foster and develop a growth mindset within the classroom. It was a class-based study looking to explore the role I played as the teacher in creating these conditions and in providing opportunities for the participants involved. The research took place in a senior national school with a sample of 26 sixth class children. The study involved a twelve-week intervention covering several concepts. Methods for data collection were pre and post intervention questionnaires, rating scales, nine diamond surveys, structured and unstructured observations, pupil reflective journals and a teacher reflective journal.

Drawing on the work of Carol Dweck, we attempted to create a classroom ethos around the topic of a growth mindset which cultivated an environment of growth, possibility and positivity. Through analysing the findings that are presented in this study, I believe my teaching of positive language to children has improved in supporting the development of student attitudes towards subjects they find challenging and has also helped them in the wider world.

In doing so, I have learned that my educational ideals of student care, student voice and positivity are critical components of my future practice.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

"Positive anything is better than negative nothing." Elbert Hubbart

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic and provides the reader with an overview of the topic researched. The rationale for the study and my underlying values for conducting the research will be provided. The thesis structure is outlined, with chapter titles and contents introduced. My research probed the first topic on the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum which aims to develop self-confidence and self-awareness. It promotes "children's self-awareness and understanding by helping them to manage their own feelings, to recognise and appreciate individual abilities and to cope with change of various kinds" (NCCA, 1999: 3). The study was structured around three research questions:

1. How can I as a teacher raise children's awareness of the impact language can have on their mindset?

2. How can learning opportunities support children in using positive language?

3. What role do I, as the teacher have, in developing and fostering a growth mindset in children?

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us a considerable number of life lessons. It has been two years like no other and an experience we are not going to forget for a very long time. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a very difficult time for everyone. It has slowed the world down, given us time to reflect, reinvented how we teach and given us a deeper appreciation of the people closest to us. We have overcome challenging obstacles as a nation and it has not always been easy to front a positive outlook. With this in mind, I felt that as a leader in children's lives, my study resonates now even more so as we come to appreciate the need to enhance the lives of our children through positive language and a positive growth mindset.

1.2 Rationale

This action research study aimed to develop and foster positive language to promote a growth mindset amongst pupils in sixth class. Everything we do in the classroom, from providing instructions to demonstrating techniques to evaluating student work, is infused with language. It is vitally important as teachers to learn to adapt our language to encourage pupils to adopt a growth mindset. From a personal perspective, I have always had an interest in children's cognitive psychology. Some have no fear of facing a challenge while others lack the confidence and belief that they are smart enough or good enough to pursue more difficult tasks. As a teacher I asked myself what can I do to help these children to have a deeper self-worth and not to be afraid of what others in their class may think or say. As a child, I was always motivated and encouraged to do my best by my parents, teachers, and coaches in all areas of life, especially in education and sports. It is of great importance to me to see if I can transfer the encouragement and guidance I received, to the pupils I teach in the future. My values of student care, student voice and positivity were a catalyst to my research study.

1.3 Values Statement

Identifying your values helps with the "framing of one's research question and can also be used to formulate the criteria for assessing the research project" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 3). As I reflected throughout this action research study I engaged with my educational values of student care, student voice and positivity. I believe these values are fundamental to my beliefs and actions.

Student care: This is a value that is of utmost importance to me. I want my classroom to be a safe environment where the children feel secure and cared for. I envisage my classroom to be a happy active learning environment where children's learning is fostered. I feel it is important

to get to know the students and their lives, actively listen to them and check in on how they are doing regularly.

Student voice: A child's voice should be encouraged in the classroom to enhance their self-worth regardless of their educational ability. I think it is vitally important to make a big effort to listen to the pupils' voices who are seldomly heard, allow time for discussion and opinions, allocate time for creative expression and encourage debating. I believe student's voice is a fundamental part of education, students have a right to voice their opinions on all that matters to them as part of their own education. This echoes article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Positivity: As a teacher, it is one of my priorities to model positivity to the pupils I teach each day. Children learn more by watching and copying actions rather than listening so as their teacher I need to be aware of this and show a good example. I believe that this value should be held in the same regard as other important life skills. By drawing attention to pupils' thoughts, it makes them become more self-aware. As a result, a positive classroom can create positive thoughts which enrich learning.

Now as I reflect, I can identify where my values have come from. At the beginning of this course, I was asked to delve into my personal and professional core values. After considerable reflection, I identified my values and the motivation and reasons for becoming a teacher. My values are based on my childhood, my beliefs and a lifetime of impressions from my family, teachers and sports coaches. As a child growing up in a family of seven my parents demonstrated the values of honesty, positivity, hard work and selflessness. Their words and behaviours have impacted the way I view my own life and how I want to transfer these values to the children I teach. My sports coaches were always encouraging and continuously talked about three things you need to have to be successful in the game. These were having skill,

putting in time and effort and having the right mindset to play the best you could. Having the right mindset has shown me that you can navigate any trial or tribulation life throws at you. My value of positivity stems from my grandmother; I fondly remember sitting in her company completing the Irish Examiner crossword on a Saturday morning with my siblings and as we would complete it, she would say we were "top of the class". It always made us feel superior even if she had completed most of it. It gave us a feeling we could achieve anything if we put our mind to it. Even though it was something as simple as completing a crossword I believe the power in her use of positive words is something that has and will remain with me forever.

1.4 Context

The research study was conducted at a co-educational, mainstream class in a primary school in an urban area. It is a senior national school with four streams for each class level, ranging from third to sixth. The school has over four hundred pupils. I, as the researcher, was also the teacher of the class.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction into the research based around the three research questions. It reflects on the rationale of the research and the value statement.

Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature pertaining to the term of mindset, the two types and a definition of both. It reviews how the principles of Dewey are echoed in Dweck's work. It looks deeper at my values of student voice, student care and positivity. It discusses the misconceptions of a growth mindset. It details the significant role of the teacher, motivation, praise and the power of yet. It discusses the possibilities of self-talk. Growth mindset is explored in the Irish context in the curriculum, practice and policies.

Chapter three discusses the topics of action research and self-study research. It presents the data collection tools used, the structure of the intervention, ethical considerations and the context of where the study was carried out.

Chapter four summarises the principal research findings that emerged from the study and provides these findings based on the data collected through pre and post intervention questionnaires, rating scales, nine diamond ranking, observations, pupil reflective journals and my teacher reflective journal. The findings are examined and contextualised in relation to the relevant literature. The findings discussed are the dominant role of the teacher, the sense of wonder and discovery, positive self-talk and transformative change with the wider world.

Chapter five explores and analyses the importance of the research findings in respect to each of the three research questions that led the investigation. It explains the limitations, provides recommendations for future study and concludes with a reflection.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the study's objectives, as well as the research questions that led the study. It has also offered the justification for the study as well as a short description of the structure of the chapters in which the thesis was delivered. The next chapter reviews the literature and research on mindset and its connections with positive self-talk. It examines the vital role of the teacher in encouraging positivity and possibility in the classroom. It appraises where it sits in the Irish context, in my research setting and the Irish curriculum.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

"Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." ― *George Bernard Shaw*

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the teaching and development of a growth mindset within a primary classroom. It aims to examine the effective strategies needed to teach positive language to foster a pupil's mindset. Growth mindset is referred to in academic domains as either "the incremental theory of intelligence or the theory of malleable intelligence" (Dweck, 2000: 3). This idea considers how our intelligence can be developed over time with determination and hard work. In contrast, a fixed mindset or entity theory of intelligence posits that intellect is unchangeable (Dweck, 2006). Relevant literature on both growth and fixed mindsets is reviewed in this chapter. This chapter examines my values of student care, student voice and positivity. It defines the concepts of mindset and its associations with positive self-talk and building self-confidence in pupils. It explores the significant role of the teacher and how a growth mindset teacher can encourage positivity and possibility in their students.

Critiquing Dweck's knowledge on mindsets, questions about the various types, how they align with school and how children need to find strategies to discover their positive self-talk in the classroom and the context of the wider world. It reflects on the review and redevelopment of the primary curriculum and the changes in the SPHE curriculum. There has been extensive research on the benefits of how a positive growth mindset can influence pupils with their learning and achievement. However, more research is needed to show how educators can influence and promote positive language to foster a growth mindset in their classroom day to day.

2.2 Search Strategy

The following terms were used in search of the literature to review as they were considered to be key terms relating to positive growth mindset:

growth mindset; fixed mindset; motivation; praise; process praise; constructive criticism; the power of yet, use of self-talk in the classroom.

Manual searches for theses, academic journals and books were conducted in the John Paul II Library, Maynooth University. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a large proportion of the literature was sourced from reputable online databases including MURAL, Sage, Taylor and Francis Online, JSTOR and ERIC. These were accessed via Maynooth University library academic portal with journals and articles referenced from both national and international contexts. Recent data from the years 2006 - 2021 was prioritised, in so far as possible.

2.3 Values

"Education, learning, teaching and knowledge are concepts that are all deeply imbued with values and ideologies" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 17). It was important at the beginning of this study that I examined my values. Values of student care, student voice and positivity are meaningful values in my practice as discussed in chapter one. Drawing on Walker's (2008) study of twelve characteristics of an effective teacher I would agree that so many of these teacher characteristics are needed to promote a positive mindset within the classroom. The characteristics of being prepared, positive, holding high expectations, being fair, compassionate, and respectful towards students are all the characteristics pupils need from their teacher to grow and think in a positive way (Walker, 2008).

In September 2018 I read an article in the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) magazine that inspired me to change my thinking on my practice. The article encourages teachers to implement Dweck's growth mindset strategies within the classroom. This involves making subtle changes such as giving the pupils constructive feedback, assigning more challenging tasks and allowing time for opportunity and self-reflection (INTO, 2018). All these strategies have been effective and they are discussed in further detail in my findings.

As I had identified fostering and promoting a growth mindset amongst pupils in my class as a goal, it was vital that I was able to create a positive, caring environment for them. I needed to self-reflect on the language I was using to encourage and praise and also question if I was living true to my values. My values as a teacher are grounded in appreciating the uniqueness of each student and enhancing their experience in education through care and having their best interests at heart.

As previously stated, the value of student voice is important in my practice. I believe there is a link between encouraging student voice and self-talk. This will in turn foster and support learning in a positive way as documented in chapter four. "Listening to the voices of young people, including very young children, is now something that is not merely espoused, but actively advocated in education" (Fielding, 2012: 48). Encouraging children to talk and attentively listening to what they have to say will give us as educators a clearer understanding of their school experience through their perspective (Busher, 2012). By providing these opportunities we may identify areas where we can assist change in their outlook on challenging areas in education (Flutter & Ruddock, 2004).

Positivity is a virtue that I desire to continuously promote in the classroom. According to Dweck (2017), optimism and self-belief are essential components in developing a healthy

growth mindset. As a result, by teaching lessons that allow pupils to gain confidence and competence, a foundation for the possibility of a growth mindset is established.

2.4 What are Mindsets?

A mindset is defined as an established set of attitudes held by someone. Over the past three decades Carol Dweck, a well-known American psychologist and her colleagues have investigated the power of the mindset in humans. She became invested in students' attitudes towards failure and how they reacted. An educator's mindset plays a major role in influencing how a child feels or reacts about themselves as a learner (Boaler, 2016). For a child, their mindset is directly affected by how he or she faces academic challenges (Ricci, 2013). Dweck (2006) demonstrates how our perceptions of abilities and talents can have a significant impact on our performance in academic achievement, sports and other human endeavours.

Dweck (2006) classifies mindset into two types: growth mindset and fixed mindset. A fixed mindset thinks that intelligence, as well as other skills and capabilities, are permanent characteristics that cannot be considerably improved (Brock & Hundley, 2016). Dweck believes that people develop a fixed mindset from a young age where they see their intelligence, abilities and talents as fixed and unchangeable. This particular theory depicts mindset as people afraid to take risks because they may appear like they are lacking in their aptitude or capacity. "A child with a fixed mindset may give up easily, lack resilience and not engage in the learning process" (Ricci, 2013: 9). A growth mindset refers to intellect, abilities and qualities that may be developed over time with hard work, study and commitment. Brock and Hundley (2016) discuss how a growth mindset assumes that our talents are not innate or natural, or that we are only given a limited number of them, but that our desire to learn, the effort we put in, and our tenacity determines how successful we become at any given goal. With a growth mindset, people may accomplish more than others because they are less concerned about appearing

smart or talented and are more focused on learning (Dweck, 2016). "A child with a growth mindset perseveres even in the face of barriers" (Ricci, 2013: 9).

The contrast between mindsets is related to our understandings of intelligence and potential. Dweck's (2006) defining work remarks why individuals vary and why some people. persevere in the face of adversity while others quit. Some view mindset to be very permanent and unchangeable and others look at how with hard work and effort there are opportunities for improvement.

2.5 Misconceptions of a Growth Mindset

Preparing pupils for the twenty-first century is an important responsibility in a teacher's profession. Teachers who encourage a growth mindset in their pupils prepare the way for the development of 21st-century learning abilities in their students (Dweck, 2009). They must encourage not just cognitive development but also non-cognitive growth in their pupils. Non-cognitive abilities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, social skills, perseverance, agency, creativity, mindset and self-control are aspects of socio-emotional development that may be addressed in the early years (Garcia, 2014). Over the last two years, there has been a lot of uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Children have missed a substantial amount of school and need guidance and positivity from their teachers to learn in a safe environment where they can grow. The capacity of young people to attain their maximum learning potential is impacted by their mindset (Garcia, 2014). Dweck (2008) acknowledges that she used to think growth mindset was a simple concept but over her years of research she has become aware of how the term growth mindset might be misunderstood. This point is argued by Hendrick (2019) as while he supports the idea of a growth mindset, he feels it is obsolete. He claims that the growth mindset idea has been misunderstood and miscast as just a way of motivating the

uninspired with catchy slogans on posters (Hendrick, 2019). Dweck (2008) appreciates this and holds concerns that some schools have misunderstood and misapplied it in a range of ways.

Furthermore, Dweck (2008) has noted that there are three misunderstandings to her conception of growth mindset. Dweck's first thought is the idea of growth mindset is confused with a positive attitude. Even though someone may show characteristics of a positive attitude your mindset might be fixed. The second misconception Dweck feels is commonly held is that implementing a growth mindset is easy. It is not; teachers must do more than just display posters; they must incorporate growth mindset into their daily practices. Teachers must change their language to emphasise the process rather than the individual. When pupils work hard to complete a difficult task, their efforts should be acknowledged. Growth mindset links praise with success. It is essential to recognise and reward not only effort but also learning and development, as well as the practices that result in these outcomes. These could be asking for help from peers or the teacher, experimenting with new methods and capitalizing on failures to move ahead successfully. Finally, the third misconception is that until you implement a growth mindset, saying you have one is not truly effective (Dweck, 2008). Dweck (2008) observes that not everybody has a growth mindset in everything continually. Each individual possesses a combination of growth and fixed mindsets. A false growth mindset happens when people accept they have one all the time.

Some educators are transforming mindset into the new self-esteem movement, which is to make pupils feel better about themselves with any effort, irrespective as to whether they learn or not. If the teacher does not create the correct environment for their pupils, they will not be influencers in fostering a growth mindset in the students they educate. The environment has to support the shift in beliefs as well as its associated behaviours. Educators have to be careful not to fall into the trap of just pinning up a growth mindset poster on the wall of a

classroom and thinking that their job is completed. Dweck (2008) regards growth mindset as a tool for learning and improvement and the growth all depends on the approaches you use to teach it (Hendrick, 2019).

2.6 Deweyan Pedagogy

Dewey's concept of growth and positivity is echoed in Dweck's mindset concepts. Dewey divided education into two groups: child-centred and subject-centred. Dewey feels that subject instruction should be based on the child's personal needs rather than an economic aim. He believes that given the right setting every child's intellect could be developed (Flinders & Thornton, 2013). His philosophy is that education should be centred on doing and experiencing things. According to Dewey, the self is not something ready-created but rather something that is always being formed by choice of behaviour. He advocated that children should have the opportunity and responsibility for their own learning (Dewey, 1910).

According to Taylor (2005), academic achievement should grow if teachers establish positive learning environments in the classroom. Williams (2017), reviews the relevance of Dewey's philosophies in the twenty-first century and highlights the gravity of the teacher as a collaborator and mentor in the learning process. It is the duty of teachers to "create cultural changes within the classroom that are accepted, internalised and acted on by students" (Taylor, 2005 as cited in Williams, 2017: 94). Dewey (1910) discovered that particular praise, support, and effective classroom management can together contribute to a positive sense of self-confidence. The ideas about creating lessons for the intervention were predominantly based on promoting language to develop and foster a positive outlook for the child's experience in school and the wider world. This is discussed further in chapter three. The significant role of the teacher will also be examined. Making time to listen to children's thoughts and opinions reinforces feelings of self-worth. Children who feel included and accepted within their class

and school foster a greater sense of self-worth. This can then potentially lead to children becoming more capable of overcoming difficult tasks and challenges.

Reflection in education is significant in being progressive. Dewey is known as the father of progressive education and he was one of the first people to write about reflection. He defined reflective thinking as "the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought" (Dewey, 1933: 9). Reflecting provides a clear outlook on a specific experience and allows for new insights and improvements.

2.7 Role of the Teacher

Education has the power to transform society and human beings every day. The role of the teacher is significant in this process. In Ireland, the primary school curriculum aspires to "enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society" (NCCA, 1999: 7). Brookfield wrote that the very least a teacher should aim towards is leaving students "more curious, smarter, more knowledgeable and more skilful than before we taught them" (2017: 1). Growth mindset is a constant work in progress and as educators, we have to persevere to influence and encourage our students each day as we teach them. The majority of research carried out is based on the impact students have if they hold a growth mindset. However, Dweck (2008) observed educators having the ability to change students' mindsets, which has resulted in improving their achievements. Rhienberg (1980, cited in Dweck, 2008) conducted a study that found educators who held a growth mindset advocated a far more momentous academic gain than those educators with a fixed mindset irrespective of aptitude.

