Identification and Literacy: The Way Children Identify Themselves as Literacy Learners

Kristina M. Roberts
krobe5@u.brockport.edu

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Identification and Literacy: The Way Children Identify Themselves as Literacy Learners

by

Kristina M. Roberts

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education of The College at Brockport, State University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Literacy

May 2017
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Abstract

This research takes a closer look into the implementation of explicit instruction in adopting a Growth Mindset and how it can affect students’ literacy identity. It also explores how students identify themselves as literacy learners. The purpose of this study is to learn more about how students identify themselves as literacy learners. Furthermore, this study looks into the impact of explicitly teaching reading strategies and Growth Mindset. This research also looks into finding ways for students to move away from negatively identifying themselves as readers. Data were collected for this study over a period of six weeks using the students’ reading assessments, pre-interviews, post-interviews, writing samples and field notes during Guided Reading groups, independent work and Writer’s Workshop. Data were analyzed for how the students identified as readers and how Growth Mindset impacted their literacy learning.

**Keywords:** literacy, identity, self-concept, Growth Mindset, reading strategies
Introduction

When I am walking around my classroom, I often hear students saying things like: I’m not a good reader, everyone in the class can read better than I can, or I just don’t know how to do it so I might as well give up. All of these comments are very discouraging to me as a teacher. Sometimes, I hear students grunting over the fact that they have to read. When I ask the students why they have these feelings towards reading, their responses indicate that reading is difficult, so in return it’s not an enjoyable activity. As a teacher, this is the last thing I want to hear from my students when I walk into the classroom. Unfortunately, these phrases and others similar to this are heard often among my group of students. Many thoughts go racing through my mind regarding how I can get my students to have positive opinions about themselves as readers. I also have a strong drive to help my students find reading enjoyable. When thinking about how I can encourage my students, I came across two studies where Rowe, Fitch and Bass (2001) and Kindzierski and Leavitt-Noble (2010) suggested that social interactions and peer collaboration can have an impact on a student’s literacy learning.

In further thinking about my students’ literacy identity and literacy learning, I started to narrow my focus into three major themes that were trends among the research I collected: Growth Mindset, peer interactions, and literacy strategies. Fitzgerald and Laurian-Fitzgerald (2016) explained how important it is for students to have an environment in which they feel like they can succeed. I agree with Fitzgerald and Laurian-Fitzgerald, and therefore I intend to implement strategies to encourage a Growth Mindset around literacy as well as strategies about what students need to do to be efficient and effective readers who have a positive opinion about themselves as readers. If I am successful in implementing these strategies, my students will have
the knowledge and perseverance to have a positive outlook regarding their identities as literacy learners.

**Topic and Research Design**

Due to some of the students’ negative reactions to reading, encouraging a positive outlook and a Growth Mindset seemed pertinent. My study will address students’ opinions about themselves as readers and how that can, in turn, affect their literacy learning. According to Rowe et al. (2001), children are aware of their literacy practices and how those practices connect to social roles in their lives. If a child feels that he or she is not a valued member of the literacy environment, it will be very difficult to encourage him or her to have a positive attitude about who he or she is as a literacy learner. Since some students are already identifying themselves as poor readers, it should be the teacher’s mission to persuade the students to believe otherwise. We need to inspire our students in order to help them identify themselves as “strong” readers.

Compton-Lilly (2006), found that people recognize identity as a way of sharing experiences with others. If a child feels he or she is “bad” at reading and/or considers himself or herself as a “non-reader”, the child will share this with his or her peers, family and teachers, in turn making this his or her identity. Therefore, teachers need to find ways to encourage students to build positive literate identities.

**Rationale**

This study is necessary to determine how identity, literacy and Growth Mindset are connected. Seeing and hearing my students have negative feelings towards reading, believing they are poor readers, and giving up on themselves influenced me to find more research about literacy, identity and Growth Mindset. I have seen instances where a child struggled with reading at a young age so he or she gave up on reading and settled with the idea that he or she is a “bad”
reader. If a child has given up on him or herself, it can be very difficult for a teacher to break that wall and amend feelings towards literacy. As teachers, it is important to find ways to encourage students to have a Growth Mindset and learn new strategies that will help make reading less of a daunting task and more of an enjoyable one.

I am a teacher looking for ways to support my students’ literacy learning. I am wondering if encouraging students to have a Growth Mindset and having specific teaching tools available to help build reading strategies can inspire students to better their reading self-concepts. With this being said, the direct connection between literacy and identity should be further researched in order to help teachers bridge the gap between these themes.

