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Why Our Words Matter: Promoting a Growth Mindset in Online Graduate Courses

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Chapter 4
Why Our Words Matter:
Promoting a Growth Mindset in Online Graduate Courses

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ABSTRACT

Research concerning the growth mindset utilized when evaluating academic persistence, Yeager states, "... to achieve, we need more than inborn ability—we need the right mindset. He [Yeager] studies how students and adults feel they belong and are respected, that their work is relevant and purposeful, and that they can overcome setbacks and continue to improve" (Mills). Through Yeager's combined research with other growth mindsets researchers such as Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth, their findings point to the idea that students must be allowed to explore, reflect, and create a level of self-awareness in their abilities to flourish while confronted by challenges to feed the growth mindset. How does one create this environment within an online graduate course? How can graduate students be pushed for rigor but allowed to be learners and explorers through rigorous graduate coursework?

INTRODUCTION

Why do Words Matter?

Do an instructor's written words make a difference in a learner's experience in online graduate courses? How might small changes potentially affect students' overall experience, embolden autonomy, and encourage a growth mindset? Theoretically, asynchronous online graduate courses are technical instructions reciprocated with student input, output, instructor feedback, and varied assessment. However, research and first-hand experience(s) promote the idea that highly impact practices, such as creating an open, positive, respectful, trusting, collaborative learning environment, are most impactful for student learning and engagement in online formats (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Glenn, 2018).

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In their research concerning the overall growth mindset utilized when evaluating academic persistence, Yeager states, "... to achieve, we need more than inborn ability—we need the right mindset. He [Yeager] studies how students and adults feel they belong and are respected, that their work is relevant and purposeful, and that they can overcome setbacks and continue to improve" (Mills, 2021). Through Yeager's combined research with other growth mindsets researchers such as Dweck and Duckworth, findings indicate that students must be allowed to explore, reflect, and create a level of self-awareness in their abilities to flourish while confronted by challenges to feed growth mindset (Dweck, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011). Furthermore, Yeager, Dweck, Duckworth, and colleagues (2022) concluded that a teacher's growth mindset affords students a potential growth mindset as teachers lead the classroom and facilitate classroom culture. For example, teachers create the norms for instruction and classroom behavior, set the parameters for student participation, and control grading and assessments, thus influencing student motivation and engagement (Kraft, 2019). Much of the work regarding mindset has been conducted within traditional P12 face-to-face classrooms as researchers continue to build on and further the theoretical basis of teachers' roles concerning effects on student mindset (Mesler et al., 2021; Yeager et al., 2022; Yeager & Walton, 2011). Therefore, how does an online instructor act as a mediator and promote an autonomous, growth-oriented environment within an online graduate course? How might graduate students be encouraged with high expectations and rigor and, in turn, embrace a position as neophyte learners and explorers through rigorous graduate coursework? Moreover, do changes to instructors' words and their shift in mindset for encouraging students make a difference in student experiences in an online graduate setting?

As a professor who has worked with hundreds of online adult learners, who also happen to be P12 educators, I have witnessed the effect in student reflective responses and email correspondence after altering my courses to encompass more of a growth-oriented mindset and autonomy-supportive teaching (Cheon et al., 2020; Reeve, 2006; Reeve, 2016). My reflective practices regarding students' support, as they face their own classroom challenges post-Covid, opened my eyes to students' need for understanding, support, and incubation as learners aligning with Reeve's (2016) definition of autonomy-supportive classrooms. The intentional and mindful use of language that supports and aligns with autonomy-based practices has opened a window to a budding area concerning the world of andragogy or adult learning theory (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Changes in my practice of mindfully and purposefully responding to student inquiries and coursework, creating opportunities for students autonomously, and praising "progress over perfection" have potentially encouraged learner autonomy and a growth mindset in my courses (Cheon et al., 2020; Reeves, 2006). Although initial efforts in my approach were to support online graduate students while knowing they were struggling in their own P12 settings as educators, the profound effect on my students' learning experiences was not planned or predicted until I began to see changes in their communication and final course reflections.