Teachers play a major role in the development of students, both personally and intellectually (Dweck, 2006). "Having students instructed by those desiring to impact their lives positively is a variable that is fundamental to the role of an effective teacher" (Farkas et al., 2000: 31). Inventiveness, passion, and personal relationship can be created by high-quality education. This is where we as teachers influence children to think outside the norms. There are many ways educators can promote a growth mindset in children they teach. Dweck (2006) has acknowledged that satisfactory tutors are captivated by the learning process rather than the intelligence or talent.

Outstanding educators encourage their pupils to strive to love learning and give their best effort. They also model for them how to eventually learn and think for themselves and to work hard on the essentials (Dweck, 2006). It is important for teachers when passing on a growth mindset, to know they are teaching for understanding and not getting pupils to memorise facts, rules, and procedures. The bulk of the current findings in research around the impact of educators mindsets informs us that almost all educators reinforce the theory that intelligence is changeable (Wacker & Olson, 2021). Those who do support this theory expect more from their students than those who believe intelligence is a fixed trait (Dweck, 2008; Rattan et al., 2012). Furthermore, research shows that educators who care about deeper understanding and work with students to achieve a growth mindset, give students a belief that their abilities can be developed (Dweck, 2008).

Rattan et al. (2012) undertook a research study and discovered that educators who believed their pupils were capable of advancement would implement instructional programs that would help students to attain the potential that growth mindset teachers viewed them capable of reaching. In contrast, educators who saw intelligence as fixed would attempt to comfort students, doing little to address the underlying factors preventing them from achieving the task.

Fixed mindset teachers often think of themselves as simply imparting knowledge to their pupils. They see themselves as finished products. However, as educators we shape the mindsets of our pupils (Dweck, 2006). Dweck (2006) outlines a number of ways that educators can provide and govern a growth mindset in classrooms. First, it is important to teach children about the brain and how it changes with learning. This will explain to children that our intelligence is not a fixed trait; it is changeable and can be developed. Secondly, educators need to mentor and be a resource for learning rather than simply judging the children's intellectual ability. Educators can give constructive praise and process approval where they praise the effort shown (Phi Delta Kappa International, 2013).

Research has shown that fixed-minded educators categorise children into groups and see these categorisations as permanent: smart students and less smart students. These teachers do not see any progress in these pupils during the year. These teachers do not take responsibility for their students' learning because of a belief that students are primarily responsible for learning and understanding the taught material. In contrast, research has shown growth-minded teachers do not categorise their students and as the year progresses some of the lower achievers potentially become higher achievers (Phi Delta Kappa International, 2013). Educators need to remember that taking risks involves risks and setbacks, but this is a critical part of learning (Dweck, 2015). The conclusion of this lesson, therefore, is that instructors pass on a development mindset not by holding a thought in their heads, but by "embodying a growth mindset in their deeds: the way they praise (conveying the processes that lead to learning), the way they treat setbacks (as opportunities for learning), and the way they focus on deepening understanding (as the goal of learning)" (Dweck, 2006: 233). According to Hattie (2012), the different mindsets or beliefs that instructors have about themselves and their pupils have a substantial influence in influencing their expectations, teaching methods and how students view their own mentality.

Growth mindset teachers see mistakes pupils make as challenges and opportunities to improve their skills, increase their understanding and become better teachers teaching these students (Dweck, 2014). In the words of Nuthall "At the heart of the problem that teachers face in the classroom is knowing what is going on in the minds of students" (2004: 295). Yet again we observe the major role teachers play in their pupils' learning by knowing what best strategies suit their students.

2.8 Motivation

According to research, the motivation of pupils is a major correlate of their mindset type. Students with growth mindsets are considerably more driven than someone with fixed mindsets (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Motivation can be described as the cause or factor for acting or behaving in a specific manner. Motivation can influence how pupils interact with school, how they communicate with their teachers and how they ask for help. Motivation can be characterised as intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is to be motivated by internal factors such as happiness, enjoyment and having a personal interest. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is non-inherent and is instrumental motivation where there is something at the end. A number of studies have shown that pupils who believe their intellect may be enhanced seek out activities with little regard for how their efforts are perceived by others (Blackwell et al., 2007; Esparza et al., 2014).

The achievement of children highly depends on how stimulated they are by academic areas. "Students' views of their own intelligence create motivational worlds that operate as powerful forces for achievement" (Dweck, 2002: 40). The theory of fixed intelligence states that some people have the opinion that intelligence is a fixed trait. This view can have many effects on the way pupils view their intelligence. It can cause pupils to be concerned about how much of this fixed intellect they possess and it can make them interested first and foremost in

looking and feeling like they have enough. They must appear intelligent and avoid appearing dumb at all costs (Dweck, 2000). According to Dweck (2006), pupils who hold this entity theory only look to problems that are easy and take little effort to look smart. Here challenges are a threat to self-esteem and pupils avoid and pass up valuable learning opportunities, so they don't look like they are a failure. In contrast to this, others believe in an incremental theory where intelligence can be developed through effort (Bandura & Dweck, 1985; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). This philosophy is based on the belief that your intelligence may be increased with effort and instruction. This idea has an influence on students because it offers them direction and fosters lifelong learning. Even pupils who have an incremental theory and low self-esteem thrive on challenges, immersing themselves fully into difficult activities and persevering through them (Dweck, 2000).

Dweck emphasises that "Beliefs can be changed" (2002: 37). As educators when we believe that their intelligence can be developed this "leads them to value learning overlooking smart, to enjoy effort and challenges, and to thrive in the face of difficulty" (Dweck, 2002: 39).

2.9 Praise

Applauding children's intellect can damage their motivation and undermines their performance (Dweck, 2006). This implies that the best thing educators can do is encourage their students to embrace difficulties, be interested by failures, relish attempts, explore new techniques and never stop learning (Dweck, 2006).

Dweck (2006) is conscious that educators praise students who put in any effort but are not learning. This is not helpful towards fostering and developing their mindset. As teachers, we need to stop trying to make pupils feel good about themselves by using language like 'Great effort! You tried your best!' if they have not tried at all. As an educator switching from product praise to process praise can help to foster growth mindsets in pupils. The focus of growth

mindset is learning not just trying hard (Dweck, 2019). Johnston (2012) outlines that as educators we have to be careful not to fall into the trap of using language in a seemingly positive way. For example, a compliment such as 'You are so smart' has the effect to promote a fixed performance framework which can lead to decreased learning for pupils. In contrast, when we commend the process of effort, we promote growth mindset which can lead to increased learning and achievement.

On a deeper level, Dweck (2006) believes that educators should stay away from certain types of admiration especially the praise that judges their intelligence or talents. As teachers we need to be careful what we commend, we need to look at the process of their work or the effort they put in rather than their intelligence or talent to get to the final product. This will encourage pupils to appreciate the relationship between hard work and enjoyable success. Furthermore Haim Ginott, through his lifelong work with children recognises a similar conclusion "Praise should deal, not with the child's personality attributes, but with his efforts and achievements" (1972, cited in Dweck, 2006: 192). Dweck (2006) also notes that rewarding children for speed and perfection is sending out a negative message to pupils towards their learning and achievement. Speed and perfection are the enemy of difficult learning: "If you think I'm smart when I'm fast and perfect, I'd better not take on anything challenging" (Dweck, 2006: 193). As tutors we need to reflect on how we communicate to our students as they complete the tasks, we assign them.

Alas, some may ask the question of what educators should choose or say. According to Dweck (2006), constructive criticism proposes the idea of explaining to children in child-friendly terms what they have done well. It explains to them where they can improve and shows them that effort and diligence are needed with skills and talents for achievement. Constructive implies assisting the child to fix something, create a better product, or do a better job. A child

needs honest and constructive feedback. If children are not shown where they have gone wrong, they will not learn and will view advice or feedback in future years as something negative. Withholding constructive criticism does not help children's confidence; it harms their future (Dweck, 2006: 195). Students whose efforts are acknowledged want to "immerse themselves in information that could teach them more" (Dweck, 2002: 49).

Educators can then apply the growth mindset in daily communication through "subtle verbal feedback, such as giving a compliment on academic achievement, or by restructuring their lessons, as teachers' behaviour in the classroom can strongly influence children's mindset and motivation" (Nguyen, 2020: 34, cited in Aronson et al., 2002; Masten 2001; Mueller & Dweck 1998).

2.10 The Power of Yet

The word 'yet' allows for the power of believing. It instils a 'You can do it' attitude. Dweck's (2006) concept is based on the principle that we are all on a learning journey and that just because you have not accomplished a task yet, does not mean that you cannot or should not try and certainly that you should not give up. It is a type of hope that is instilled in us not to give up (Dweck, 2006). Dweck's idea looks at how everyone has the ability and power to improve. As educators, we need to value the making of mistakes and the struggle children have on a day-to-day basis. 'Not yet' has the connotation to suggest possibility. If a student is to give time, patience, effort and application, a sense of accomplishment will follow. Newkirk states "Intelligence is not a matter of being smart it is the capacity to view difficulty as an opportunity to stop, reassess and employ strategies for making sense of problems" (2012: 122). Making mistakes is part of all our lives and children should be exposed to seeing mistakes as a part of life and an occasion to learn.

2.11 Positive Self-Talk

Theodorakis et al. define self-talk as "what people say to themselves either out loud or as a small voice inside their head" (2000: 254). Vygotsky refers to self-talk as "the use of language as a tool for thought and constitutes an important part of cognitive development" (1989 as cited in Flangan & Symonds, 2020: 1009). Prior research has indicated that self-talk plays a role in children's problem solving and is positively connected to children's overall achievement in performance over a duration of time (Corkum et al., 2008).

Much of the current literature on self-talk pays particular attention to children under the age of seven. However, a recent study carried out by Flanagan and Symonds (2020) have investigated children's projected use of self-talk to sustain motivation amid difficult academic challenges. They studied a group of children between the ages of nine and twelve. The research findings from the study revealed this age group of children were able to express a wide range of potential uses of self-talk to cope with challenges within the classroom. The study revealed "the power of self-talk and the significance of their classroom interactions, classroom environment and larger sociocultural context" (Flanagan & Symonds, 2020: 1020). The study also noted how effectively the students were supported by their teachers, as well as the importance of the teacher's involvement in teaching techniques to encourage positive self-talk (Flanagan & Symonds, 2020). When it comes to shaping students' self-talk, a teacher is crucial (Dohrn & Bryan, 1994), because positive affirmations for effort help students replace negative beliefs with positive ones by generating "constructive emotions and behaviours" (Solley & Payne, 1992: 2).

Positive pupil–teacher interactions are associated with children's involvement, emotional management, communication skills and desire to try new things (Osher et al., 2018). Martin and Marsh (2009) agree that encouraging self-talk in the classroom potentially

prepares pupils to face higher obstacles and challenges outside the classroom. Positive self-talk helps an individual "cope, correct, reinforce, or guide a person to a goal" (Stanulis and Manning, 2002: 6). There have also been research studies carried out on self-talk in the context of sport and in particular in recent studies in physical education. Zourbanos (2013) claims that in addition to facilitating learning, self-talk may help pupils embrace and enjoy exercise as well as develop more self-esteem and self-belief.

A positive classroom atmosphere improves students' potential to learn and be productive both inside and outside of the classroom. It enhances the pupils' wellbeing towards their learning and achievement. My research school emphasises the positives and rewards good behaviour. Our whole school approach recognises the uniqueness of each child and supports children in all aspects of their development. To promote wellbeing, we engage in several programmes such as Friends for Life wherein chapter three I will discuss how I used concepts and ideas from this book to design my lessons for the intervention. Each week we aim to enhance self-esteem by presenting a child from each class with a star pupil award. As part of our special educational needs policy, we provide a social skills class for children whom we feel would benefit from learning social skills and to boost their self-esteem and self-confidence. Students can use self-talk to help them control their anxieties, enhance their creativity, perseverance, and ambition. Language is a very powerful tool in the classroom and permeates everything we do from demonstrating lessons to evaluating student work.

2.12 Context in the Irish Curriculum

Schools in Ireland play an important role in the promotion of wellbeing by engaging in a variety of activities and practices that assist the development of a child as a whole. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) prioritises the promotion of student well-being in schools. According to national and international research, our children's well-being is vital to

their academic and personal success (DES, 2020). My study is relevant and timely as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is under review and redeveloping significant concepts throughout the curriculum and in particular the SPHE curriculum.

The vision of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework is "to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood and into the future" (NCCA, 2020: 5). My research study hopes to contribute to this by providing language to develop and foster a growth mindset both inside and outside the classroom. The proposed framework focuses on seven essential components, one of which is encouraging well-being. This is highly relevant to my study as fostering wellbeing connects to self-awareness, self-worth and the importance of children seeing themselves as capable and resourceful. It supports them by providing skills to cope and be resilient. It encourages children to be optimistic and interested in their learning, as well as to recognise their own individuality and potential (NCCA, 2020). "It glosses the latter as promoting persistence, flexibility, motivation, and choice: characteristics associated with growth mindset" (Thompson, 2020: 95). The proposed flexible time in the curriculum will be a great addition as the thirty minutes per week in the 1999 curriculum was not sufficient to cover all areas of the SPHE curriculum as I have experienced in my teaching career thus far. It was difficult to give equal opportunities to each child in the class. While I tried to integrate the concepts across other curricular areas like oral language, the arts and physical education it was very difficult to ensure all strands were covered and often SPHE became just integrated with other subjects and was not taught on its own due to curriculum overload.

In recent years and in particular, the last two with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic many challenges are being presented to our young people. As educators, we need to cater for

their needs to ensure they have a positive outlook on their education and future life. By modelling language teachers can show children how they can change their self-talk from negative to positive. Preparing pupils for these changes by cultivating a growth mindset can be especially beneficial for children in their early middle-school years (Barnes & Fives, 2016). The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework (2019) strive that by 2023 wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school.

2.13 Conclusion

In conclusion, the importance of growth mindset in teaching is becoming gradually more established. It could be observed that pertinent literature and theory related to promoting a positive growth mindset in the classroom has been examined. The definition of mindset has been explored in great detail. The role of the educator and the influence this individual has in the classroom to support a growth mindset has been discussed. Mindset has been considered in the Irish context, where it fits in the curriculum, in practice, and policies.

As noted above the educator plays a huge role and the benefits of having a growth mindset teacher have been portrayed. Growth mindset teachers have the influence to encourage positivity and possibility in their students. It has addressed key factors such as praise, motivation, positive self-talk, and the power of positive language such as using the word "yet". There are over thirty years of evidence to support the theory that children's perception of intellect has an influence on their learning. This is focused on their motivation and self-confidence on tasks they have not previously been successful in. It can be seen in their ability to develop new strategies and skills to achieve tasks (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 2000).

There are many indications to show the impact teachers mindsets have on student learning (Dweck, 2008; Rattan et al., 2012). There are huge advantages of having a growth mindset teacher instead of a fixed mindset teacher. Thus, the growth mindset teacher is driven

and has the determination to face challenges that they come across as they teach. This type of

teacher is one that can motivate students that have previously been substandard at a subject and

influence them to work harder so that the student can achieve their potential.

Chapter 3 Methodology

"If teachers truly believe that every child has the power to grow and improve his or her talents, skills and abilities through hard work and effort, and to seek to cultivate that belief in their students, the roots of the growth mindset will grow deep." (Brock & Hundley, 2016: 220)

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this action research study was to examine and enhance how I, as a teacher, can foster a growth mindset amongst the pupils in my class by increasing their awareness of the language they use and its significance. This study investigated the impact the language we use can have on our growth mindset. The synergy between the research methodology, self-study action research and the research content growth mindset will be explored throughout. In the following sections, action research methodology, the school context and participants will be described and all ethical considerations outlined. The overall research design and instruments employed will be explored, while the procedures used at various stages throughout this study will be explained. "Research design includes a concrete and specific statement of the aims and objectives of the research as set out in the overall research purposes" (Cohen et al., 2018: 165). A number of different data collection tools were selected for this research project: discussion circle, teacher observations, pupil questionnaires, Diamond Nine ranking, pupil work samples, a teacher reflective journal and pupils' reflective journals. Finally, data collection analysis and interpretation will be considered.

3.2 Research Rationale

Changing outcomes begins with changing your mindset. This study has allowed me to reflect on my values. I have experienced myself as a living contradiction as I have not fully been living to my values of student care, student voice and positivity. This study is based on my ontological and epistemological values, which will impact my research method. As I began

to reflect, I realised that this was the perfect opportunity to examine if I was truly encouraging a positive growth mindset in my classroom. I have taught my class for the past two years and from the beginning, I have experienced some pupils struggling to show positive self-esteem and lacking the ability to face challenges and errors. I wanted to foster a greater sense of self-worth in my practice. It is my hope that my practice will be improved but also contribute to the benefit of other teachers' by sharing my results.

3.3 Qualitative Research

For this small-scale research project, I conducted largely qualitative research with elements of quantitative research, but its contribution was less significant. Qualitative research as a method assumes that "knowledge is something which is fluid and subjective" (Kalmbach et al., 2010: 26) and comprises the process of "gathering data to gain a powerful insight into the thoughts, feelings and 'insider perspective' of lived experiences" (Punch, 2009: 294). Qualitative research as said by Denscombe "exhibits a preference for seeing things 'in context' and for stressing the importance of multiple interrelationships between a wide range of factors in operation at any one time in the setting" (2014: 246). According to Cohen et al., "It gives voices to participants, and it probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions (2018: 288).