**Purpose**

My purpose is to better support my students around their literacy identities. I intend to deliver instruction to all of my students with strategies showing what good readers do and how to have a Growth Mindset about tasks that can be difficult at first. If the students feel like something is too hard, they might just quit and give up. My objective is to learn more about how I can encourage my students to have a positive opinion when things get too difficult. I want to further research ideas on how to encourage students to persevere and work through the struggles instead of giving up. It is my end goal that when faced with a difficult concept or activity, students will be motivated to try their best and not give up on themselves in the future.

**Research Questions**

My research questions are as follows:

- How do my students identify as readers?
- How can learning about Growth Mindset impact students’ literacy identities?
Review of Literature

Introduction

The succeeding literature review gathers ideas surrounding the connection between literacy, identity and Growth Mindset. Research demonstrates that students need encouragement and support in order to work through challenging tasks. According to Rowe et al. (2001), “…teachers need to understand children’s affiliations and views of themselves…” (p. 433). This review will take a deeper look into Growth Mindset to provide potential strategies for teachers and future teachers to use with students in order to encourage them to work through difficult tasks. This review will also look into identity in reading. The review will take a further look into students’ funds of knowledge of students. Key themes around current research around literacy and identity are listed below.

Identity

In my research study, I utilize literacy lessons to teach students strategies about improving their literacy skills. As a teacher-researcher I am working with students to better understand ways to encourage them to identify as positive literacy learners in a classroom environment.

In my classroom, I have observed students who have poor attitudes towards reading. Often these students will express struggles and then share feelings stating they are bad readers. In a study done by McCarthey (2001), the researcher looked into how identity impacted elementary readers. McCarthey explained, “literacy experiences in school affect students’ attitudes” (p.122). If students have negative experiences in school, there is a possibility of connecting that to literacy identity. Researchers have found that students understand what it means to be literate. Seban & Tavsanli (2015) found that students’ literacy identity connects to students’
understanding of literacy. In a study done by Schachter and Galili-Schachter (2012), the researchers defined identity as the following:

We define identity literacy as readers’ proficiency and willingness to engage the meaning systems embedded within texts and to consider adopting them as part of their own personal meaning system- that system within which they define themselves and their relation to the world (p.1).

Through this study, I explore strategies for students to be able to identify as strong or good readers. If I have students who do not believe they are good readers, in turn, the students could identify as bad readers. This is relevant and important because I want my students to view themselves as good readers. In a study done by Leung and Hicks (2014), the researchers looked into the significance of students identifying with a positive identity. The researchers found that “…once students start thinking of themselves as writers, they connect more deeply [with being writers]” (p.597). In order for my students to connect to their work and feel confident about it, the students need to identity as readers. Moreover, Compton-Lilly (2006) states that “children’s personal histories as readers, their past successes, the official criteria for determining reading competence, and their current struggles all contribute to ways in which children identify themselves as readers” (p.59).

Growth Mindset

Esparza, Shumow, and Schmidt (2014) explain what a person with a Growth Mindset would appear as. The researchers found, “Students with a Growth Mindset tend to embrace challenges, persist in the face of obstacles, perceive effort and study strategies as a means to learn, utilize feedback to improve, and find inspiration in the success of others” (p.6). If a child feels that he or she will struggle with something before even attempting the task, it has strong
potential to end up being a daunting and/or difficult task for him or her. According to Kindzierski and Leavitt-Noble (2010), “Many students demonstrated behavior that suggested it’s easier to give up then to try again and fail” (p.132). Some students may get the idea stuck in their head that something is too hard or they just simply cannot do it. Once they have these feelings, students may just choose not to complete the task or even try it. As a teacher-researcher, it is my desire and intention to motivate students and give them strategies to help them not give up. I want them to continue to take risks and try even if it seems like the task is beyond their academic ability level.

Research has shown that if students feel that they can continue to learn, their brains will grow (Fitzgerald & Laurian-Fitzgerald, 2016). Furthermore, Dweck (2007) states, “In addition, they [students] held hard work in high regard, believing that the more you labored at something, the better you would become at it” (Two views of intelligence section, para. 13). As teachers, it is crucial that we support our students in believing that they can persevere and overcome any difficult tasks or activities. We need to provide students with strategies to persevere through a difficult task so it becomes a learned behavior to stick it out which will hopefully help them to become more successful.