Data Collection

Grounded theory was utilized as the instructor collected anonymous online graduate student narratives through a structured reflection process, coded for key themes, and analyzed content after final course grades were submitted via IRB approval (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A second instructor was utilized to validate potential themes with a supposition of two key areas - growth mindset and learner autonomy. Student responses were selected via final course reflections that aligned with potential themes. Initially, the structured reflection captures any potential bias and initial feelings about themselves as a learner

and the course in general - from materials to interface to returning to online higher education for the first time in the first week of the course. At the end of the course, a final reflection takes the learner through various stages of examination, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing their experience (Appendix: Transference Reflection). Many final student reflections contained themes centered on peer review and peer support, student autonomy and choice, instructor support and response, and overall mindset. Although instructional changes were made to improve the learners' overall experience, altering instructional approaches to evoke a student response was not intentional or for research purposes – I wanted to support my struggling students. After several semesters of observing a growing trend in student responses through students' final reflections, I began to question how potential changes in my mindset, word choice, and overall attitude affected my students. This chapter explores one instructor's examination regarding students' reflective practices and potential shifts in student mindset, learner autonomy, and the extraordinary impact a shift in instructor mindset and words can have on learners. More importantly, how are online graduate students' shared reflections and experiences potentially affected by an instructor's shift to high-impact practices creating an incubation for authentic learning and growth in asynchronous online graduate courses?

BACKGROUND

Online Graduate Students

As noted, the subset of online graduate students discussed within this chapter is also full-time P12 educators from across the globe. Historically, P12 educators are known for their vast ability to juggle it all - align with school curriculum and needs, prepare curriculum and deliver a host of assessments, design and teach in a variety of modes for all learners, manage student behaviors so learning can occur, play social worker and mediator, maintain high-quality relationships with all stakeholders, and everything in between that commonly leads to a stressful work environment creating attrition even before the Covid-19 Pandemic (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Day & Qing, 2009, Diliberti et al., 2021). Even in the trenches of teaching, many would propose that educators are engaged lifelong learners and are prepared to take on whatever they are tasked with or obstacles they may face to, in turn, show up for their students day in and day out (Day, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Nieto, 2003). Educators are inherently committed to student growth, both academically and socially, and genuinely care about their students and positive relationships as the foundation for successful classrooms (Malmburg et al., 2010; Pierson, 2013). Teachers take home more than just papers to grade - they carry a heavy backpack that weighs on them psychologically (Nieto, 2003). Post-covid, many would state that a teacher's backpack is even more of a load to carry as they confront both the positive and negative outcomes of no-school, online schooling, and hybrid schooling in the last few years (Hilger et al., 2021). Historically, the career of a P12 educator is not for the weary or weak, and there needs to be more time for self-care and reflective practices, let alone time to learn new skills or fully engage in an online graduate course(s) (Jones & Crawford, 2022; Thompson et al., 2022). Knowing what educators were facing as they continued to enroll in online graduate courses through the pandemic and listening to their stories, struggles, and needs for support created a purposeful shift in my approach to teaching through my words and overall mindset.

Most students enrolled in an asynchronous online course(s) are initially inundated with communication in the form of words that translate into a welcome email and/or video, directions for acclimatizing the

course with syllabi, assignments, course expectations, grading practices, tips, and insights (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016). After the Pandemic, the formalities of welcoming and introducing students to an online course remained the same, but the words I utilized and my overall mindset regarding the approach shifted. I began consciously inserting more supportive and positive language after providing the student with a detailed paragraph outlining expectations and formalities that could easily overload students as they begin an 8-week online graduate course. I continued to present the necessities of the course along with rigor and high expectations, just as I had done over the last nine years as an online educator, but considered a more human approach or tone (Porosoff, 2018). Even as a former P12 teacher and teacher-educator, I was teaching how I was taught or how I believed higher education should teach adult learners. Initially, I assumed that adult learners had it all figured out and did not need all the super-supported and guided oversight or ethic of care that most undergraduate students demand within a highly pedagogically based, constructivist learning environment as proposed by Knowles and others (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016; Huang, 2002; Knowles et al., 1998). Even in undergraduate teacher education courses, I commonly espouse to my students the sentiment that "teaching the way you were taught would never cut it in P12 classrooms if you want to be an effective teacher." However, the highly-effective and well-known pedagogical applications had never translated to my practice with online graduate students, let alone minor details like learner empowerment through autonomy-based language or growth mindset shift. Introspectively, as a graduate student, how could I not remember sitting in several Ph.D. night courses where information, expectations, directions, and course content were overwhelming and amassed great stress and doubt within minutes? Quite simply, the pandemic changed us all in many ways, and leaving my silo, considering my practice, and reflecting on what I could change to make the experience better for my struggling students was at the heart of the mindset shift –both for my students and myself (APA, 2021; Jones & Crawford, 2022).