3.4 Action Research

Action research is a method of enquiry used to investigate and refine your own practice. It is a rigorous methodology that begins with a question in the form of, "How do I improve my practice?" (Whitehead, 1989: 41) in response to the experience of oneself as a living contradiction when values are denied in practice (McNiff, 2020). Dick (1993) defines action research as a methodology. Firstly, it is an action that brings about change in a setting and secondly research takes place to increase understanding for the researcher involved (Dick,

1993). McAteer (2013) notes the term 'action research' as frequently used in relation to the initiatives educators undertake as part of continued professional development. Action research has been developed for the purpose of the improvement of education over a number of years seeing lots of change. It acts as a self-study for practitioners to engage and reflect on their own practice.

Action research "embraces the idea that each researcher is informed by their own values, norms and assumptions" (Sullivan et al., 2016: 25). It is unique to each researcher. This was an action research project in which I was both the researcher and the participant while examining my practice. Sullivan et al. (2016) note action research studies critically reflect on your work, engages in a values approach as well as studying yourself in order to improve your practice.

Action research is linked with reflective practice. Moon (1999) defines reflective practice as an active, flexible activity that deals with actual complicated and challenging circumstances. Greene views reflection as being open, 'to come awake and find new visions, new ways of living in the fragile human world' (2001: 207). Mezirow (1990 cited in Sullivan et al., 2016: 26) argues that reflection is key to understanding our assumptions and challenging these assumptions. Reflective practice "challenges teachers who have unquestioned assumptions about good teaching and encourages them to examine themselves and their practices in the interest of continuous improvement" (Zalipour, 2015: 4). Conducting action research has numerous benefits. Primarily, the teacher is given time to improve their own practice as a teacher. This in turn enhances their students with their performance and achievement on tasks. Action research has the possibility to enrich the environment in which they teach. This type of research resolves immediate and long-term problems in the field where both the educator and pupils gain. Action research challenges teachers to understand what

pupils know and how they learn. It increases problem-solving skills and gives educators confidence in their teaching. Coughlan and Brannick (2009) support this idea, implying that in order for change to occur, one must engage in self-reflection, set realistic expectations and be willing to learn.

Devine acknowledges this in her own research "…where adult – child, teacher-pupil relations are framed in terms of voice, belonging and active participation, children will be empowered to define and understand themselves as individuals with the capacity to act and exercise their voice in a meaningful manner on matters of concern to them" (2002: 307). Action research, according to Kemmis, is an excellent technique to maintain high standards in any profession since it requires "collective responsibility of professionals" to adapt to changing societal needs (2010: 420).

3.5 Self-Study Action Research

Self-study action research comprises undertaking research in one's own educational practice (Loughran, 2010). It is based on the desire to enhance one's professional practice and is driven by values. As teachers, we all strive to live by our educational values in practice. These values act as guiding principles in our daily teaching. Zeichner termed self-study research as, "the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research" (1999: 8). According to McNiff (2000) in self-study action research, reflective practice is essential as the researcher needs to be able to examine their own practice and reflect on how they behave or think.

In this self-study action research, I lived out my values of student care, student voice and positivity in my classroom. Self-study action research has shown that my practice might not necessarily present a particular problem, but it is important to dig deeper and question the way things present themselves. As the class teacher, to instil a growth mindset I first needed to

examine my language use in the classroom. Praising for purpose was one part I proposed to examine. I reflected in my teacher journal on the language I was using to commend the pupils. I caught myself replying 'Excellent work, you are so smart'. As I meta-reflected I realised I was praising the student but not praising the process, so I learned to respond by saying "Great work look at all the strategies you have used in completing the task" (Dunne, Reflective Journal 10/20). This subtle shift helped the pupil see that their work had developed through hard work and dedicated practice.

3.6 Action Research Cycle

McNiff and Whitehead's (2011) cycle of action research involves five key stages. These five stages as outlined by McNiff and Whitehead (2011), can be seen in the diagram below:

Stage 1	• Identifying an area of investgation.
Stage 2	• Imagining a solution.
Stage 3	• Implemeting a solution.
Stage 4	• Evaluating the solution
Stage 5	• Changing in practice in light of the evaluation
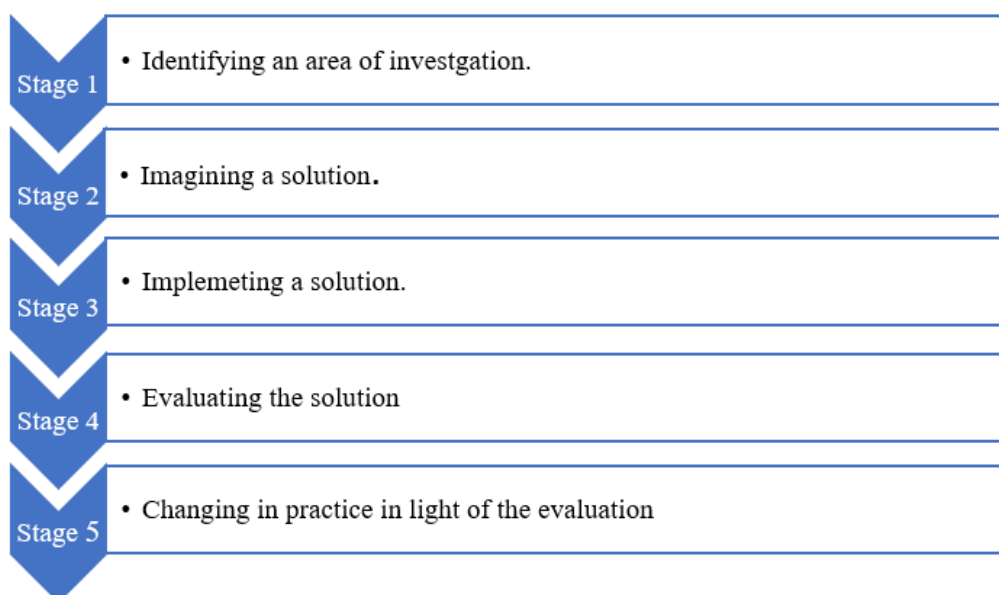
Figure 1: The Five Key Stage of Action Research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011)

In this action research study, I identified an area for an investigation which was the development and understanding of language to foster a growth mindset amongst pupils in a mainstream class in a primary school. I noticed that my class group had a tendency to use

negative statements and would not give things a go indicating a fixed mindset. On reflection, I found it difficult to comprehend and wanted to find a solution to help students who automatically used negative words to say they could not do something for example "I will never be able to do that" or "I am not good at art" before they ever attempted the activity. The action undertaken to bring about change was the implementation of change in children's language in learning to foster a positive mindset towards all learning both in and outside the classroom. Through engagement with a wide range of literature, discussion with my critical friend and reflection I imagined an intervention and this is discussed in more detail below. Language was encouraged in dissimilar areas over the twelve-week intervention lessons. Collaboration between me as the educator and my students were essential in determining the details of the problem. To influence change in practice, a variety of research tools were employed to collect data. The data collection tools that were utilised to compile and assess the intervention are explained in detail. The advantage of action research over other more traditional research methods is that it has the ability to produce meaningful and long-term transformations in organisations (Aveyard, 2013). This intervention impacted my practice as I am more aware of the language I, and the children use and this is expanded upon further in chapter five.

3.7 My Values Systems

"Action research begins with values" (McNiff, 2002: 12). The values that motivated my action research methodology reflected those that influence my work as a teacher. My intention was to improve my educational practice and my teaching of language to enhance and develop opportunities for the pupils in my class to foster a growth mindset. My aim was that these opportunities would provide my pupils with a sense of wonder and discovery, provide them with new perspectives towards challenges using positive language and cultivate new

understandings of failure. My values of student care, voice and positivity were sustained throughout the research study by continuously reflecting in my reflective journal.

3.8 Research Design

3.8.1 Research Site

As noted in chapter one this study was carried out in my school setting – a co-educational, sixth class in an urban area. It is a senior national school with sixteen mainstream classes in total, four at each level from third to sixth class. The research was carried out where I was the class teacher.

3.8.2 Research Participants

All of the pupils in my 6th class were given the opportunity to take part in the study. There were 26 pupils in the class, 17 boys and 9 girls. To engage and participate, I first got consent from the children's parents and then all of the children in my class signed the assent ethical forms to participate in the study. The purpose of the research was to enhance my practice as a teacher. I was determined to influence the mindset of my pupils to a positive growth mindset where they may utilise language to aid with positive self-talk when completing challenging activities and view mistakes in a positive light. I kept a reflective journal to record observations throughout the study. The pupils had their own personalised reflective journals which they used to express their thoughts and feelings. They completed activities and set goals during the lessons.

3.9 Data Collection Structure

This study took place over a twelve-week period, beginning online for the first two weeks as a result of school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic and was completed in school face to face, with intervention lessons planned for thirty minutes twice per week. As my

research school participates in the Friends for Life programme as part of SPHE, I followed this plan and the Growth Mindset Coach Book, a guide for teachers. I drew upon components of these books and adapted elements of them in order to structure the overall intervention.

3.9.1   Data Collection

Data collection is an essential component of any part of research (Bryman, 2016). In this research study triangulation was a key element of ensuring validity and authenticity of claims to new knowledge. Data was gathered for this study in one cycle. For this reason, a variety of data collection methods were chosen. This includes teacher observations, pupil questionnaires, Diamond Nine ranking, pupil work samples, a daily teacher journal, the pupils' reflective journal and also comments from a critical friend. The research intervention took place from March to May 2021. Data collection was carried out with all the pupils in my sixth class.

To generate baseline data, I conducted a questionnaire with the pupils to interpret their knowledge of what a positive growth mindset is. As part of this discussion, I carried out a rating scale exercise with the students to see where they rated what subjects they liked best and least. The pupils completed a Diamond Nine ranking on things they liked about school. The children did a narrative on the reasons why. Following on from this I focused on the intervention programme twice a week during SPHE lessons to develop the use of language to promote and foster a positive growth mindset amongst pupils across all curricular areas.

Over the twelve weeks, we focused on different aspects of language and how we use it. After the twelve-week intervention, I reconducted the questionnaire to see if their opinions had changed, what they had learned from the experience and if they felt it was worthwhile carrying it out. Throughout the intervention, I conducted naturalistic field observations during the occasions when growth mindset was being offered. I also kept a reflective diary in which I

reflected upon the interventions put in place. I continually reflected on whether I was living more closely to my values of student voice, student care and positivity in my practice.

3.9.2 Data Collection Tools

Data Collection Tools	Discussion Circle
	Pre and Post Intervention Questionnaires
	Diamond Nine Ranking
	Observations
	Teacher Reflective Journal
	Pupil Reflective Journals

Figure 2: Data Collection Tools

Discussion Circle

Discussion circles are a form of a group interview with the priority on the interconnection within the group who discuss a subject designated by the investigator (Cohen et al., 2018). In this investigation, I administered a discussion circle with the students in advance to enacting the intervention. The motivation of the discussion circle with the children was to assemble some baseline knowledge on the students' explanation of what they believe mindsets are. The utilisation of a discussion circle permitted the students to test each other and contribute to a discussion in surroundings which was natural to them (Cohen et al., 2018). It allowed an opportunity for each participant to contribute and offer their opinions to the discussion. Throughout the intervention, I used the discussion circle as a tool for the participants to reflect and discuss the new language we were developing and what situations we could use it for.

Questionnaires

Self-completion questionnaires were selected as another method of data collection for this study. A questionnaire is a valuable approach to data collection, as it allows the researcher to collect data in a short amount of time. Prior to the intervention, a questionnaire (see Appendix G) of both open and closed questions was distributed to 26 students in sixth class. Students were asked to answer by circling the option they agreed most with following each statement. Post-intervention another questionnaire (see Appendix S) was distributed to the children. They were asked both open and closed questions regarding their enjoyment of the intervention, attitude to the new language used, what they thought they have learned from it and whether they believed they could use their positive language skills as a transferable skill to the wider world. As I designed both questionnaires, I was careful to use common language, so the participants understood clearly what I was asking. I kept them short and focused and I avoided leading questions that could cause the respondents to answer in a preferred way.

Diamond Nine Ranking

Diamond Nine ranking is a research tool that involves a subset of nine boxes to prioritise and categorise key variables. Before the intervention, I decided to use a diamond ranking (see Appendix J) activity also known as 'diamond 9' as a study tool as I felt it would be effective in engaging young children in the research process. Pupils should be accountable for sharing their knowledge in planning, implementing and assessing their learning in the classroom. They should also be accountable for explaining their decisions and actions, as well as asking for or providing assistance to others (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). The students placed in an ordered list their most favourite items about school to their least favourite items about school and gave a narrative on their chosen options. The participants worked individually and then in pairs by discussing their options and ranking their options with the most preferred item

at the top and the most disliked at the bottom. The pupils also marked the diamond with comments and explanations (Clark 2012; Clark et al., 2013; Woolner et al., 2010, 2012, 2014). The data allowed me to gather information about pupils' positive and negative experiences about school and how I could help them develop language around this. Diamond Nine ranking is valuable for extracting constructs and facilitating talk. When rating elements such as words, objects, or images, participants must make clear the overall links through which they organise knowledge. This allows for the study and comparison of their comprehension (Clark, 2012; Clark et al., 2013). Diamond Nine ranking has been utilised in the classroom to elicit students' beliefs because it is seen to be motivational for students; it also enhances response rate and the sincerity of their replies (Baumfield et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2008).

Observations

Observation is a data collecting strategy in which the researcher immerses herself in the environment in which her respondents are present while jotting down notes. Observation plays a vital role for teachers in planning and assessing effective lessons. Cohen et al. (2018) speak about the benefits of observation to the researcher in that it allows them to collect live data from the social situations which are naturally happening. In this manner, the investigator is not relying on second-hand accounts of what is taking place. To ensure validity I chose to observe and record what is fair and not take observations out of context or embellish truths. Campbell et al., stated that "simply noticing events can also provide insight into situations" (2004: 94). For this reason, I decided that a combination of both semi-structured (see Appendix H) and unstructured observations would not only increase the reliability and validity of each but also could be used to best capture what was happening in the classroom. Over the twelve-week intervention period, observations played a significant factor in future planning of activities and formed the basis of the reflections within my journal. I documented my

observations in a notebook in practice, writing any observations that I made about changes in the children's attitudes towards mindset. Using observations as a data-gathering instrument allowed me to assemble information that could not be identified by other data-gathering instruments for example, "formal and informal conversations, verbal and non-verbal interactions, etc" (Morrison, 1993: 80). Using observations enables the researcher to move beyond perception-based data, such as opinions and interviews and gain more in-depth, personal knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018).

Teacher Reflective Journal

Critical reflection is essential in the process of action research. According to Schon (1995), a practitioner through reflection can make sense of some of their uncertainties. Pavlovich views reflection as a key variable of journal writing, encouraging the writer "to stand outside the experience, to see it more objectively and to become detached from the emotional outcomes" (2007: 284). Moon sees the reflective journal as "essentially a vehicle for reflection" (1999: 4). As mentioned in chapter two Dewey (1933) believes that we have to think about our experiences in order to genuinely improve our practice. He understood the significance of reflection and its worth within the classroom.

Throughout my action research project, I kept a journal to keep track of my learning and changes in my thinking. Keeping a reflective diary enables you to learn more about your profession and focuses your thoughts on your values as well as the areas of work that interest you (McDonagh et al., 2019). Keeping a journal was important to me and it enabled me to record occurrences during the day, as well as momentary reflections, reactions and observations both in and on action. McNiff (2002) emphasises that the defining feature of action research is that the researcher is studying their own life, not the lives of others. By using the reflective journal, I was able to identify areas of my practice where I was perhaps afraid to

deviate from the conventional norms, resulting in a lack of a meaningful learning experience (hooks, 2003). The journal played an important role in recording feelings, providing a source to meta-reflection, and provided a time and place for being expressive and creative. The journal formed for me a "permanent record of thoughts and experience and a safe outlet for personal concerns" (Spalding & Wilson, 2002: 1397).

Pupil Reflective Journal

The pupil reflective journals proved to be a pertinent part of the research. McNiff notes that participants can be invited to keep a journal of learning as long as ethical guidelines are adhered to (2016: 180). I explained to the pupils that I would be collecting and using data from their journals for my dissertation. As they reflected on their experiences, feelings and thoughts, positive language emerged. The ideas and thoughts that arose from the pupil's reflections may be used to produce generalisations or concepts and it is those generalisations that essentially allows for new situations to be dealt with appropriately (Gibbs 1988). Each student created their own personalised pupil reflective journal (see Appendix R) in which they completed the exercises after each lesson each week. They used them for goal setting and problem-solving as well as changing negative self-talk to positive self-talk. They served to provide me as the class teacher with critical feedback and feelings and thoughts about what they enjoyed and disliked and what I could improve on within my planning of the intervention. My written reflections alongside the pupils helped me reflect on my observations in planning further lessons throughout the intervention and informing my thinking.

3.10 Structure of the Intervention

My action research method enabled me to adapt my teaching of language to try to influence and foster a growth mindset amongst the pupils I teach in sixth class. The twelve-week intervention during SPHE lessons took planning, consideration, time and research to

ensure the lessons were of high quality. I am pleased to note that they were highly successful, engaging and fun to teach. There is always space for tweaking and improvement, however, I will continue to use this teaching method in my future practice for the pupils I will teach. The action research study followed only one cycle (see Appendix F) as I felt the learning was continuous. Over the twelve-week intervention period, the lessons took place two times per week in thirty-minute slots during our SPHE lessons. I drew upon elements of two books to enhance my lessons: Friends for Life Programme and The Growth Mindset Coach Book, a guide for teachers. Both books provided beneficial ideas and lessons on core concepts to develop positive life coping skills and foster a growth mindset so the participants can deal with whatever life throws their way in and outside the classroom.