Dweck (2015) suggests that we are always wanting and yearning to learn new things. It needs to be our job as educators to continue to instill that desire in our students’ minds so it is not lost when they reach an obstacle. We should encourage them to keep trying and putting forth effort. Laurian-Fitzgerald and Roman (2015) completed a research study that showed how students are capable of learning how to have a Growth Mindset at a young age. Laurian-Fitzgerald and Roman (2015) state, “We are also very convinced that Growth Mindset principles and skills can be successfully taught to students of all ages” (pp.80-81). As teachers, we need to
continue to find ways to encourage students to use drive and persevere when they are faced with challenging tasks that might push them outside of their comfort zones. We don’t want them to lose it as they grow older, like Kindzierski and Leavitt-Noble (2010) found in their study. The two researchers found that “They [students] also demonstrate difficulties with persuasive, narrative, and informative writing and have developed a negative attitude toward writing as they leave elementary school” (p.127). Developing a Growth Mindset can help students to be successful learners because it keeps them motivated and they are willing to try new things and take risks.

**Peer Interactions**

The way a student feels when he or she is perceived as either a good or bad reader by peers can play a huge role in the way a student identifies as a literacy learner. According to Rowe et al. (2001), students are aware of how their peers view them as literacy learners. “Children responded to each other in terms of social roles. Children who struggled to record their ideas on paper were less powerful in official literacy events because of the social roles they occupied during authoring and sharing” (Rowe et al., p. 429). With this knowledge, it is important for teachers to take it and make a difference in their students’ learning. Teachers should find ways to help build students’ identity about literacy in a collaborative way.

When we are looking at teaching students new things, using peer collaboration will be to our advantage. A study done by Fitzgerald and Laurian-Fitzgerald (2016) explains the importance and benefits of incorporating peer collaboration. The researchers explain that if students are working together, they are likely to find success. In Slavin’s research (1996), he concludes, “If students value doing well as a group, and the group can succeed only by ensuring that all group members have learned the material, then group members will be motivated to teach
each other” (p.54). When students are working together in groups, they have more motivation to complete the task and learn from their peers.

Peer collaboration and literacy identity connect through a major theme of social constructionism (Triplett, 2007). Moreover, Hruby (2001) determines, “constructionism deals with knowledge formation outside the head between participants in social relationships” (p. 51). Students can be apprehensive about speaking up in class because they are afraid that their answer is not right and then their peers will view them in a negative way (Triplett, 2007, Seban & Tavsanli, 2015). If students are working collaboratively, they may be able to work together to find the answer to what was difficult for them or to double check that their answer was indeed correct. Having students work in small groups or working with partners can encourage children to take more risks and not be as anxious about sharing their thoughts.

A study done by Flint (2010), who referenced Vygotsky, states, “…children learn best when working cooperatively, in a social context, on something that is meaningful to their lives” (p. 296). Giving children the opportunity to work through something with a peer can encourage them to identify themselves as stronger literacy learners because they have had the chance to communicate and construct meaning (Flint, 2010). It is important to have children feel confident in what they are doing because it could affect their relationships with peers.

As I implement this research into my own classroom, the students are working together during the structured observations and literacy lessons. I instruct my students on how to collaborate and work together to encourage them to be supportive in helping each other identify as strong literacy learners. I want my students to feel confident in their reading so they feel accepted by others and feel they are all an equally important part of the classroom environment. Seban and Tavsanli (2015) stated that, “students emphasized that they [students] need to be
literate because it [not being literate] will be received very negatively by their environment” (p. 222).

**Funds of Knowledge**

Funds of knowledge is a way teachers can learn more about where their students are coming from. Funds of knowledge allow teachers to understand and become familiar with a student’s interests, culture and family beliefs. Hedges, Cullen and Jordan (2011) explain that:

The notion of funds of knowledge, that is, knowledge about household functioning, development, and well-being, provides an analytical way to assess children’s interests, respectful of their lives in their families, communities, and cultures. The major findings were that children’s interests and inquiries were simulated by their funds of knowledge constructed during participation in everyday life experiences (p.198).

All students come from diverse backgrounds with differing levels of knowledge about topics in school and in life. Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) suggest that the term “funds of knowledge” is referred to as “…historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p.133). Teachers can also benefit from incorporating a child’s funds of knowledge into teaching. With obtaining a child’s funds of knowledge, a teacher has the opportunity to use a child’s knowledge in instruction. For example, in a study done by Reyes, Iddings and Feller (2016), the researchers found that a teacher was able to “connect to day-to-day examples from her students’ funds of knowledge” (p.24) after being aware of the funds of knowledge. This benefited the children because of the authentic and meaningful experiences the students were a part of. Being able to have an understanding of where students come from will help a teacher make connections, which in turn could benefit academics. According to Andrews and Yee (2006), “schools should draw on
communities’, families’ and children’s ‘funds of knowledge’ in order to support their learning in school” (p.447).