Supporting a Growth Mindset

Widely accepted as the belief that human capacities are not fixed but can be developed over time, mindset research examines the power of such beliefs to influence human behavior (Dweck, 2014). Moreover, with a growth-oriented mindset, learners believe they can learn, grow and change their knowledge, skill, or ability (Yeager et al., 2022). With a fixed mindset, the opposite would be true. I commonly read about my student's perception of their potential as they enter my online graduate program within the initial stage, or Exploration, of the reflection activity (Appendix: Transference Reflection). My students initially reflect on their lack of self-efficacy and an ability to believe that they can learn to utilize new tech tools or applications, keep up with technology in their P12 classroom, or tackle work/life demands. Through reading and coding students' language regarding their perceived abilities as they begin the course (e.g., Introduction to Technology Integration), the majority of students use language that is very growth-oriented (e.g., "I am excited to learn about new tools for my classroom."). My graduate students commonly discuss their enjoyment and ability to learn new things, their willingness to take on new tasks, and the support they need to utilize new (tech) tools or strategies in their P12 classrooms.

Concerning adult online graduate education, many would contest that as we age, our brains become less plastic or moldable, and thus there is a shift into a much more fixed mindset in which there is a belief that there is little room for potential changes concerning intelligence or ability (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Yeager et al., 2018). Many graduate students I teach are very growth-oriented but enter their online

graduate courses with fear – for overall adequacy as a graduate student, technology-based knowledge for online learning and the core content area, time management, or even the overwhelming task of taking an online course and working full time (Bishop, 2002; Caruso, 2006). However, much of what my graduate students discuss is their skills and abilities as classroom educators rather than themselves as adult learners. The dichotomy of the teacher as a learner and their ability to sit in that role is for another time and triggers my interest as an educator and researcher. What I have learned through graduate student reflections, oral and written comprehensive exams, and email conversations with my students is that they potentially experience a mindset shift that is a confound combination of their efforts (and struggles) in the course, the course curriculum, the reading and research that ensues, exploring new tech tools, peer discussions and engagement, APA writing expectations, and overall interactions with the instructor.

My instructional practice aims at utilizing words that support, encourage, and allow my graduate student to pursue "progress over perfection" and to play, explore, fail, make mistakes, return to the drawing board, and reflect on the changes or choices they made as a learner. Using these exact words and promoting a mindset of "adults as the learner" has created a perceived change regarding how my students approach and feel about their course experience. Viewing mistakes and actual learner growth as opportunities, for instance, as my students were developing an understanding of APA and writing expectations, allowed them to see the potential in not being there "yet" and that APA can be challenging, but together we will get through it (Dweck, 2014; Dweck, 2006; Tirri & Kirsi, 2016; Yeager & Walton, 2007).