3.11 Description of Intervention

The study aimed to improve children's self-worth by developing and fostering positive language to promote a growth mindset. I wanted my students to see themselves in a positive light where they were confident at tackling difficult tasks and saw failure as a means of improving their learning. Firstly, I planned explicit lessons around the model of mindset and its importance. I practiced a progressive Deweyan approach as I created my lessons on fostering a growth mindset as I focused on the child's needs. Each week, we looked at different concepts that could improve our positive language to help us grow and progress. Some of the concepts were directly aimed at me as the teacher. I needed to reflect on the language I was using in the classroom and how I was praising the children in the class. I had to ask myself whether I was praising for hard work and effort or just trying to make the pupil feel good about themselves. Was I praising to promote a growth mindset? To generate some baseline data, I carried out a questionnaire on the participant's definition of what mindset is, a rating scale with questions based on mindset and the children completed a rating scale on how they felt about subjects.

Online they completed a Diamond Nine ranking on what they liked most about school. However, as the participation online was low, I decided when we returned to school to administer the same baseline data as not everyone had completed it. The response was much improved. In class we had lots of discussions about our feelings and why we might feel the way we feel. Following on from this each week we looked at new concepts to help grow our mindset. These were as follows.

- Growth versus Fixed mindset

This was the first topic we discussed as a class, we delved into what it meant to have either a growth or fixed mindset (see Appendix K) and looked at how all of us have both. We examined how intelligence can be developed with hard work and effort. The activities we completed were a worksheet on how we look at ourselves, how we think our friends perceive us and what our teacher thinks of us (see Appendix L).

- Power of Questioning

For this concept, the children in their groups got the opportunity to make a list of the questions (see Appendix M) they could ask themselves that would help them to improve their work. This is an example of some of the questions to pupils wrote in their reflective journals.

'Did I ask a question if I needed help?'

'Is my work something I am proud of?'

'Did I review my work for possible errors?'

'Is it really my best work?'

'What strategies have I learned that I can use?'

- Use of Praise

For this concept, I reminded myself to modify my language to praise the process and not the person. Below in Fig. 3 are examples of how I reflected in my reflective journal in how I could rephrase my language from person praise to process praise.

Person Praise	Process Praise
Great job! You must be smart at this.	Super job! You must have worked really hard.
See, you are good at Maths. You got a 100% on your last test.	You really studied for your maths test and your improvement shows it.
You got it! I told you that you were smart.	I like the way you used all your English comprehension strategies until you got it.
You are such a good student!	I really like the way you kept your concentration and kept working on your maths problems. Well done.

Figure 3: Person Praise to Process Praise

- Classroom Discussion on Making Mistakes

We highlighted mistakes as an opportunity to learn. We examined failure and the fear of failure and how it made us feel. Due to embarrassment pupils are afraid to take on challenges, explore and think for themselves. This was evident from some of the pupil comments in their reflective journals (see Appendix O). Mistakes should not be evaluated as poor performance. As the teacher, my role here was to explain where the children went wrong and how they could fix it. Allowing children time and opportunity to redo their work was beneficial as they could see it as a learning opportunity. If a student needs help with their work encourage them to ask their peers for help or ask the teacher.

- Changing Negative Language to Positive Language

For this concept I wanted the children to be able to identify the negative language they were using and teacher model ways of how they could change their language from negative to positive (see Appendix Q). I felt this would be beneficial to them concerning challenges they found difficult across all curricular areas.

- Challenges

I set the children a variety of challenges ranging from easy to hard to see how they felt under time pressures. This aim was to help the children use their helpful green thoughts as taught in the Friends for Life programme to not give up easily even if they were finding the challenge difficult.

- Goal Setting and Problem-Solving

For this concept, we began by researching the lives of famous inventors, elite sports figures, and celebrities. We examined their journeys to success and how they reached their goals, the challenges and failures they had to overcome to get to where they are today. We discussed the reasons why we still talk and learn about them in the classroom. I then set the participants the task of researching their favourite celebrity or sportsperson. They had to present their findings to the class. They had to present their understanding of how their celebrity trained and set goals in order to achieve their successes. They then set their own short and long-term goals in their reflective journals. Each week the pupils answered questions like the two sets below in Fig. 4.

• What is the most interesting thing you have learned this week? • What can you do to improve next week? • When have you felt confident this week?	• What are three things you have learned? • What are two things you want to learn? • What is one question I still have?

Figure 4: Reflective Questions

- The Power of Yet

We embraced the idea of using the word yet at the end of sentences to make room for improvement and possibility. (Fig. 5) It was important to note to all the participants that everyone has a mixture of both growth and fixed mindset. It is a spectrum and our goal should be to cultivate a more persistent growth mindset. In doing so we had to focus on our positive self-talk. "Self-talk is critical to managing mindsets" (Brock & Hundley, 2016: 176). Post-

intervention I asked the children to create mindset posters using all the positive language they had learned and asked them to fill out a questionnaire to complete the intervention.

I don't get it	+	Yet	=	Optimism
I can't do this	+	Yet	=	Perseverance
I can't do Irish	+	Yet	=	Growth mindset

Figure 5: Power of Yet

3.12 Validity and Rigour in Action Research

As a researcher, it was fundamental to me that the data I collected and the analysis I performed on my findings were reliable, sound and ethically correct. Care, respect, solidarity, community, mutuality and civic transformation should all be guiding principles for researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). McNiff describes producing evidence as "part of the process of establishing the validity, or truthfulness/believability, of a claim" (2017: 195). Validity is "the touchstone of all types of educational research" (Cohen et al., 2008: 134). To ensure my research study was of high quality I carried out the following:

My critical friend listened to and examined my research, providing helpful comments and feedback. Brookfield suggested that through dialogue colleagues can offer multiple perspectives and opinions and help us unearth and check our assumptions regularly and believed that "the presence of critical friends is at the heart of the critically reflective process" (2017: 66). I consulted with her regarding any issues I encountered or any dilemmas I faced. I appreciated her thoughts and opinions. Her help and guidance were a valuable resource for the action research process.

Triangulation may be defined as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (Cohn et al., 2008: 160). Triangulation shows

that "the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, 1970: 308). Triangulation occurred across the study in a number of different ways. During the data collection phase, the data was gathered from a range of 26 sixth class pupils. Data was gathered in both quantitative methods, using pre and post intervention questionnaires, Diamond Nine survey and qualitative methods using discussion circle time, observations and both teacher and pupil reflective journals which adds strength to the data. Triangulation is used "to increase scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings" (Flick, 2005: 227).

3.13 Ethical Considerations

At the outset of this study ethical approval was sought from Maynooth University Ethics Committee. Permission was granted and following this, a Letter of Consent was sent to the Chairperson of the Board of Management, outlining the aim of the research and what was involved (see Appendix A). Cohen et al. (2011) note that the principle of informed consent derives from the participants' right to free choice and self-determination. This is particularly important when researching with children, as it is essential that both they and their parents or guardians must understand exactly what is involved in the research and what their role would entail should they choose to engage with the study. I explained all aspects of the research project to the children and answered any questions that they had. Due to school closures in January consent and assent were sought online initially and then a hard copy was received on return to school. I read through the Plain Language Statement for Participating Students on a pre-recorded video for Seesaw and I gave them a Letter of Consent (see Appendix B) and a Plain Language Statement (see Appendix C) for their parents or guardians to read, reminding them of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Once I received written parental consent, I gave the twenty-six participating children a letter of assent

(see Appendix D) and a plain language statement (see Appendix E), which they discussed and signed in the presence of their parent or guardian if they chose to participate. Throughout the investigation, every effort was made to respect and care for all participants. The importance of student care and student voice in this study was emphasised, and student input was provided throughout each lesson. Ethical considerations are crucial across all stages of the research process where the 'dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants is paramount,' (Moule & Goodman, 2009: 45).

Sensitivity

When conducting action research researchers must be especially sensitive to the needs of participants and maintain a high level of personal respect for them (Cohen et al., 2018). The participants of this project were between the ages of eleven and twelve years. To provide children with a fair chance to learn, teachers must critically reflect on each child's situation as well as the working environment of practice (Kincheloe, 1991).

Power Dynamics

Sullivan et al. acknowledge in order to avoid power issues it is "essential for the teacher-researcher to critically analyse their value system and to take the students seriously as agents in their own education" (2006: 97). I took great care with the participants throughout the intervention. I respected them as individuals and I refused to observe the pupils as "passive receptors" (Broch 2014:13, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016). I used language appropriate to their age to discuss the study. I dealt with any unexpected outcomes and ensured that all participants felt comfortable but also clarified with them that they could withdraw themselves at any point of the study.

Data Storage

In compliance with university guidelines, only data for the justification of the fact-finding study was gathered and processed. Data was documented distinctly and precisely. I

used pseudonyms when writing about my participants. As outlined by Sullivan et al. (2016), all data was signed, labelled and dated. In accordance with university and GDPR Guidelines, electronic data was secured using password protection. Hardcopy data was allocated in a data archive in a locked cabinet with access to the researcher and sanctioned university personnel only.

3.14 Challenges

A major challenge that I faced prior to the data collection period was the global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. I had planned to begin the data collection in January on-site in the classroom but due to the high rise of cases before Christmas, schools did not reopen in January and all schoolwork went online. I postponed the data collection as I was reluctant to begin online. However, with little certainty of us returning to school I began the intervention online at the beginning of March and this posed its own challenges. I made all the necessary amendments to the ethics forms and the online data collection began. The response to the intervention was only about half the participants but once we returned to school in March, I completed it face to face and the response rate improved immediately. One of the stark realities of the Covid-19 pandemic was many pupils missed a number of school days due to being close contacts so did not get to participate in all the intervention lessons.

3.15 Data Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), theme analysis should be a fundamental approach for qualitative analysis since it offers essential abilities for performing many other types of qualitative analysis. It is a method for finding, organising, categorising, evaluating and reporting on themes discovered in a data set. It is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The phases were carried out using data gathered from observational notes taken during teacher-

designed activities and individual reflective journals. These had been recorded each week during the data collection sessions. Following the collection of qualitative data my teacher reflective journal was documented and reflected upon. Colour coding, finding repeating patterns, and discovering words or phrases were all part of this method of identifying recurring themes in my data. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that there is no precise rule on the decision determining whether or not something should be deemed a theme; they feel that the researcher should decide on the relevance of the material with their own research questions in mind.

Thematic Analysis is completed in six phases which are outlined below.

Step 1: Familiarisation	Step 2: Coding	Step 3: Searching for themes
Step 4: Reviewing themes	Step 5: Defining and Naming themes	Step 6: Writing the report

 (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Figure 6: Six Phases of Thematic Analysis

To begin the thematic analysis, I transcribed all the data collected from observational notes, teacher-designed tasks and individual reflective journals. My teacher reflective journal was also used, which was documented and reflected upon in the weeks following the collection of qualitative data. I read and re-read the entire set of data and as a result, became very familiar with it. I had a great interest in the children's thoughts and experiences on the intervention. Generating initial codes involved breaking down the data into smaller codes which I then subdivided and emerging themes were formed. These themes have been explored to find

patterns arising from the data. The themes were examined and evaluated in connection with my research questions and my values (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.16 Conclusion

To conclude, my research was conducted within the action research paradigm, with a particular focus on the self-study approach. The research design and the context of where the research took place was discussed. A detailed overview of the data collection tools, how the data was collected and stored, the structure of the intervention and a description of the intervention was provided. I described how the data was validated in accordance with ethical guidance. In the next chapter the findings are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This action research study investigated how I, as a teacher, could develop and foster a growth mindset amongst the pupils in my class. This was achieved by increasing their awareness of the language they use and its significance. This section aims to analyse the data collected during the research cycle. This has been a reflective and enlightening experience I have shared with my class. It is undeniably a study that was conducted with people rather than on people (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). The three research questions for this study are set out below:

1.	How can I as a teacher raise children's awareness of the impact language can have on their mindset?
2.	How can learning opportunities support children in using positive language?
3.	What role do I, as the teacher have, in developing and fostering a growth mindset in children?

Figure 7: Research Questions

4.2 Emerging Themes

This chapter details the findings of this study. The data obtained for this research comes from questionnaires, Diamond Nine ranking, rating scales, empirical observation, teacher and pupil self-reflection diary entries, all of which were used to analyse the language used by the participants. The findings are discussed and analysed under four main themes, which emerged from the data analysis:

(i)   My Role as the Teacher

(ii)   Sense of Wonder and Discovery

(iii)   Positive Self-Talk

(iv)   Transformative Change with the Wider World

The findings will be explored in detail within this chapter.

4.2.1 My Role as the Teacher

My role as the teacher became a prevalent theme in my research. The significant impact of my role as teacher is shown in my findings as I had an integral role to play. The curriculum states the "teacher has a complex role as a caring facilitator and guide who interprets the child's learning needs and responds to them. It is the teacher's concern for the wellbeing and successful development of the child in creating a supportive environment where the child is happy and motivated to learn" (NCCA, 1999: 20). With this in mind and through the guiding principles of the growth mindset ideology, I played an important part in helping the children to experience change. This concurs with Dweck (1999) where she identifies what a teacher says and does matters.

Mindsets are core sets of beliefs that act as lenses through which we observe, interpret, and interact with the worlds in which we work and live (Dweck, 2006 & McGonigal, 2015). Throughout my reflective journal, I referred to the characteristics of compassion, kindness and care. As noted in chapter two from Walkers (2008) study I felt these were evident characteristics required to fulfil my role so that each child worked towards developing positive self-esteem, took on new challenges, and saw mistakes as a way of learning.

I had a particular role to play as a teacher in encouraging and fostering positivity in my classroom. I had the ability to be an agent of change. I noticed and nurtured positive growth mindset within my classroom. A reflective question I asked myself daily was "How do I foster and maintain a positive mindset in the classroom?" (Dunne, Reflective Journal 09/20). I have taught my class for the past two years and from the beginning, I noticed there was a sense of

negativity and a lack of self-esteem amongst a number of the pupils. I wanted to examine how I could change this. From the outset, I knew that in order to promote a positive learning experience the pupils must feel supported and engaged. Teacher modelling of positive language to promote a positive mindset was a key part in fostering and improving my support towards my students. It was also a vital part of how I helped enable children to learn and develop language to a growth mindset. This theme may be subsequently divided into three subthemes as seen in Figure 8 below.
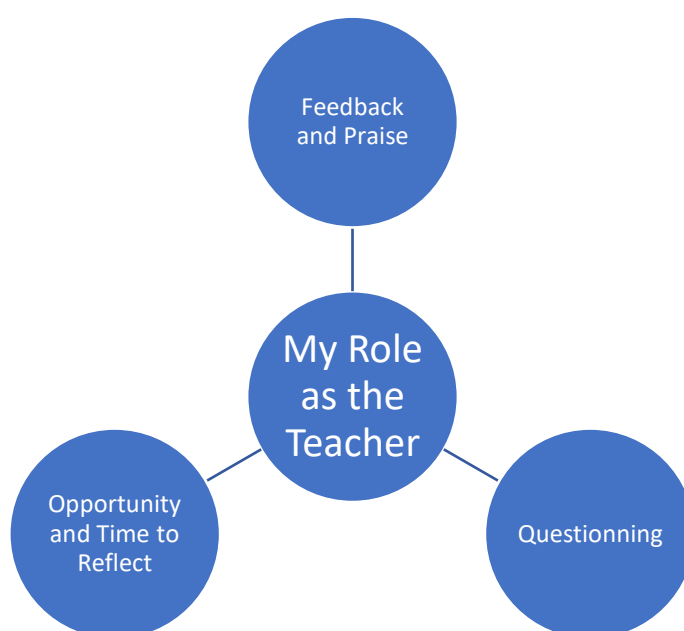
Figure 8: Subthemes of My Role as the Teacher

1) *Feedback and Praise*

As a class, we particularly examined the language used in each of the concepts during the intervention and how we could change our negative self-talk to positive self-talk. However, to instil growth mindset language in pupils it had to firstly begin with me as the teacher. At the beginning of the intervention, I examined my language and reflected in my reflective journal to see how I could change my words. Interestingly one of the examples I wrote down in my reflective journal was *"This pupil will not stop talking"* (Dunne, Reflective Journal, 11/20). I

now realise I was viewing this pupil with a fixed mindset. When I reflected, I knew I needed to change my words to *"I wonder what strategy I can try with this pupil tomorrow"*. Small changes like these helped me to reflect further and assisted me in gaining valuable insight into how I needed to be aware of my language to promote a positive environment in my classroom. Another area of my teaching practice I focused on was my use of praise for purposeful effort in my classroom. My reflective journal entry shows the internal struggle of realising that perhaps, I had not been demonstrating a positive growth mindset in the way I thought I had been. For example, this was a response I replied to a pupil with who had answered a question incorrectly *"No that is wrong"* (Dunne, Reflective Journal 12/20). I also felt like I had not been adequate in how I modelled growth mindset for the children and had even been perpetuating a negative response. I often found myself saying *"Come on now, just get it done. The more I thought about it, the more I felt like this was not in line with my values and that I was not effectively modelling growth mindset in my class"* (Dunne, Reflective Journal 12/20).

I have observed that the feedback I gave my pupils can either encourage a pupil to avoid challenges or pursue easier goals. I have learned the importance of specific praise, for children's work rather than replying *"Excellent work, you are so smart"*, I have changed my feedback to *"Great work look at all the strategies you have used in completing the task"*. I responded to errors and setbacks and noticed that the children were no longer shying away from challenging tasks. They were able to identify when they needed to ask for more help whether from their peers or me as their teacher. It reinforced the importance of my self-awareness and how this impacts the pupils I teach. This concurs with Dweck (2006) who argues that educators should look at the process of the pupils' work or effort rather than praising for intelligence or talent. As the weeks went on, I observed a sense of confidence and self-esteem growing. This subtle shift helped the pupils see that their work had developed through hard

work and dedicated practice. This further supports Ginott's (1972) view of praising for effort and achievement rather than personal attributes.