Funds of knowledge is an important foundation that teachers should be aware of. According to Seban and Tavsanli (2015), “students’ literate identity development is a complex social process and influenced by a variety of factors (school practices, home literacy, practices) …” (p.218). The connection between the home environment and school environment can influence the identity of the child. Hedges et al. (2011) also agree that the connection of funds of knowledge, home and literacy are connected. Funds of knowledge can help teachers gain a better understanding of who their students are as individuals. Funds of knowledge gives teachers the opportunity to learn more about where their students come from and it gives teachers a clearer insight into students’ interests, culture and family beliefs.

**Conclusion**

From the research that has already been completed, I further investigated the connection between literacy, identity and Growth Mindset. As a teacher-researcher, I explored how the students were identifying as literacy learners. I also looked into how to support my students with looking further into how Growth Mindset can impact my students’ literacy identity.

**Methodology**

During this study, teaching instruction was delivered to students helping to show them what it means to have a Growth Mindset and strategies around making students stronger readers. We worked through lessons to establish what good readers do and ways to apply these strategies to their own independent reading. Lessons around how to implement Growth Mindset in daily thinking were also included. This data collection lasted for a period of six weeks with a range of data collection methods.
Participants

The participants that were selected for this study are all students in my second grade classroom in the 2016-2017 school year. The class is made up of 10 girls and 8 boys, and the students are mostly Caucasian, with the exception of one student, who is African American. The socio-economic statuses of the students in my classroom are also mixed. There are five students who receive free and reduced lunch through the school. This class is a blended class, meaning there are both general education and special education students in the classroom. There are six students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP), four students who receive Academic Intervention Services (AIS), and two students who meet with the counselor on a weekly basis. Among the students in this classroom, there are five children who are reading significantly below the grade level expectations. I am the special education teacher in this classroom and I am in the classroom for Language Arts, writing and math. During these times, I work in small groups with students and also co-teach with the general education teacher. The students who participated in this study are already in Guided Reading groups based on their academic reading level.

Setting

The setting of this study is a second grade classroom in a suburban elementary school in New York State. This school houses grades ranging from Kindergarten to 4th grade, with four classes of 18-23 students in each grade. The classroom environment is very welcoming and set up to help students feel and be successful. For use as resources for the students, there is model work hung on the walls and charts used from previous math, Guided Reading and writing lessons. In a corner of the classroom, the general education teacher and I have created a reading nook with bookshelves filled with leveled books for the students and comfortable pillows for students to enjoy during independent reading time. Our district provides each classroom with two
desktop computers and five iPads for the students to utilize during the school day. There is a SMART board in the front of the room with a large carpet for the students to gather. The desks are surrounding the carpet in different ways. During Guided Reading, each teacher meets with 1-4 students at a time at a kidney shaped table. A photo of the classroom is included in figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Figure 1: Classroom photo.

Positionality

Every teacher comes from a different background and has a different story to tell. Because of this, it can impact my role as a teacher-researcher. I am a white single female in my twenties, English is my only language and I have no children of my own. I grew up in a very
loving home with a mother and father who always got along and showed me how to love and respect others. I also grew up with two older sisters and one older brother. Both of my parents are successful in their careers as are all of my siblings and their families. My parents were always able to provide breakfast, lunch and dinner for my family and we all had our own beds to sleep in at night.

As a child, school was an enjoyable place for the most part. I had to work hard during my schooling but I was capable and I was successful. I never received AIS nor did I have an IEP or 504 Plan. I had parents and siblings who were always willing to help me when I needed it. I received my Bachelor’s Degree in Childhood and Inclusive Education, grades 1-6. This is my second year working in a suburban district as a special education teacher. I am currently working with students in first and second grade.

Methods of Data Collection

During this study, I collected data to gather a better understanding of the connection between literacy, identity and Growth Mindset. In order to do this, I found success using multiple forms of data collection. The types of data collection are listed below:

(1) Literacy artifacts- These work samples were collected from students in the second grade classroom. These artifacts came from work done in the small group Guided Reading lessons and during the whole group writing lessons.