Utilizing humor was also essential in my written responses to students' work. When correcting student APA mistakes via written document comments, I said, "APA is super fun, right? Together we've got this, and remember, progress over perfection." Again, also supply them with links and examples to correct their work for the next time. Simple words of support for their work and mistakes, plus letting them know we are in this together, have made all the difference in their work and their ability to push through and trust the process (Porosoff, 2018). In fact, I could encourage students to chime in on my general response concerning a topic and leave Friday Memes on our discussion board platform to summarize our week. Sometimes the memes told me more about where my students were as a learner than their weekly course discussions. When students make mistakes, I remember to compliment them on what they did right and not just on their mistakes – after all, the mistakes are where they learn, correct? I commonly tell students that mistakes are okay, and if "they knew it all already, then why would they be here?" For instance, when students are new to APA and are grappling with the formatting of a source on the References page, I respond in the document comments that "I appreciate that you supported their work with quality outside sources; however, here is how you would format this type of source. Thanks! ej," and then I give them the supporting resources or links. Again, nothing changed in my practice regarding correcting mistakes and guiding students to utilize the correct course documents or support tools. Additionally, it did not take extra time to utilize a small amount of humor and see the positives within their work, but also correct and guide their mistakes. Instructor validation for making mistakes, allowing space to learn and grow, working through challenges with APA, and having time to explore and play with a variety of tools, then reflect on their experiences (not the perfect of their project using the tool(s)) has been the hallmark of my courses to promote and encourage a growth mindset (Yeager et al., 2022).

Autonomy-Supportive Teaching

In their study, Reeves (2006) defined autonomy support in the classroom as the following:

Autonomy-supportive environments involve and nurture (rather than neglect and frustrate) students' psychological needs, personal interests, and integrated values. Supporting these inner motivational resources is a worthwhile undertaking because students in classrooms taught by autonomy-supportive teachers, compared to students in classrooms taught by controlling teachers, experience an impressive and meaningful range of positive educational outcomes. (p. 228)

Cheon and Reeve (2013; 2020) cited that autonomy-supportive environments affect students' motivation, perceived competence, enhanced creativity, great engagement, higher intrinsic motivation, enhanced well-being, and better academic performance affect student outcomes. Teachers engage in autonomy-supportive teaching in their unique way; however, shared practices among those that are successful in implementation maintain a supportive aspect and respect students' perspectives and initiatives, and create a tone of overall understanding for the learner (Liu et al., 2015). The process of autonomy support for students is for the instructor first to identify and be aware of the need for student autonomy, then nurture, develop, and strengthen it to support and grow students' inner motivation (Liu et al., 2015).

Educator awareness and training concerning autonomy-supportive teaching is the most beneficial in creating an environment where the educator supports the student's need for autonomy and develops an understanding of the students' perspectives(s) (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). As with most high-impact educational practices, positive relationship building is crucial in establishing learner needs, engagement, and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Klem & Connell, 2004). As a former P12 educator and educator of educators, the notion of learner autonomy was not profound or new to me. However, the implementation of utilizing autonomy-supportive teaching for my online graduate courses was missing on my part, and I knew my students not only deserved better but they needed autonomy to survive as they returned to their P12 classrooms (Kim et al., 2022; Lever et al., 2017). The review of my teaching evaluations from previous students, even before the pandemic, led me to purposefully block time for intentional student interaction and responses in my online courses, which is critical for student growth (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015). I devoted more time to giving feedback and developed a mindset and language to talk with my students, support them as people, and grade them accordingly using solid rubrics to ensure rigor, build relationships with them, encourage peer relationships and peer review, envelop empathy for my online students and encourage learner autonomy through choice and voice.

Promoting Growth Mindset

As a junior faculty, I unknowingly attended and participated in a 2016 webinar where a well-known researcher in the area of growth mindset, David Yeager, a colleague of Dweck, discussed the psychology of college persistence and how word choice utilized in academic probation letters can affect persistence and retention. Returning to higher ed in 2013 was less than one year after Dweck's (2014) famous TedTalk regarding "the power of yet" and numerous studies that would continue to follow concerning the power of a growth mindset in the classroom. Although Yeager's, and assumably Dweck's, insight on the power of words was important to me in the context presented – I mean, why wouldn't an institution endorse more positive or growth-orient language in their correspondence for retention purposes – the thought of how our words matter never translated into my classroom practices. In my courses, I even taught about Dweck, fixed versus growth mindset, and "the power of yet" and utilized Dweck's (2014) videos. I would have my students assess their mindset in my undergraduate education courses, and it still did not click for me within an online graduate setting. Many would say it takes a global pandemic to get people

to change, and that "people" was me. I began to revisit how I viewed, responded, and approached my written communication with students - from welcome emails to graded responses to feedback on papers and projects. How could my overall mindset shift and words make a difference, even to create my level of reassurance that I was understanding, empathic, and kind?