Developing a growth mindset in pupils is a long-term process that requires a concerted effort on the part of teachers. Similarly, getting teachers to perceive themselves in the same light will take time; yet there are tremendous benefits to be gained through leveraging these principles. By teacher modelling, care is shown not only to what the pupils will achieve or what they will learn but more importantly see pupils as learners learning to listen, solve problems and make a difference no matter the task. It reinforced the significance of my self-awareness and how this impacts the children I teach. This is consistent with Dweck's (2008) conclusions that educators who care, give pupils a belief that their abilities can be developed.

2) Questioning

Modelling how to use questioning was another feature of the research. Giving children the opportunity and time to ask questions was important as part of the study. As a class, through discussion, we formed a list of suggested questions the pupils could ask themselves while completing tasks. The pupils wrote down questions as a resource in their reflective journals.

Giving children the opportunity to reflect on their work was very beneficial as they were taking responsibility for their work. This resulted in the children having a resource bank of questions they could utilise to improve their work. They became part of their vernacular language in checking to see how they could further improve their efforts.
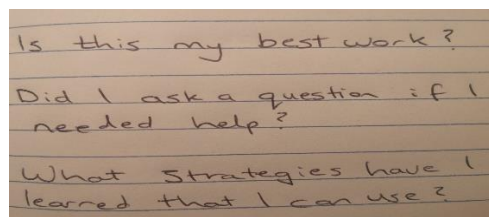
Figure 9: Example of Questions in Pupil Reflective Journal.

3) *Giving Pupils Opportunity and Time to Reflect.*

From my observations, it was clear to see that allowing students the opportunity and giving them the necessary time to reflect in their reflective journals was very beneficial. In the beginning, a number of pupils found it challenging as they were unsure of what to write. As the weeks progressed throughout the intervention the children were identifying areas where they were positively noticing their efforts and areas where they needed to improve on. They were then able to work on these areas in the following weeks. I noted in my journal how numerous times throughout the intervention the participants would ask *"When do we get to use our reflective journals?"* (Dunne, Reflective Journal 04/21). Reflective journals are a powerful tool to promote children's autonomy and improve student learning. My research indicates positive benefits for both the children and the teacher. For the children, it allowed them the opportunity to write freely and reflect on their learning. It allowed them to set personal goals and review the language they were using and possibly holding them back from being the best that they could be. They helped students acquire positive language authentically and enhanced their critical thinking skills by giving them occasions to express their opinions. From the outset of decorating and creating their personalised journals, they were eager to use them throughout the study.

The pupils' reflective journals gave me an insight into goals they had set for the week, questions they still had and areas they were looking to improve on. This helped me with my lessons on where I could help these individuals best. My teacher reflective journal improved my professional knowledge, gave me a greater understanding of my class and pedagogy as well. As I wrote in my journal, I began to realise that I as the teacher have started *"to appreciate that my personal and professional experiences teaching and understanding language will yield*

diverse results and that there will always be potential for growth" (Dunne, Reflective Journal 05/21).

4.2.2 Sense of Wonder and Discovery

The pupil's positive reactions to growth mindset demonstrate that it altered their expectations of what they might accomplish. This supports Dweck's (1999) premise that a growth mindset boosts self-efficacy and the desire to improve and learn. Drawing from chapter two, Dweck (2006) has broken down the mindsets into two types: growth and fixed. A fixed mindset assumes that intelligence and other qualities, abilities, and talents are fixed traits that cannot be significantly developed, and a growth mindset is defined as intelligence, abilities and talents that can be developed over time with effort, learning and dedication. The sense of wonder and discovery was a prevalent theme that emerged throughout the research and will be discussed below under three subheadings.

1) Benefits of Understanding Growth Mindset

In the pre-intervention stage, the pupils were asked for their definition of what they thought mindset was. Pre-intervention questionnaires revealed a varied knowledge of what they thought it was. Children's open-ended responses were noted. While the children displayed an understanding of what constitutes mindset "*it is how your mind is thinking,"* (Sarah, 2021) or *"what you are thinking, how you set your mind on something"* (John, 2021) there was a lack of homogeneity in their definitions. A number of the children did not have a definition as they were unsure*; "I don't really know"* (Joseph, 2021). Throughout the development of the mindset intervention, it was evident that the children gained a clear understanding of the growth mindset and fixed mindset concepts; this is evident in these definitions provided by these children.

"Growth mindset: a growth mindset is like an optimist (someone who is happy and is positive) it is always finding a way to fix things, never giving up, trying again and again until you get it

right and finding the positive side of things. Fixed mindset: a fixed mindset is having very negative thoughts and giving up very easily and not trying again, thinking, and expecting nothing good but only the negative side of life" (Amy, 2021).

"Growth: A growth mindset can attempt anything, even if it seems difficult. It knows that it is ok to fail, make a mistake or lose. Fixed: Fixed mindset thinks that once you have made a mistake, you shouldn't bother again, and nothing is possible" (Lisa, 2021).

As part of the pre-intervention through questionnaires and rating scales the children were asked what subjects they liked and disliked, what subjects they found hard and easy, what subjects they felt they were good at, and which subjects they found more difficult and how it made them feel (see Appendix I). Physical education and art were the most popular subjects that the children found easy and felt they were good at. In contrast, the majority of children found Gaeilge and Maths to be the most difficult and the subject they disliked the most. As we discussed the reasons why as a class, I used Mentimeter as a visual aid to illustrate the language most commonly used to express their feelings towards these subjects.

What subjects do you feel you are good at? How do these subjects make you feel?

talented

alright happy

happy excited smart

intelligent and proud   clever powerful

happy smart

ok

pretty ok

i feel good

i feel smart   they are really fun to do

successful proud smart

happy and excited   i feel happy

successful smart

confident

Which subjects do you like? Why do you like these subjects?

interesting and fun

it mostly isn't writing

it is easy   fun   fun to do in general

fun and interesting

i'm good at them

not too easy or too hard

i like art it's fun   make me feel smart

i enjoy them
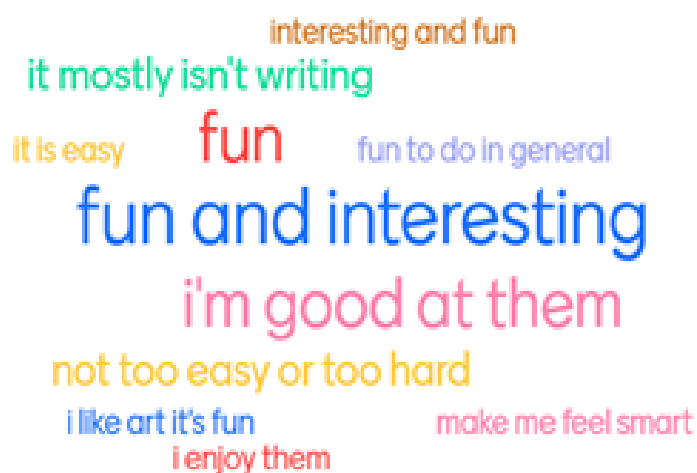
Which subjects do you find more difficult? How do these subjects make you feel?

annoyed frustrated sad

bored sad nervous
anxious and fed up
fed up bad clueless
negative   unintelligent fed up
silly unintelligent   afraid fed up
i feel a bit fed up
panicked   a bit stupid
annoyed sad

Which subjects do you dislike? Why do you dislike these subjects?

they are hard
just not for me
hard and boring   it is difficult
hard to understand
they're hard and annoying
boring and sometimes hard
hard put me in a bad mood
i don't enjoy them
too much effort   gaeilge is hard
boring and hard
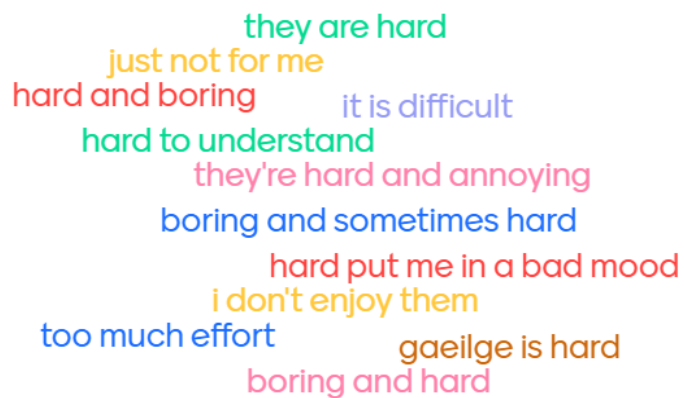
Figure 10: Feelings Towards Subjects.

Reflections from the pupil reflective journals supported and verified the feelings children had towards certain subjects.
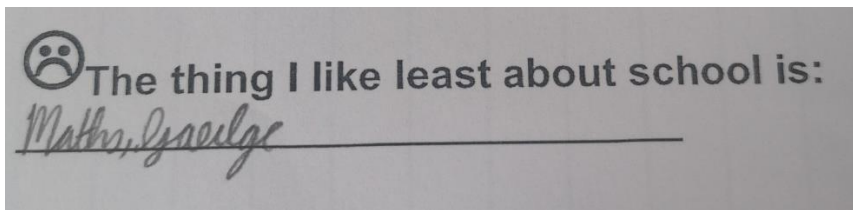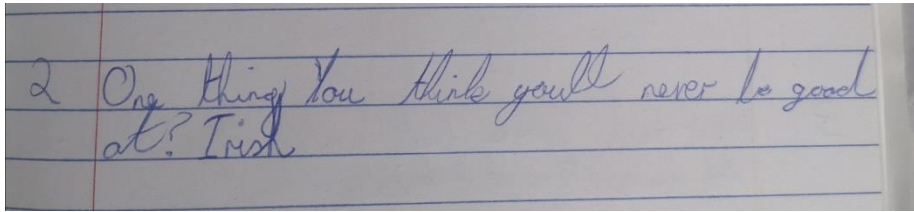
Figure 11: Pupil Reflective Journal Entries.

Each week, as we worked on the different concepts of the intervention the children were slowly changing their language and working on improving their skills towards challenging tasks within subjects they disliked. The findings from the pre-intervention data showed a shift in the attitudes of participants towards how they felt negatively about certain subjects. They were now more open-minded and were able to identify the areas they found challenging within the subjects for example in this child's reflective journal she noted *"I like maths, but I find fractions hard"* (Jacob, 2021). The children were making the connections with the strategies taught in school and seeing things from a different perspective. These results gave me, a greater insight into how my pupils were feeling towards certain subjects, how I could use my communication and relationship with the children to try and foster a more positive outlook using positive language to improve on subjects like Gaeilge and Maths.

Surprisingly as we read and discussed our class novel 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' the children identified how some of the characters had fixed mindsets. This led to a whole class discussion; where the pupils offered solutions on how the character could change his mindset

from fixed to growth. They also discussed how Bruno, one of the main characters in the story

had a growth mindset and suggested their reasons why.

2) *Understanding of Failure and Mistakes*

At the beginning of the intervention, the participants were given a short questionnaire on

making mistakes, how it made them feel and what they thought others thought of them. From

the overview below, it can be seen that most of the participants felt negative feelings towards

themselves when making a mistake and also felt others thought negatively of them too.

How do you feel when you make a mistake?

a bit disappointed
tiny bit mad
feel like giving up
bad cause i got it wrong
frustrated
kind of bad
bad
annoyed
sad
embarrassed
ashamed
not good

How do you think other people see you when you make a mistake?

feel pity for me
pity me
annoyed
disappointed
embarrassed
confused
see me as a failure
think i'm silly
bad
you are bad or something
they think i'm bad
they see me as dumb
you're a failure
people say bad things
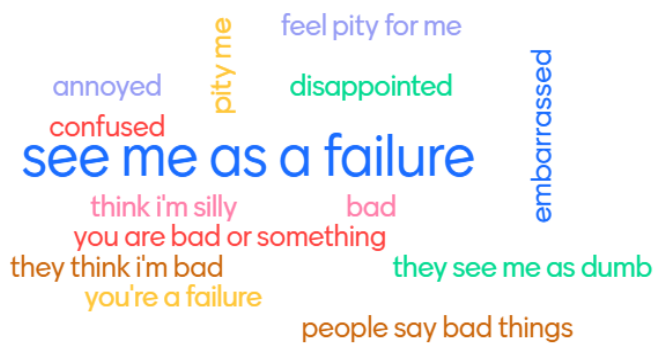
Figure 12: Feelings Towards Mistakes

As I reflected in my teacher reflective journal this was an area that I felt needed to modify if the children's attitudes were going to change. "How do I change the children's attitudes from viewing making mistakes as failure instead of a way of improvement?" (Dunne, Reflective Journal 03/21). As the weeks progressed, there was a noticeable shift in the participants' attitudes toward making mistakes. The children began to overcome their challenges and articulate making mistakes as a way of learning. *"In school I can ask for help if I do not know what to do and outside of school, I can keep on trying until I get it"* (Lisa, 2021). *"Mistakes are great for experience"* (Róisín, 2021). When the participants were asked if they had learned anything from making mistakes they answered, *"I have discovered that every time I make a mistake, I'm learning what not to do the next time, and doing that is making room for improvement"* (John, 2021) or "*Yes, I discovered a new way to do it that makes it easier*" (Jim, 2021). They noted in their personal reflective journals how they were more confident and did not feel embarrassed if they made a mistake as they felt they were in a safe environment.

4) A New Perspective on Challenge and Failure

From the children's responses on Mentimeter, failure is something they see as negative and they have already been taught that you should not fail. They associate it with fear and are apprehensive about trying difficult tasks for fear of failure is a common occurrence. They were afraid of being embarrassed in front of their peers. I knew I had a role to play in changing their perspective towards failure and giving them a new outlook on challenges. Failure is a potential pathway to success. On week 10 we studied celebrities, inventors, and sports people and in particular positive statements and famous quotes attributed to them. The children began to understand how they trained and set goals to achieve their successes. We talked about what these famous people must have said to themselves, we listened and watched videos about them,

and the children chose to study and research someone they admired and presented their findings to the class. This allowed the participants an opportunity to see the failings and persistent attitude of these people to change their language and not give up.

During collaborative research and discussion, the children were able to identify and delve into the information found and discover how these people had to work hard, persevere, fail, make mistakes and never give up getting to where they are now and how relevant they still are in today's society. This lesson was interesting and rewarding for the participants as seen in a pupil reflective journal *"I learned that most of the famous people today made lots of mistakes but kept going"* (Jane, 2021) and "*My favourite part of the mindset lessons was learning about famous people who inspired many"* (Ava, 2021).

As already mentioned in chapter two Hendrick (2019) believes growth mindset theory has been misrepresented and miscast as simply a means of motivating the unmotivated through pithy slogans and posters. I agree with him. Growth mindset is much more than just that. I was careful in the planning of my lessons to avoid what Hendrick (2019) has cautioned against. Throughout the intervention, I felt it really benefited the children delving into the lives of famous inventors and sportspeople. It was beneficial to have a discussion on these famous figures and to realise it was okay to make mistakes. You only need to be able to perceive them as a means of learning to achieve. Growth mindset needs to be used as a learning tool in the classroom where children can identify improvement in their work.

Wonder is inquisitive and allows children to perceive things in context without any bias. It awakens our hearts and brains to the endless possibilities that surround us each day that we may otherwise take for granted. Having a sense of wonder and discovery comes from creativity and opens up the mind to new possibilities. Children often ask 'why and how' about everything to anyone who will listen to them. It is valuable to answer these pupils' questions and also ask

the question back to them *"Why or how do they think something is what it is?"* (Dunne, Reflective Journal 04/21). Asking these questions is critical to new knowledge, understanding and higher thinking. Asking questions leads to the discovery of a better understanding of your surroundings. It is a tool to learn something new each day. I observed that children learn best when they are the ones asking the questions and when they have the desire to learn.

4.2.3 Positive Self-Talk

As mentioned in the literature review positive self-talk helps an individual "cope, correct, reinforce, or guide a person to a goal" (Stanulis and Manning, 2002: 6). Allowing children, the opportunity and time to reflect on something that did not work out gave them the ability to reflect and use the different positive language they learned to attain and complete difficult tasks.

It is interesting to see from the first pupil's example of goal setting he used writing his Irish story as something that did not work out for him (Fig. 13). He identified what happened, what his strategy was, why he used the strategy, how he felt when it did not work out, what he learned for next time, what new strategies he will try or who could he ask for help and how he would deal with his thoughts that keep him from trying. Being equipped with this knowledge enables children to coach each other through problems or challenges. Children can now help each other in a variety of disciplines across the curriculum because there was a direct link between peer learning and peer support.

Figure 13: Pupil Example of Problem-Solving Strategy.

Post intervention I noticed a significant difference in the classroom climate, where pupils persevered at challenging problems. This was in contrast to the pre intervention attitude where children would have given up more easily. This is in line with Dweck's (2015) idea that a growth mindset works well for students who are struggling in school.

Every day we engage in self-talk. As soon as children become "able to evaluate themselves, some of them become afraid of challenges. They become afraid of not being smart" (Dweck, 2006: 10). One of the main aims of the study was to teach children how to rethink the language they use into positive self-talk. Throughout the intervention, we looked at specific words and affirmations (see Appendix U). To begin the pupils must be aware of the negative language they have used. Secondly, they needed to acquire new strategies to change the

negative language into positive language. Finally, they had to implement this positive language in their daily lives.

The negative language used in the classroom was investigated and the children were asked to write in their reflective journals words or thoughts that came into their head when they find a task difficult or challenging. This was helpful to the children in identifying these thoughts as unhelpful to them; *"I'll never learn how to do this"*(Sarah, 2021), *"I can't do it"* (Tom, 2021), *"there is no point in trying"* (Lisa, 2021), *"this is too hard"*(John, 2021) *"this is so bad*" (Joe, 2021)*"Theirs is so much better than mine"* (Rachel, 2021).