(2) Interviews- This data collection was used to determine students’ perceptions about reading in general and their perceptions of themselves as readers. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for meaningful conversation to be included which is outside the realm of the interview questions. See Appendix A for the list of pre-interview questions and Appendix B for post-interview questions.
(3) Field Notes- The teacher-researcher took ethnographic field notes while the students are working on the literacy activities. The field notes serve the purpose of learning more about how students are identifying as readers and how they are using Growth Mindset.

(4) Running Reading Records (RRR)- These assessments were given to the students to determine reading levels and how the scores compare to the grade level expectations that the school district has established. These assessments were used to compare how students are identifying themselves as readers to their accuracy in reading, comprehension, miscues and if they are using noticeable word solving cues during reading.

(5) Literacy Lessons- I taught a lesson based solely around what makes someone a good reader and ways he or she can identify as a good reader. I also incorporated strategies of how to have a Growth Mindset when things do not always come easy the first time.

Procedures

All of the students in my class were given RRR during their Guided Reading groups. This is something that happens at least once a week, if not more often during the regular literacy block in the school day. These assessments were used to determine the actual reading ability of the students, their comprehension of the story, and which strategies the students are using while reading. During Writing Workshop, I conducted the interviews with all of the students.

After the interviews and RRR were completed, I began to work with students on building reading strategies for the ones that are difficult for the students. This generally happened during the Guided Reading time. Throughout the Writing Workshop time and Guided Reading lessons, I introduced the concept of Growth Mindset. We had discussions around what Growth Mindset is and how we can implement it in the activities we do in our lives. With this newly discovered knowledge, students discussed the capability to persevere through difficult things in their life,
not just in literacy. As a class, we continued to revisit these concepts and talk about what we can do to continue to improve our identity as literacy learners.

During the six-week data collection period, lessons were taught to introduce and discuss the topics of Growth Mindset and reading strategies. During the Growth Mindset lessons, students were taught that when having a Growth Mindset, the brain can grow and change if we change our words a little. Students completed an activity where they needed to sort phrases into Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset. For example, one of the phrases for a Growth Mindset was “This will be challenging but I’ll keep at it” and a phrase for the Fixed Mindset was “I give up”. After this activity, students were introduced to the “power of yet” (Dweck, 2007). The “power of yet” means that even though you might not be able to do something right now, you are able to do something else. For this activity, students wrote down something they couldn’t do yet and something they are able to do. One student wrote, “I cannot read diary of a wimpy but I can read pigeon book”. See figure 2 below for a student example.
After the Growth Mindset lessons, the students participated in lessons around reading strategies. In the book “The Reading Strategies Book” by Jennifer Serravallo (2015), the author suggests multiple strategies for teachers to give their students while reading. From this book, I chose two strategies to introduce to the students: “Try, Try, Try, Again” (Serravallo, p. 85) and “Run Into the First Part” (Serravallo, p. 93). See examples of the strategies in Appendix C. The first strategy reminds students to use more than one strategy when they are reading. The second strategy encourages students to look at the first letter and try out the word using the first sound, then moving through the whole word to be able to read it fully. These strategies were taught to the students and then they had the opportunity to practice them in their Guided Reading groups and during independent reading time.

After the students participated in the reading strategy instruction, there was another lesson around the theory of Growth Mindset. During this lesson, students participated in group discussions around what Growth Mindset is and why it is important for learning. They then participated in a writing activity where they had to come up with how Growth Mindset can help them become better readers.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness will be reputable in this study through the practice of data triangulation. Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) explain that data triangulation is necessary and important because it will “ensure that the themes found in a study are credible representations of people’s experiences and perspectives because the information draws on multiple sources of information or individuals (e.g., a principal and a student) or types of data (e.g., observational field notes and
identifications)" (p. 364). I am collecting multiple forms of data throughout the study. The work that I complete during this study was reviewed through a critical lens by an advisor.

**Analysis**

After collecting my data over the six-week data collection period, I decided to create a coding system to organize my data. Shagoury and Power (1999) and Plano-Clark and Creswell (2015), discuss the importance of creating codes to have a better understanding of the data and to be able to create themes that are found throughout the various data collection. Plano-Clark and Creswell (2015) indicate:

> Codes are labels that the researcher uses to describe the meaning of a segment of text or an image in relation to the study’s central phenomenon. Codes can address many different topics, including participants’ feelings, perspectives, strategies, contexts, behaviors or language (p.359).