As the shift in my mindset and my written reactions and responses to students began, I never envisioned that my words would create ripple effects for my students and their learning experience(s) (Reeve et al., 1999; Vincent, 2020). When I created course materials or left comments to students in their Google Docs, I began thinking about words my family, friends, coaches, etc., utilized growing up that made me feel supported and the feeling that everything was going to be okay as a novice learner in a new situation. The power of supportive words made me feel like we were motivated and could get through an 8-week power-packed short course together (Reeve, 2015, as cited in Liu et al., 2016). Furthermore, even the word "we" made a difference –the students saw me as "on their side" and as if we were on the same team and battling it out together in a supportive environment, unlike most classes that can feel like teachers against students, as if there was a big gotcha or secret agenda (Porosoff, 2018).

REFLECTIVE STUDENT VOICES

As professional educators, one central tenet from our very first education courses is that reflection is one of the critical aspects of becoming a successful teacher (Schon, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 2000b). Reflective practices help educators observe, react, correct, change paths, revisit, and potentially change what they could have done differently in their classroom every minute of the day. Formal reflection does not come naturally; reflection must be mindful and intentional and practiced to become second nature in the teaching field (Dewey, 1933; Lyons, 1998; Schon, 1983). A reflective practitioner must anticipate what comes next (with over 25 unique humans in the room) and reflect on how to do it better, differently, individually, or not at all the next go-around (Schon, 1983).

For over ten years, I have utilized a formal reflection process presented in stages to facilitate the student's overall experience(s) and close the learning loop (Appendix, *Transference Reflection*). I ask my students to initially engage in the Exploration Stage, which asks them to examine and reflect on their initial thoughts, feelings, and bias as they begin the course. In the final week of the course, the student is asked to submit the final stages of the reflective process in which they reflect an explanation of their experience, conjecture or questioning, analysis, and synthesis (Appendix, *Transference Reflection*). As my students finalize the course and complete the formal reflection, the stages encourage them to build on their initial thoughts and feelings and create a cycle of initial perceptions, realizations, questions, and overall learning throughout the course. For most, the student experience(s) in the course and overall self-reported progress were robust and beyond my understanding. Quite honestly, I did little in the past to observe what my students were telling me about their experience(s) and saw the final reflection document as a tool for them as the learner. However, during and after the Covid-19 Pandemic, their reflections became their journal, encapsulating more than the course experiences; it acts as an essential document that now guides me to understand their learning experiences and learning journey, in addition to what did and did not work concerning the course curriculum and delivery. Their reflections are typically individualized takeaways and experiences that are powerful for them as learners to realize regarding their learning journey and a potential shift in mindset, feeling of support, and peer interactions. As a mere observation, although most of my students are professional educators and thus reflective practitioners,

many do not engage in formal written reflection regarding their learning. Based on the reflection prompts or stages, I observe students utilizing the transference reflection document as a journal and a safe space to share beyond what I have asked or could expect as an instructor.

Moreover, students that have enrolled in my courses previously and joined me for the capstone course know what to expect from my mindset of learning, my sentiments of "progress over perfection," that we do not glorify busy work, and the course reflection as an expectation. Some students have commented on their overall enjoyment of the reflection process within the formal Transference Reflection document. I have sometimes gained even more in-depth reflections because previously enrolled students know what to expect, and space for learner choice, voice, and growth is an assumption based on the tenets of an autonomy-supportive classroom (Reeve, 2016). In the capstone course, I specifically ask students to complete the final synthesis stage after their oral and written comprehensive exams. I have found significant learning and overall reflections of the entire experience I want to capture after the dust has settled, and they are less stressed about all processes and formalities of comprehensive exams and finalizing their e-portfolio.