Each week during the intervention we took a negative statement and together came up with how we could change it into a positive statement (See Appendix Q). The participants worked individually and also in their pods using the methodology think, pair, share. As the pupils' understanding of self-talk deepened furthered, they became more confident, flexible, and creative in recognising and rethinking their negative language. They also began to show awareness of the negative words like *I cannot, I will not, I will never be, I am not* and the positive words of *can, will, yet, have*. From the reflective journals, it was evident how much positive language the children had learned and how they were now able to reflect and change their negative thoughts to positive ones.
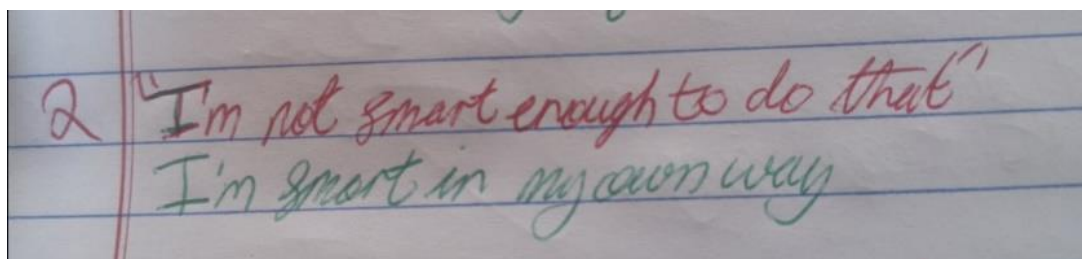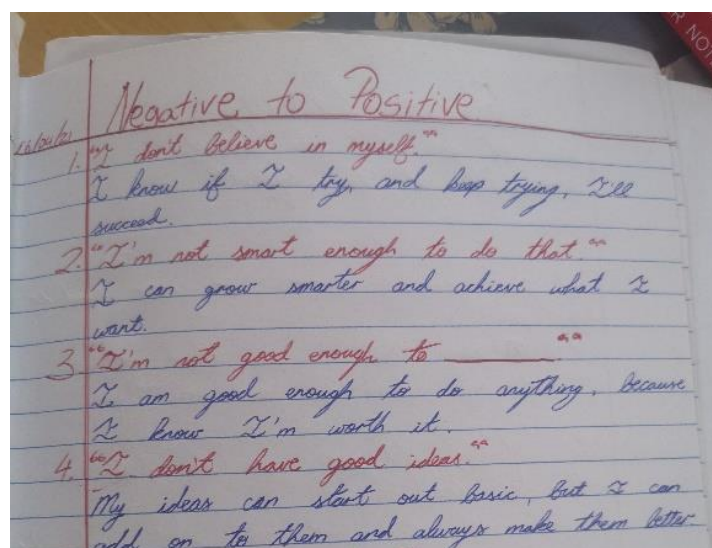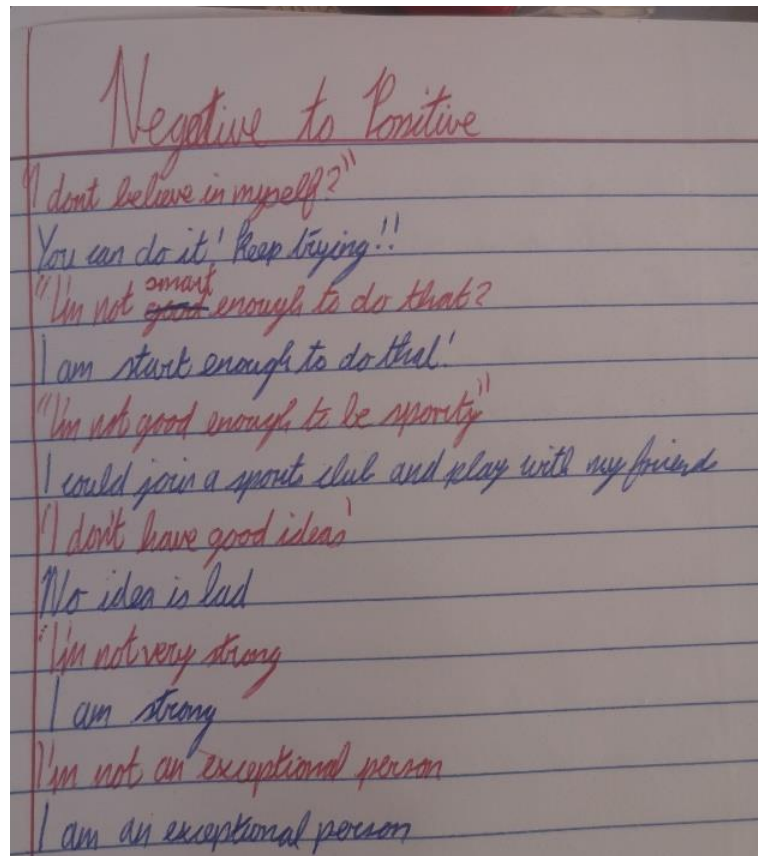
Figure 14: Pupil Reflective Journal Entries.

The data collected during the study revealed that the new strategies learned impacted

the students' abilities to successfully rethink negative statements to positive statements and to

consider the value of doing so in their lives and how they could transfer them to other parts of

their lives too. Using positive language to change self-talk has huge potential to change attitudes and perspectives not only towards academic subjects but also in the wider world as discussed by Martin and Marsh (2009) in chapter two.

On the final week of the intervention, the participants were asked to create posters on Mindset (see Appendix T). The participants created posters using all the new language they had learned over the course of the intervention. This child created an acrostic poem on the word Mindset. The positive language was becoming a more prominent part of our class and the children were gaining the benefits.

Mistakes are okay,
In your brain there is positivity somewhere you just need to find it
No need to stress you just try your best,
Do what you can.
Stop thinking you CAN'T do it, all you need to do is add yet,
Easy this word means you have tried hard and gotten better,
Try your hardest and don't give up.
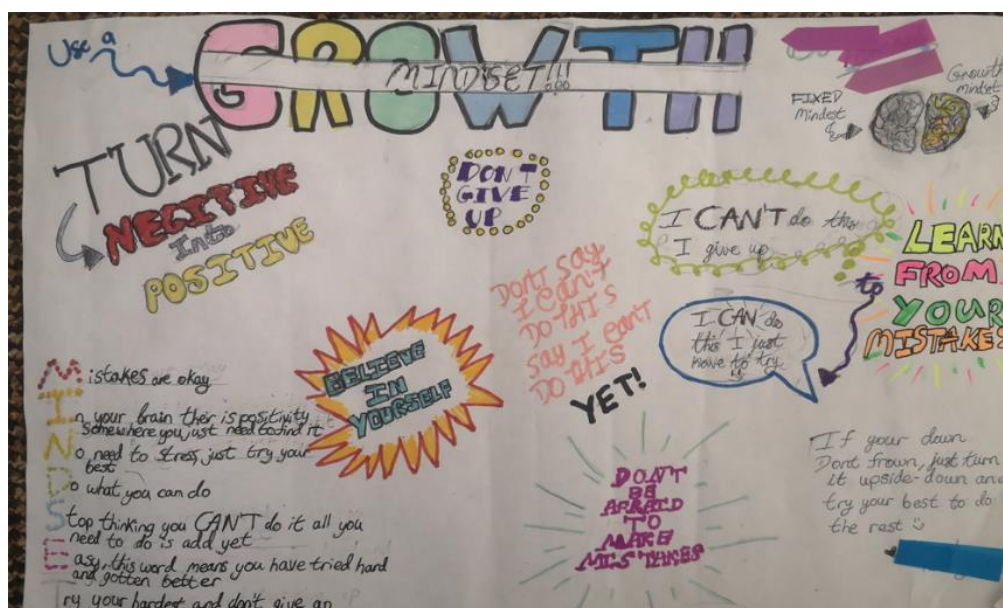
Figure 15: Sample Pupil Mindset Poster

During the intervention, the children were given lots of opportunities to engage with self-awareness and awareness of others around them. I observed children reminding each other to use positive language when they were feeling negative towards something. "In school when I'm stuck on a question instead of giving up, I can ask someone that knows it, not to tell me the answer but tell me the strategy to do it" (Tom, 2021). By providing time for talk and discussion I again gained a deeper understanding of my class, seeing things from their perspective especially in certain subjects.

4.2.4 Transformative Change in the Wider World

Mindsets are just beliefs. They are powerful beliefs, but they are just something in your mind, and can change your mind (Dweck, 2006: 9). Mindset has the power to control a person's attitude and potentially influences a person's behaviour. Mindset can be expressed as "I (we) believe. Belief is the major component of the mindset because people set up their expectations and goals based on what they believe the nature of situations should be" (Fang et al., 2004: 298). As the intervention progressed, the children's reflective journals illustrated how the positive language they were learning in class was beneficial not only in school, but also in a wider context, as seen from their extracts below. To coincide with my values of student care I endeavoured to extend a feeling of empowerment to the children in my class. When the children were asked to give examples of times in their lives when they exhibited a growth mindset (see Appendix P), many of the examples related to extra-curricular activities such as sport. When the participants were asked whether they thought their growth mindsets were just for school, they answered,

"It is useful outside of school because you don't just give up on subjects you could give up on sports too" (David, 2021).

"No for outside as well because for example if you shoot and you miss you will be disappointed, but you have to use your growth mindset and try again" (Karl, 2021).

"*It can be at a football match when you are losing, and you believe you can still win"* (Amy, 2021).

"*You can use it when you're in a long line at a shop or doing homework*" *(Tim, 2021).*

"I didn't feel like riding my bike to school the other day, but then I thought it would be a good exercise and it was a nice day" (Kate, 2021).

"I couldn't hit the ball right in GAA and I was getting really annoyed and was about to give up but then I thought in my head I can do anything if I keep trying" (Richard, 2021).

"When I was at soccer yesterday, I felt like giving up because I was frustrated at myself. I went to the side of the pitch, drank some water and calmed myself down by using my growth mindset language" (Ronan, 2021).

This shows that the children were able to use and be more aware of the skills of positive language being taught to them. It demonstrates the connection between self-talk and how it may be applied outside of school in a variety of situations (Martin & Marsh 2009). I strongly believe that the participants of this study will benefit and be able to utilise these new language strategies to help them outside of school.

The new language skills learned can be utilised at home, in secondary school, at work and throughout life. As growth mindset abilities are transferable to other parts of life, it makes sense to teach them to children at an early age. Educators have the power to directly provide these positive opportunities for the pupils in their care as noted by Flanagan and Symonds (2020).

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the main findings from this research study. It highlighted how the children benefit from the growth mindset intervention because of their improved meta-learning abilities and empowerment as a consequence of their newfound understanding of positive language. They were instilled with a feeling of wonder and discovery as a result of the mindset intervention, which provided new perspectives on challenges through positive language and a newly developed understanding of failure. The data highlighted that using language and utilizing growth mindset strategies helped participants. Children were better prepared to face challenges. This was evident in genius hour projects they presented during class time. It was apparent from their personal reflective journals that they were more confident and did not feel humiliated if they made a mistake because they felt confident in their classroom. The children are now able to use the positive language and strategies taught both in and out of school to interpret situations in a different light and this was again evident in the reflections they logged in their journals. The mindset techniques used in this study were designed to increase interest in subjects, develop a new way of thinking using positive language, and provide an alternative to overcoming obstacles which I feel were all developed and fostered amongst the participants involved.

Reflecting on the outcome of the study I believe my practices have developed in many ways from delivering meaningful lessons on language to developing and fostering a growth mindset environment. It showed me I need to allow and give time for children to reflect in their self-reflective journals, help them to view mistakes as a way of learning and encourage them to problem-solve with positive language in their minds. It showed me the importance of my reflection, observation of the children and the language they use and the significance of keeping with my values of student care, student voice and positivity.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Introduction

This self-study action research thesis investigated the benefits of using language to develop and foster a growth mindset amongst pupils in a mainstream primary classroom. The project sought to create positive teaching opportunities to enhance the children's sense of wonder and discovery, self-worth and ability to tackle challenging tasks. Following a review of pertinent literature in chapter two, the following three research questions were identified:

1. How can I as a teacher raise children's awareness of the impact language can have on their mindset?

2. How can learning opportunities support children in using positive language?

3. What role do I, as the teacher have, in developing and fostering a growth mindset in children?

The methodology used to examine these research questions was described in chapter three. The findings that emerged from the data collection throughout the study were presented in chapter four. The data was analysed and as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, four key themes emerged: a sense of wonder and discovery, my role as the teacher, positive self-talk, and transformative change with the wider world.

This chapter identifies the limitations of the study. Conclusions will be drawn from the findings and discussion outlined in chapter four and examined to see how they addressed the three research questions. Implications for future practice will be identified and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future study and a reflection.

5.2 Limitations of the Self-Study Research

This study was undertaken in a primary school with a sample of 26 sixth class children. Data obtained from subjective personal experiences are unique to the participants who

participated in the study and may not be representative of other people. Sullivan et al. acknowledge that children have complex lives that are constantly evolving and producing new meanings (2006: 133). The participants in this study were aged between eleven and twelve years old so the data gathered may be specific to the older cohort of primary school children. This prevents any further generalisations of younger pupils in a primary school. This is a study undertaken inside my classroom context and so is not indicative of other settings in a comparable environment.

The intervention was due to begin in January but as a result of the continued outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the schools remained closed after Christmas. The intervention was delayed until the beginning of March and began online on our school e-portfolio Seesaw. The intervention was slow to begin online as only half of the participants got involved due to a variety of reasons. However, when we returned to school the intervention continued and again as a result of children being close contacts some children did not get to fully complete the intervention.

It is also worth emphasising that researcher bias may have influenced the study's results. With the positive relationship between the researcher and its participants there is always a risk that the participants feel they need to please the researcher by giving them the answers they would like to hear. However, as the researcher I encouraged all the participants to be honest and open with their answers in their reflective journals.

5.3 Addressing the research questions

In this section I will address the three research questions identified at the beginning of the study. As discussed in chapter four the themes and findings have been outlined. The connections between the research questions and the findings will be summarised.

5.3.1 How can I as a teacher raise children's awareness of the impact language can have on their mindset?

Language is a primary tool for expression and communication. Providing language opportunities by teacher modelling creates positive connections and relationships with the participants in the class to be more engaged in their learning. Mindset influences how we respond to difficult situations and disappointments, as well as our willingness to confront and improve ourselves.

Encouraging a growth mindset in the classroom motivates students to tackle challenging tasks, stick with them for longer and feel the satisfaction of a can-do attitude. They do not give up when they fail; they see failure as a learning opportunity to improve where they have gone wrong.

5.3.2. How can learning opportunities support children in using positive language?

As highlighted in chapter four there were numerous benefits of promoting and providing learning opportunities to children around a positive mindset. When a pupil can identify their feelings and have the confidence to ask for help from their peers and their teacher, their self-confidence will improve and a further improvement in their attitude towards their schoolwork and other extra-curricular activities can be seen. It raises awareness on how positive language can impact children's motivation to persevere. It gives them an opportunity to develop their resilience in the face of challenge.

5.3.3 What role do I, as the teacher have, in developing and fostering a growth mindset in children?

Firstly, I have to acknowledge that everyone has a mixture of both a fixed and growth mindset as noted in chapter two by Dweck (2008). A child's mindset can transition from fixed to a growth mindset by teacher modelling of positive language in the way they teach and praise.

My intervention aimed to create awareness around self-thoughts and the language we use each day. Children's self-talk determines their self-worth so in trying to achieve this, positive language needs to be modelled by the teacher. Allowing the children time to reflect in their journals was very beneficial in trying to achieve this. As emphasised in chapter four there are numerous benefits. The children have discovered a sense of wonder in their learning, they now see mistakes and failure as ways of improvement and learning. They have learned to change their negative thoughts to positive thoughts which has given them the skills to think differently about themselves. As an educator, I now have a deeper insight into the thoughts of my pupils I teach from their self-talk and reflective journals. It gave me the opportunity to plan my lessons around helping them improve their work as I have identified their weaknesses and where they feel they need extra help.

5.4 Recommendations

In future I would consider beginning the intervention at the beginning of the school year in September. I would assign a reflective journal to each pupil to keep for the year so they could see the benefits of reflecting and setting goals as the year progresses. I would also carry out a three month or six-month follow-up on the research. A comparable study would possibly give more information about whether such improvements are sustainable over an extended timeframe. According to research, teachers can get more involved in their students' learning processes and better support them in areas where they need it by using constructive communication (Lory, 2015). A review of attitudinal views regarding different subjects should be considered by teachers on a regular basis to see where we can support pupils further.

There are further research opportunities to be explored within the Friends for Life programme. The concept of promoting positive language to foster a growth mindset could be

explored through other cross-curricular links for example English, Maths, and the Arts Education.

As parents are the primary educators of their children, they have a significant role to play in the development of a growth mindset in their children. I plan to communicate my research findings to the parents and offer an information night. This will in turn increase awareness of the importance of positive language in the home to promote increased confidence and self-esteem.

5.4.1 Within my School

This research has demonstrated the important role of the teacher in promoting and fostering positive language across the curriculum to instil a growth mindset amongst participants when they feel like giving up on challenging tasks. In my school, I plan to present my research and findings at our staff meeting at the beginning of the school year. I would like to encourage all teachers to reflect and observe the language they use in the classroom and identify areas where they could improve and enhance the learning of the pupils they teach through a positive mindset. I would recommend a whole school approach to fostering and developing language to promote a growth mindset.

5.4.2 Continuous Professional Development

Teachers need to nurture their positive mindset and language they use in the classroom before attempting to foster and develop it with the pupils they teach. There are several summer courses based on teacher wellbeing, mindset, motivation and developing skills towards resilience and positive mental wellbeing to help with children's future development.

As referred to in chapter two the DES is working on the draft primary curriculum framework which discusses SPHE and wellbeing in particular as a high priority. My findings

in this research support their ideals for increasing empowerment in children to increase their ability and outlines how influential the teacher can be in achieving this.

5.5 Conclusion

As I come to the final part of my action research project, I reflect on how it has been a very rewarding journey. It has benefited me as a teacher and how I will teach in the future. I have learned so much about myself through my reflective journal but also how aware I must be of my language in the classroom so that my classroom continues to be a positive, fun and safe learning environment for my pupils.