Student Support

Students have shared feelings of acceptance, ease, and overall support via their formal reflection documents in my courses. One graduate student, a 4th-grade teacher, stated the following:

While I encountered many unexpected obstacles over the last two months, I still psyched myself out a little too much. My lack of confidence in myself and my abilities, especially relating to the ISTE standards, were probably even bigger obstacles than the various unexpected difficulties I faced. I would often overthink my assignments and get overwhelmed which only hindered my progress. Having such a supportive and understanding instructor made all the difference though. Reading feedback that emphasized "progress over perfection" was something that really helped me out. That's honestly probably the most important thing I will take away from this class. In addition to that, I will be leaving with the knowledge that the ISTE standards are a lot more important to align with and a lot more manageable than I once believed.

The struggle and demands of a graduate student life and their course experience in a fast and furious 8-week (3-hour) short course was improved by supportive and growth-oriented statements such as "progress over perfection" (Yeager et al., 2022). The idea is that students will fail and make mistakes as they get to a possible state of knowing or arriving, depending on the context or subject, which is essential to supporting a growth mindset. The overall idea that the learner is not there "yet" but there is a possibility is the root of Dweck's work when she includes that there is power in "yet" and how potential is the basis for a growth mindset (Dweck, 2014; Yeager et al., 2022).

Encouraged Failure

Failure is a concept or approach that is generally not seen as a positive experience, yet for learners, even adult learners at the graduate level, we know it is inevitable as they dive into learning new constructs and approaches, dig into the research, and jump back into the formal writing process (Eckstein et al., 2023). The research concludes that for mastery to occur, most learners need up to seven opportunities to succeed at a skill, even adult learners that also professional educators; they need the space and grace to

play, explore, fail, reflect, share, regroup, and reattempt (Bälter et al., 2018). One instructional technique to encourage a growth mindset is to embrace failure as a learning opportunity (Yeager et al., 2021). One graduate student that is currently substitute teaching shared the following in their formal reflection:

After settling into this course, my fears and anxiety slowly went away. I found a routine that worked for myself and my family and hit the ground running. My fear of sharing coursework with my peers melted away, and I found out that I love this aspect of this course. Our class and professor developed a camaraderie and worked together to become better students and educators. I thoroughly enjoyed working with all of my peers and learning from them. The amount of knowledge and insight I have gained from my peers through assignments, feedback, and discussion was significant. I wish all graduate-level courses worked in this capacity.

As I stated before, learning from our peers was also beneficial as I saw how these standards and assignments applied to real-life classrooms.

As I complete this class, I walk away with much gratitude and appreciation for our course assignments, professor, and peers. Being in a class environment that allows you to explore, fail, think critically, and interact freely with classmates has been a pleasure upon returning to college. I have learned a new appreciation for technology and how to use this technology as I move further in my education and eventually into a classroom. While this course was challenging, I have taken so much away that I can use in my life and future career. I have already started doing so when interacting with my peers. This course excites me to get into a classroom, start applying the new technologies I have learned, and not be afraid to learn new things.

Noted in the student's reflection regarding their overall course experience(s), it is evident that rigor and student expectations are not minimized with various inclusive and supportive language and instructor shifts in mindset and autonomy-based language. In conclusion, being empathic and understanding of your learners, their needs, and their experiences does not diminish student achievement or the instructor's high expectations (Reeve, 2006). As alluded to in the last student quotes, an essential piece of my course design is creating an open community that holds space for the ideas that "we are all learning" and "if we knew it all, we would not be here." Intentionally including myself in the narrative of being a lifelong learner, holding space for the expertise and knowledge they bring to the course, and developing narratives for being a learner among the students has also shifted the dynamics for building a trusting and safe community.

Building Community

Building community through instructor understanding, empathy, and words of encouragement can change the student experience(s) and the mindset they take with them as a learner in their workplace (Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016; Cheon et al., 2020). A reading teacher that primarily works with students with dyslexia stated the following regarding her capstone course experience:

In isolation, I earned my undergraduate degree and much of my studies throughout the master's program. However, communication with my class peers via Currents was ongoing throughout this final course of the

program. The presence of a by-product of transparency, an authentic community, struck me. The day of my comp exam gives evidence of the development of such a community. While in the meeting, I received a "thinking of you" message from one of my peers. I was surprised how the three encouraging words caused me to smile and eased my nerves; I was validated and understood. Participating in and cultivating a professional culture of transparency and authentic community will be a personal goal in the future. I endeavor to "pay it forward" within my sphere of influence as I know I will benefit from the results.