`   Through recording in my reflective journal, I have also developed a deeper understanding of the voices in my class and I feel I supported their needs throughout this project. This study involved the use of positive language in the classroom to develop and foster a growth mindset. I uncovered truths about myself and my practice through meta-reflection. I believe I am living closer to my values of student care, student voice and positivity in my practice. Reflecting on the findings of my self-study, I can see that my practices have improved in many aspects of providing engaging and relevant growth mindset lessons. The four main themes in this study are all important aspects that when reflected upon will benefit both the educator and the pupils they teach in the future.

To conclude, a pupil in the study summed up mindset using a threefold diagram – "The things you think, the things you say and the choices you make" are all related to how you see yourself, your mindset and the wider world. Throughout the research a positive affirmation we adopted was "Change your words, change your mindset!"

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Appendices

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Appendix A – Letter to the Board of Management

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

January 2021.

Dear Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Management,

Research Question: How can I as a teacher foster a growth mindset amongst the pupils in my class by increasing their awareness of the importance of the language they use.

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University A component of the course is a small-scale research study, investigating an area of my own practice. The area of my practice that I am interested in is growth mindset. A growth mindset is an approach to life in which an individual believes that their talents, intelligence and abilities can be developed further. For this study, I hope to implement an intervention with my class to scaffold the learning by providing language opportunities for a positive growth mindset. I intend to investigate the benefits for both me as a teacher and the children in my class.

I hope to commence in February 2021. To complete the small-scale study, I intend to carry out research both on an online platform while we are remote learning and also in the classroom once we return through self-study action research and the collection of various forms of data. The data will be collected using teacher observations, pupil questionnaires, pupil work samples, pupil audio recordings, a daily teacher journal and the individual pupil reflective journals. I hope to conduct an intervention by teaching two SPHE lessons that focus on growth mindset each week for a period of ten weeks.

The school and the students involved will not be identifiable from the write up of this research. Pseudonyms will be used to preserve the anonymity of all participants in the reporting of data from the class group discussions and observational field notes. Involvement in this research study is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Data collected will be securely stored and edited on my secure password protected computer for the duration of the research. All data will be deleted on completion of my Masters degree. The findings from my research may be used on an anonymised basis in future publications or conference presentations.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at PATRICIADUNNE.2021@mumail.ie

Thank you for your interest and support.

Yours faithfully,
Patricia Dunne

PRINCIPAL/CHAIRPERSON CONSENT FORM

Patricia Dunne, a student on the Master of Education (Research in Practice) programme in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University, has permission to conduct a small-scale action research project with the children in her class both online using the Seesaw platform and in the classroom commencing in February 2021. I also give permission for them to seek consent from the children in the class and their parents/guardians. I understand that the school's or children's names or any identifying information will not be revealed in any aspect of the study.

Signed: _____   School's Name: _____

Principal or Chairperson

Date: _____

Appendix B - Plain Language Statement for Parents/Guardian of Participating Pupil

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Plain Language Statement for Parents/Guardian of Participating Pupil

Research Study Question: How can I as a teacher foster a growth mindset amongst the pupils in my class by increasing their awareness of the importance of the language they use.

What is this Action Research Project about?
I, Patricia Dunne am currently undertaking a part time masters at Maynooth University. I am a student on the Master of Education programme. As part of my Masters in Education (Research in Practice) I'm conducting a small – scale research study with my own class for my thesis to investigate the benefits of influencing a growth mindset in children. This project will involve a ten-week intervention and an emphasis on using positive language and mindset across the curriculum when faced with challenging tasks in class. Data will be generated using teacher observations, pupil questionnaires, pupil work samples, pupil audio recordings, a daily teacher reflective journal and the pupils' reflective journals. I am then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What will my child have to do?
Over a ten-week intervention, the class will engage in two thirty-minute lessons each week. These lessons will look at how positive language can help develop our growth mindsets. Your child's participation would involve a questionnaire before and after this teaching intervention. In addition to this I will keep teacher observation notes on the children's motivation and participation. Some of the work involved will be audio recorded. The children will keep a reflective journal. Some of the children's work samples may be used/referenced in the write up of my research. As we are currently learning remotely at home the initial data collection will begin on our online e-Portfolio - Seesaw and we will continue in the classroom once we return.

Who else will be involved?
The study will be carried out by me Patricia Dunne as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the Programme leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

Will the identity of my child be kept confidential?
The school, teachers and the pupils involved will not be identifiable from the write up of this research. No real names will be used in the reporting of the data generated in this study.

What happens to the data?
Data collected will be securely stored and edited on my secure password protected computer for the duration of the research. All data will be deleted on completion of my Masters degree. The findings may be used on an anonymised basis from my research in future publications or conference presentations.

Is participation in this research voluntary?
Involvement in this research study is voluntary and the children are free to refuse or withdraw at any time without giving a reason. With your permission I will tell your child about the research and explain that if they agree to take part that they can withdraw at any stage if they so wish.

If you would like to discuss any of the above or have any question on this research project, please contact
me by email - PATRICIA.DUNNE.2021@MUMAIL.IE.

Ms. Patricia Dunne, Sixth Class Teacher.

Appendix C - Letter of Consent for Parents/Guardian of Participating Pupil

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Letter of Consent for Parents/Guardian of Participating Pupil

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The overall aim of this research is to investigate the importance and benefits of providing language opportunities for a positive growth mindset. A growth mindset is an approach to life in which an individual believes that their talents, intelligence and abilities can be developed further.

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement:

Your child's participation in this study will involve them engaging in two thirty-minute SPHE lessons each week over a ten- week period both online through Seesaw and in the classroom. Your child will also complete a questionnaire both before and on completion of the SPHE Education lessons. The children will each have a reflective journal of their own. Some of your child's work will be audio recorded. There will be teacher observational notes written during the SPHE lessons based on the children's motivation and participation with the project. Some of your child's work samples may be used/referenced in the write up of the research project.

Arrangements for protection of data and confidentiality:

Data collected will be securely stored and edited on my secure password protected computer for the duration of the research. All data will be deleted on completion of my Masters degree. The findings may be used on an anonymised basis from my research in future publications or conference presentations. The school, teachers and the pupils involved will not be identifiable from the write up of this research. No real names will be used in the reporting of the data generated in this study.

Confirmation that involvement in the research study is voluntary:

I understand that my child's participation in this research project is voluntary and I can withdraw my child at any time. I have read and understood the information in this form. I

have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I may have and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I give my consent/ do not give consent for my child to take part in this research project.

Can I ask you all to complete the consent forms by Monday the 1st of March 2021 by following this link:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=zPVUFDW7hUa72YYh_YBVyUCtNAD7Y4pIvbPNQJKhiZBURFRRSzMyTkRWMUVCR1IwQkhVWUEzR0pBTi4u

Appendix D - Letter of Assent for Participating Pupils

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun-agus Luath-Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Letter of Assent for Participating Pupils

What is this project for?
During this project you will be working as part of the class to look at things we find difficult at school and how we can change our attitude and language towards them. We will look at the impact language can have on our mindsets and how important and beneficial it is to have a positive growth mindset.

Why am I taking part?
 To see if I can learn how language can help me to develop my growth mindset when I am faced with challenging tasks.

What will I need to do?
- I will need to participate both online through Seesaw and in class.
- I will work on my own and with the other children for two thirty minute lessons each week for ten weeks.
- I will work as part of a group during these lessons to solve problems using this new approach to language.
- I will complete a reflective journal.
- I will complete a questionnaire before and after the project is finished to talk about what I thought of it and if I would make any changes.
- My teacher would like to observe me and listen to me when I am in school and will write down some notes about me in her reflective journal.

Do I have to take part?
Taking part in this project is voluntary. I can change my mind during the programme if I decide that I don't want to take part any more.

Name of child (in block capitals):

_____
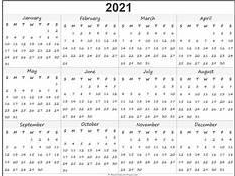
Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E - Plain Language Statement for Participating Students

Plain Language Statement for Participating Students

Participants will be invited to read the Plain Language Statement aloud in the class room to ensure that they have read all of the information.

	I am doing a project for my teacher's college course with children from my class.
	Here is how the project will work.
	The project will start in March and runs for ten weeks. The class will work together online and in class for two thirty- minute lessons each week.
	The group will be working together to learn how language can help to develop our growth mindsets.
	While I am working, my teacher will write some notes about what and how I am learning. My teacher will need to write an essay for college about how the project went. Some of my work might be used as a sample in her essay
	Before we begin the group work, my teacher will ask us to complete a questionnaire. My teacher will talk about

	what I like about school, what I dislike about school, where I would rate my growth mindset and what I think about the importance of growth mindset.
	When we have finished the project, my teacher will give us another questionnaire to see what we thought of it and if we would make any changes to it.
	My teacher would like to record my voice while we are talking during the project because she wouldn't be able to write everything down fast enough. I will always know when my teacher is recording me and can tell her if I don't want her to.
	I understand while school is closed due to Covid -19 we will continue to work online and all data will continue to be collected through Seesaw.
	I understand my real name will not be used in the research.
	The notes and the recordings will be kept by my teacher in a locked drawer or on her computer with a password so no one else can read them.
	My teacher will keep the information until it is finished for her college at the end of the year and then all the information will be deleted. The results from my teacher's project might be used for future publications or presentations.

	It is up to me if I would like to join in with the group. If I do not want to take part in the project or decide to stop at any time that is no problem.

If you want to ask any questions about this project you can talk to your parents or to me. If you want, you can ask your parents to contact the people in charge of making sure the project is done in the right way. The person they should contact for this is Programme Leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn. E-mail: bernadette.wrynn@mu.ie

Appendix F – Research Model and Framework

Date:	Action:
September - November 2020	The research topic was identified. Critical engagement with relevant literature occurred. Reflective journaling began.
December 2020	Ethical approval from the college granted
January 2021	Due to school closure because of Covid -19 the intervention was delayed. Permission from the Board of Management to conduct my research in the school was granted.
February 2021	Consent from parents and assent from the children in my class was sought online.
March/ April 2021	Two sessions of the beginning of the intervention began using Seesaw. Discussion of concept of research with the class. Meeting with critical friend to discuss planned actions in the research. Pre-Questionnaire and nine diamond survey completed. Teacher designed lessons around positive growth mindset carried out. Upon return to school a hard copy of ethical approval was received. Observation by critical friend. Meet with critical friend to discuss early implementation. Topics covered during the intervention. • Intelligence can be developed. • Growth versus Fixed Mindset • Celebrate Mistakes • The Power of Yet • Praise the Process not the Person • Positive Self-Talk • Negative Language to Positive Language

	• Red Thoughts to Green Thoughts • Challenges • Positive Statements/ Affirmations of Famous People
April 2021	Content analysis of children's work. Observations
May 2021	Post mindset questionnaire. Content analysis of children's work. Critical friend evaluation.
June 2021	Data Analysis. Validation Group. The data and findings were finalised. The findings were compiled and summary research articles were drawn up.
July/ August 2021	The self-study action research thesis was written.
September 2021	The findings of the thesis were published.

Appendix G – Pre-Questionnaire

Pre-Questionnaire   Name: _____

1. What five words do you think best describe you?

1=

2 =

3 =

4 =

5 =

2. What do you love doing that makes you feel happiest?

3. What do you know how to do that you can teach others?

4. Of all the things you are learning, what do you think will be the most useful when you are an adult?

5. What are you most grateful for?

Appendix H – Semi-structured observations

Semi- Structured Observation

Date	Name of Activity	Who is taking part?	Timing and location of the activity	Language being used by the teacher	Language being used by the children.	How are the children behaving? Do students appear motivated and engaged?

Appendix I – Feelings about Subjects

School

How do you feel about …..?

Choose the face that best describes how you feel about the following things:
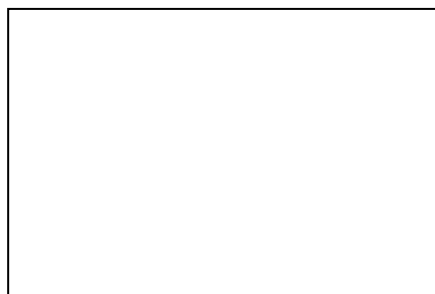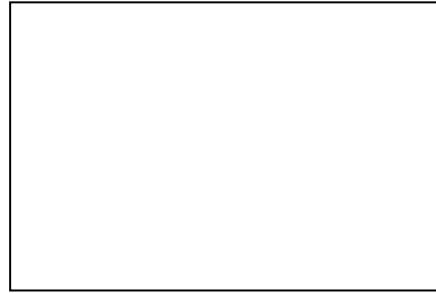
English– reading, spelling, writing, talking, listening	☺	😐	☹
Maths	☺	😐	☹
Science – experiments and finding things out	☺	😐	☹
Geography- Learning about other places & the people there	☺	😐	☹
Gaeilge	☺	😐	☹
History- Learning about the past	☺	😐	☹
Art – painting, drawing, making things	☺	😐	☹
Music – singing, playing musical instruments	☺	😐	☹
Using the computer/ IPad's	☺	😐	☹
P.E	☺	😐	☹
Drama	☺	😐	☹
Religion – learning about different religions	☺	😐	☹
Playtime/Lunchtime	☺	😐	☹
Coming to school	☺	😐	☹

☺ **The thing I like best about school is: _____**

_____
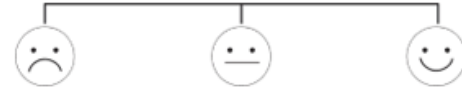
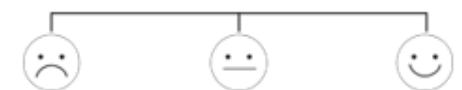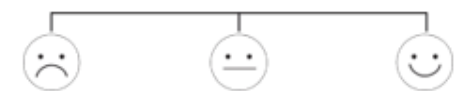☹**The thing I like least about school is: _____**

_____
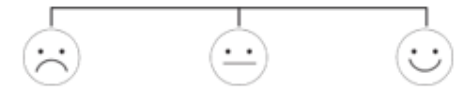
Appendix J – Diamond Nine Ranking

Nine Diamond Ranking

Appendix K – Mindset Rating Scale

Read each statement and colour the smiley face you think best describes what you think about each statement. Do you agree, disagree or are you unsure?		Disagree Unsure Agree
When I'm frustrated, I keep trying.		☹ 😐 🙂
Mistakes help me to learn and improve.		☹ 😐 🙂
My effort and attitude determine my success.		☹ 😐 🙂
Trying new things is stressful for me and I avoid it.		☹ 😐 🙂

		Disagree Unsure Agree
I appreciate when people, parents, coaches, teachers give me feedback about my performance.		☹ 😐 🙂
You can always change basic things about the person you are.		☹ 😐 🙂
The harder you work at something, the better you will be.		☹ 😐 🙂
Truly smart people do not need to try hard.		☹ 😐 🙂

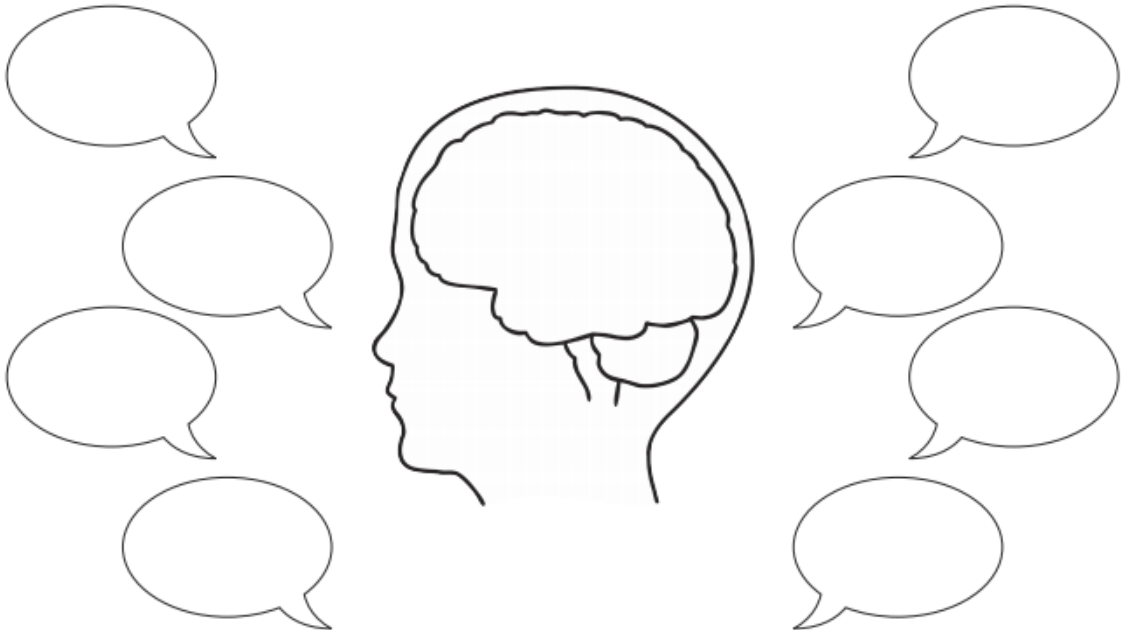|		Disagree Unsure Agree
Only a few people will be truly good at sports – you have to be "born with it."		☹ 😐 🙂
Music talent can be learned by anyone.		☹ 😐 🙂

Appendix L – How do people see me & What do they think of me

Please circle or tick the statements you think about yourself.