The overwhelming influence of small words, gestures, and growth, a safe space for a growth mindset, and compassion for your learners is evident in the statement. It supports the perceived notion that my student(s) is gaining autonomy as a learner (Cheon et al., 2020). However, the concept that the learner will "pay it forward" and take the idea of an authentic community with them is exponential for the learner and me as an instructor. Furthermore, I often wonder how my courses affect my students, their P12 students, and their classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Although based on instructors' experience(s) and limited to a subset of asynchronous online graduate students, the mindful shift in utilizing purposeful words and phrases in course communication and instructional materials undoubtedly contributed to student growth and learner autonomy (Cheon et al., 2020; Reeve & Cheon, 2006). Small and incremental changes can profoundly affect our students' growth, potential mindset shifts, and efficacy for learning in new capacities within our courses. It is also profound to engage in reflection and a formal reflection process in which students can formalize their experience and close the learning loop (Lyons, 1998; Schon, 1983). The formal reflection allows the instructor to gain valuable insight into the student experience from the course design, content, and delivery perspective.

Online graduate students' response in their formal reflections has provided insight into guiding my reflective practices, attitudes toward graduate student support, and course design, delivery, and content. Moreover, harnessing the expertise of P12 educators, gaining insight from a curriculum and design perspective, and seeing their potential growth mindset expand or shift is among the highest compliments as an instructor. Gathering, coding, and analyzing student reflections from students for the last two years has led to a greater understanding concerning simple yet powerful shifts in online graduate instruction and how our words matter. Moreover, student reflections and personal communication have revealed that our written words can create a potentially powerful ripple effect in their graduate learning experience.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Autonomy-Supportive Teaching: The delivery of instruction through an interpersonal tone of understanding that appreciates, supports, and vitalizes students' psychological needs (Reeve, 2016).

COVID-19 Pandemic: The widely accepted terminology for the novel coronavirus elevated to a global pandemic in March 2020.

Fixed Mindset: the belief that intelligence and skills are relatively set. People with a fixed mindset strongly believe that 'you either have what it takes to succeed or do not. They view competence as an innate quality, something they are born with that cannot be developed further.

Growth Mindset: the belief that human capacities are not fixed but can be developed over time, and mindset research examines the power of such beliefs to influence human behavior.

P12 Students: Individuals enrolled in early childhood education through 12th grade.

P12 Educators: Individuals who educate students from pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade.

APPENDIX: TRANSFERENCE REFLECTION CYCLE

What Is the Transference Reflection*?*

Directions: Your reflection summarizes the total learning experience in (insert name of course) and must include how the ISTE Standards are integrated into teaching, leadership, learning, and student/learner success.

This reflection should include the **five** stages of reflection:

Exploration Stage (Week 1)

You are to explicitly state your prejudices, beliefs, feelings, or preconceived notions about your initial course experience(s). ***Complete this in the first week of class*** *and post where the Final Reflection goes in the Google Community, then add it to your initial document at the end of the course (you do not need to repost).*

Explanation Stage (Week 8)

You are to explain how your actual experience matched or differed from the prejudgments you identified in the exploration stage.

Conjecture Stage (Week 8)

You are to formulate a conjecture or question that might help you resolve or at least further explore the tensions created between your presuppositions and actual experiences. Such a conjecture might resemble a thesis statement, but a conjecture preserves the exploratory purpose of the essay, an intellectual reconnoiter.

Analysis Stage (Week 8)

You are required to test or answer your conjecture by engaging in a more profound re-examination of your presuppositions and actual experiences. Such a reflective analysis seeks to search for truth openly rather than argue for a particular position.

Synthesis Stage (Week 8)

This is the crucial stage of the reflective process, in which your practices and understandings are restructured, and new actions are put forward. You are encouraged to draw out the implications of your analysis. The document allows you to say something meaningful and new towards the end of your reflective essay.