I am kind

I am helpful

I don't say how I feel

I cause trouble

I am angry

I get others into trouble

I can be trusted

I am good fun to be with

I am hardworking

I am clever

I don't listen

I have lots of friends

I follow the rules

I am good at sport

I copy what others do

I know what I want to do

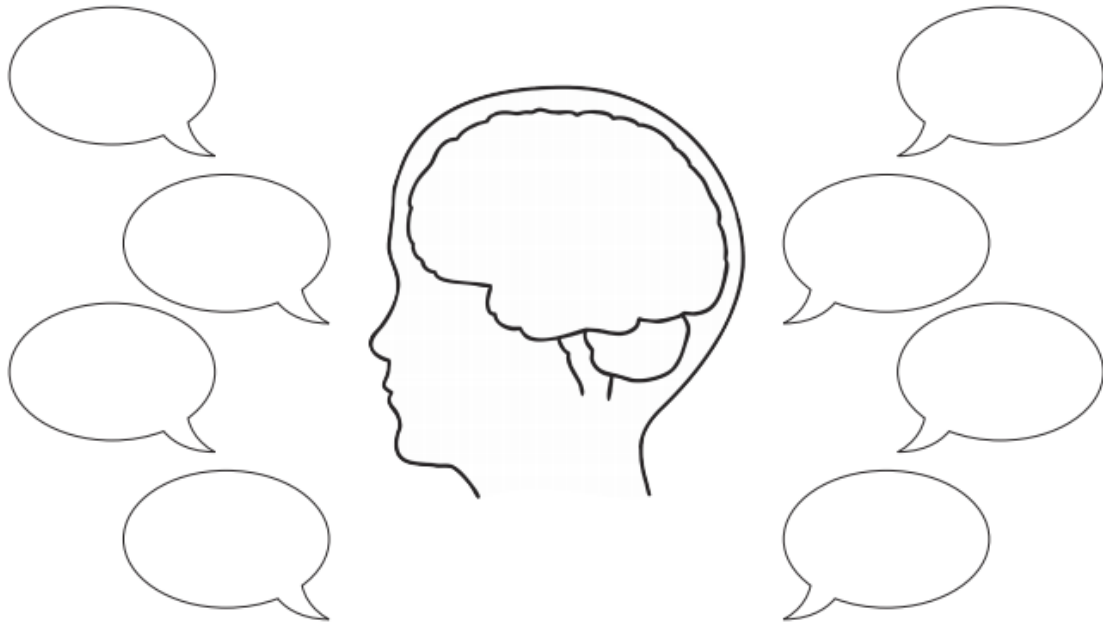I don't care about my education

I am cool

Now, let's think about what your friends might say about you. You can use some ideas from the previous activity, but try to think of your own as well.

Finally, let's think about what you think your teachers might say about you.

Appendix M – Sample of Questions in Pupil Reflective Journals

Samples of Questions in Pupil reflective journals

- What did you do today that was hard?

- What mistake did you make today? Did you learn from it?

- What would you like to get better at?

- What is something you have gotten better at recently?

- What's something you're curious about?

- How did your brain grow today?

- What question did you ask someone today?

- What did you do today that made you think?

- What did you do today that you're proud of?

Appendix N – Mindset Questions

Mindset   NAME: _____

- 1. When I start to feel like quitting, what will I do in that moment to persevere?

_____
_____
_____

- 2. What are my thoughts telling me about how successful I might be at learning this skill? If these thoughts are limiting to me, how might I think differently?

_____
_____
_____
_____

- 3. What am I saying or doing to myself that is holding me back?

_____
_____
_____

- 4. What would I want my teacher to say to me when he/she sees me taking a risk, trying hard, or pushing through mistakes to pursue this goal?

_____
_____
_____

- 5. Imagine how you will feel when you accomplish something that is really challenging. Describe that feeling.

_____
_____
_____

Appendix O - Mistakes are a great way to learn

Mistakes are a great way to learn.

- How do you feel when you make a mistake? Why?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- How do you think other people see you when you make a mistake?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Have you ever discovered something new from making a mistake?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Have you ever felt proud of making a mistake?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Has a mistake ever made you think more deeply about a problem?

  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

Appendix P - Transformation with the Wider World

Reflective Journal Tasks

When in school and outside of school can you use a growth mindset?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What language/ words have you learned that can help you to change your negative thoughts in your head?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix Q – Negative Affirmations to Positive Affirmations

Negative affirmations to Positive affirmations

	Examples of Children's Responses
Instead of saying…	I can say….
I am not good at this.	- Maybe I am not the best, but I will try my best. - I can get better. - I can become good at this with time and effort.
I am great at this.	- I always try my hardest. - I practiced a lot. - I have worked hard and achieved what I deserve.
This is too hard.	- I can practice. - Keep on practicing until you get it. - I need to work and practice.
This is too easy.	- I worked hard. - I kept on thinking and learned from my mistakes. - I am getting better at this.
I am afraid I will make a mistake.	- Mistakes are ok, I will try my best. - Mistakes help you learn. - Mistakes make you stronger.
I give up.	- I will try harder. - I am going to try again. A fresh start always helps. - Practice makes perfect.
I cannot do this.	- I can ask for a little help. - I will try as hard as I can. 100% - I need some time to practice.
This is good enough.	- I will do it to the best of my potential. - Is this my best work? - My best work is still out there. - I can improve.

I will not try because I might fail.	- I try my best; my best is enough. - Failing is natural when becoming successful. - I cannot be afraid to make mistakes. - Try it and if you fail try harder.
I am not as smart as my friend.	- She may be smarter than me, but I will learn at my own pace. - Ask your friend for help. - I can get better. - But they can help me learn. - Everyone is strong at certain subjects.

Appendix R – Images of Children's Reflective Journals
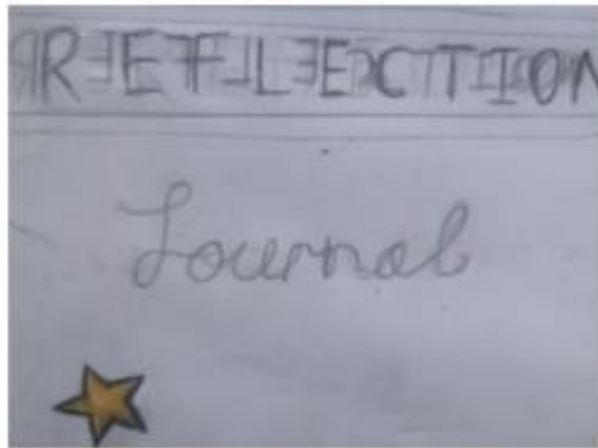
Appendix S – Post Intervention Questionnaire

Post Intervention Survey   Name: _____

What have we done this year to help our mindset?
What mindset do you think you have? Why?
Do you think a growth mindset is just for school or could it be useful outside of school?
Can you explain to me what a fixed and growth mindset is?
Can you list things you have learned about mindset that you didn't know before we started our lessons?

What has been your favourite part of the mindset lessons so far? (the timed challenges/ learning about famous inspiring people/ setting goals/ creating growth mindset posters/Reflective journal/Anything we did in Lessons)

Do you feel like you have become more growth mind set in the last few weeks? Mark your answer on the scale:

1=not at all
2=a little bit
3= I'm not really sure
4=I feel I am more aware of my mindset and have language to help me with situations I find difficult
 5=I definitely think more about my growth mindset and now have positive language to help me
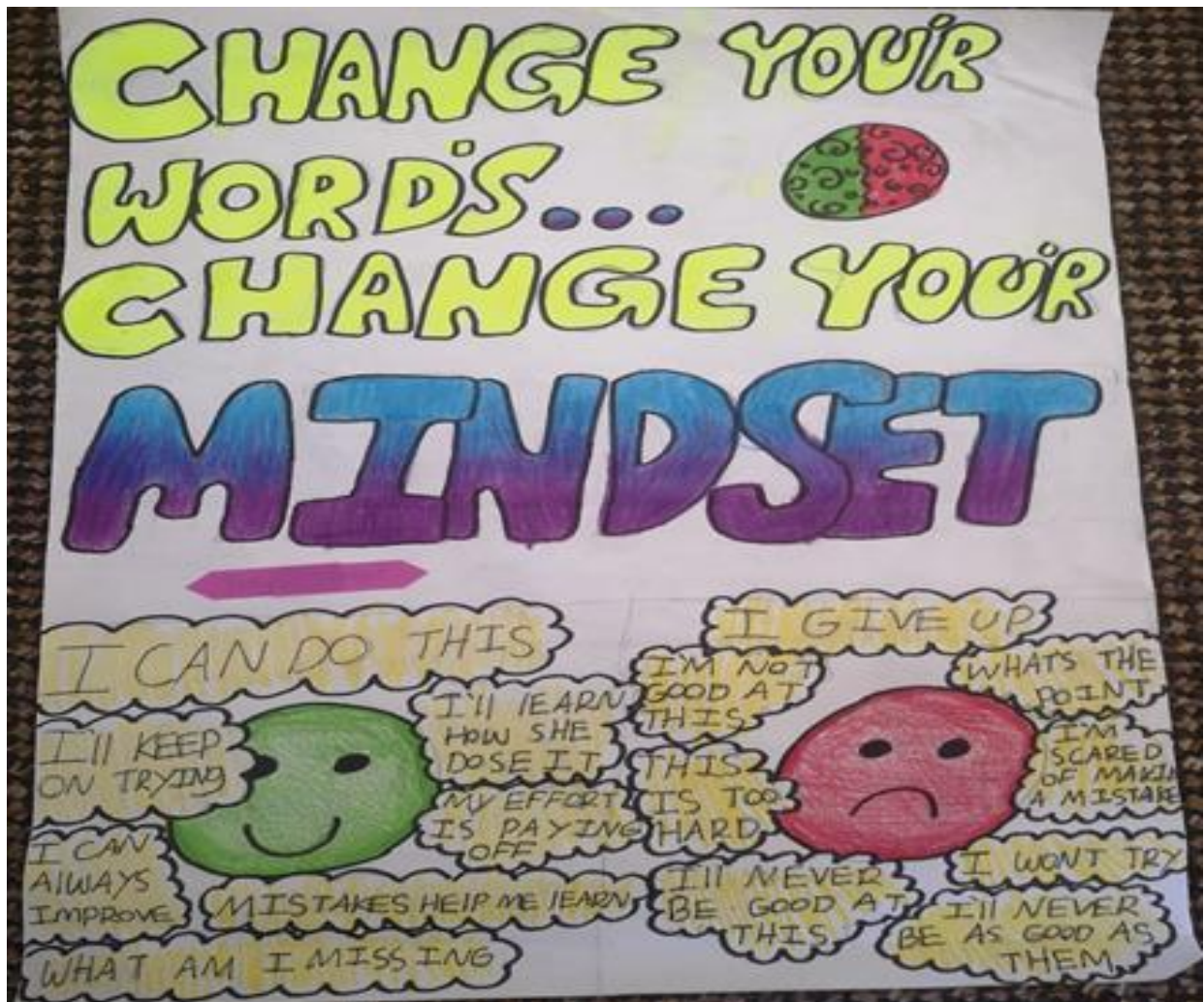
 1_____2_____3_____4_____5

Tell me about a time you have used something we have learned inside or outside school?
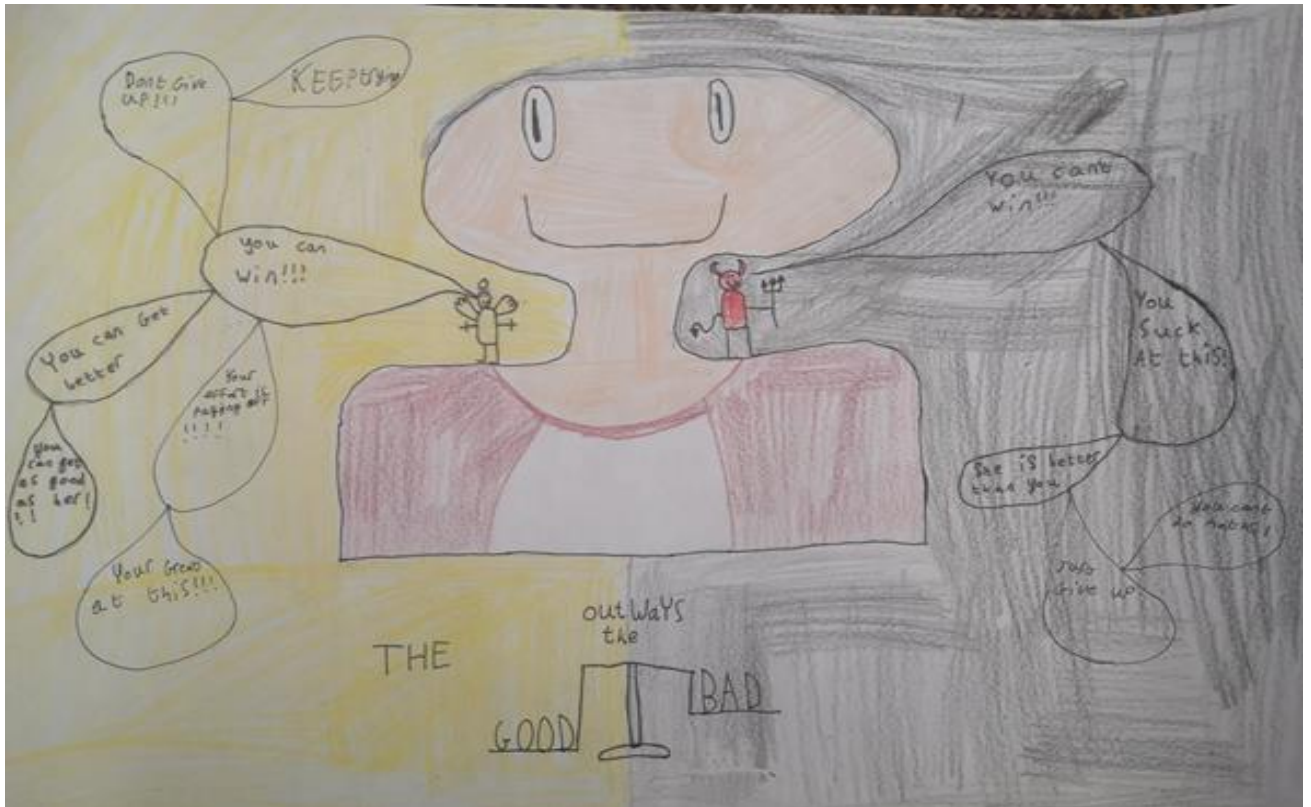
 You are struggling to understand a new topic in Maths. You tried to answer the Maths questions but you get a lot of them wrong. Then you hear some of the children at your group saying that the questions are easy. The teacher explained the topic again but you still don't understand it fully. What would you say to yourself?
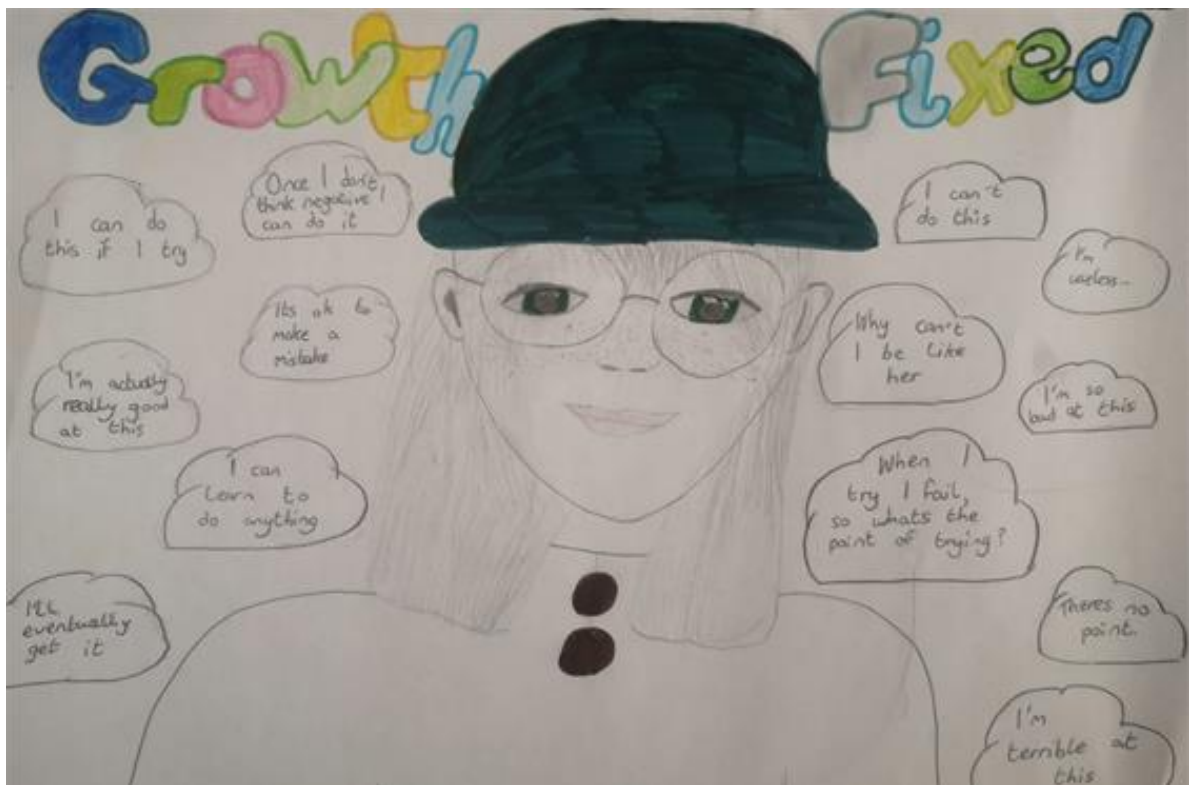
You overhear a child at your group say that they are terrible at drawing. They make an attempt to draw something and then rub it out. They try again but they cover it with their hand and seem annoyed. They give up trying and say 'I'm no good at this. Drawing is boring'. What would Ms. Dunne say to this child?

Have you any suggestions or ideas of things you'd like us to do to improve the lessons on learning about mindset?

Appendix T - Samples of the Participants Mindset Posters

Appendix U – Classroom Displays