For the purposes of organizing my data, I created four codes to analyze my data. The codes I used were S=struggling reader, CI= changed identity, G= Growth Mindset, and CM= changed mindset. I created the codes by analyzing and triangulating my data. I used field notes, pre-interviews, post-interviews, reading assessments, and students’ writing pieces.

While looking through my data, I practiced the method of constant comparison. According to Shagoury and Power (2012), constant comparison “…involves deriving categories from data over time, and then using the categories to build theory” (p. 143). To start my data analysis process, I first went through my field notes. I looked through this to see if I saw any similarities and common themes between my students. I collected the field notes during independent center time, Guided Reading groups, and Writer’s Workshop. After I looked through my field notes, I looked at the RRR information. From this, I gathered the information
that four out of the 18 students were struggling readers (code: S). I also looked into how many students were reading on grade level or above grade level. Figure 3 below shows the percentage of students reading below grade level, on grade level and above grade level.

**Figure 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below Grade Level</th>
<th>On Grade Level</th>
<th>Above Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3:* Indicates the number of students who are reading below grade level, on grade level, and above grade based on RRR assessment completed by the teacher.

I then gathered my pre-interviews and post-interviews. All 18 students were given the pre-interview to get a better insight in how each student identified as a literacy learner. Only students who identified as not good readers or okay readers during the pre-interview, or students who received reading support were given the post-interview. From the interviews, I looked into how students identified themselves as readers. Students identified as not good readers, okay readers, or good readers.

**Figure 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Identified Pre-Interview</th>
<th>Students Identified Post-Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Good- 6%</td>
<td>Not Good- 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay- 22%</td>
<td>Okay- 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good- 72%</td>
<td>Good- 86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4:* Indicates how students identified themselves as readers. Results were taken from students during pre-interviews and post-interviews.
I then looked at the pre-interviews and post-interviews to compare student responses for strategies they could use to become better readers. From this, I found that many students demonstrated Growth Mindset as they changed the way they identified as readers, going from not good or okay readers to good readers and giving Growth Mindset strategies as a way to become better readers. For example, I looked at Joseph, a student reading below grade and who identified as not a good reader during the pre-interview.

**Figure 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Question</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think you are a good reader?</td>
<td>Pre-Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m not that good. I look at pictures”.</td>
<td>“Yeah because I try my best and I fix my mistakes”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5:* Indicates a student response to how he sees himself as a reader. This table has information from the pre-interview and post-interview to show comparisons.

I then looked at writing samples that students completed after a Growth Mindset lesson. Students needed to reflect on how having a Growth Mindset could help them to become better readers. Through this, I looked into how many students changed their mindset.

The purpose of the data collection was to gain a better accuracy of being able to answer my research questions. Through my data collection, I was able to gain understanding of how my students identified themselves as literacy learners and how Growth Mindset can influence the way they identify themselves. I noticed how students changed their mindset and the way they identified themselves as readers through a short intervention period.
I discovered themes in my findings by analyzing and coding my data. I was able to find that students are aware of their identity in the same way the assessments identify them. I also found that students are willing to change their mindset and grow their thinking to be positive. Through my data analysis, I found that most of my students who initially identified as not good readers or okay readers were able to use Growth Mindset thinking to change their identity as readers. Finally, I found that the implementation of the theory of Growth Mindset was an effective strategy for my students.

**Finding One**: Through my data collection, I found that 80% of students demonstrate Growth Mindset thinking after instruction around Growth Mindset.

**Before Growth Mindset instruction.**

Before I taught the lessons around Growth Mindset and implemented the reading strategies lesson, some of my students did not identify Growth Mindset as a strategy they could use to become better readers. The students only identified strategies like: reading the whole page, not just looking at the pictures, putting a finger in to use as a tracking strategy, breaking apart the word by sounding the word out or stretching the word out, skipping the word and going back and keeping eyes on the book. These were some commonalities from the students that were found prior to teaching of the Growth Mindset and strategy lessons. These answers were collected from pre-interviews and the field notes. For example, one of the students, Amanda was stuck on a word while reading during a Guided Reading group. I observed Amanda while she was reading. The following transcribed conversation occurred when she was stuck on an unknown word.

**Amanda**: ‘Puts head down on table’.

**Mrs. Black**: What’s up Amanda? Pick your head up.

**Amanda**: I can’t do this. I don’t know what that word says.
Mrs. Black: How can you figure this out? What reading strategy can you use? (Points to a board with known reading strategies hung).

Amanda: I guess I could try to sound it out. P/t/ch, p/a, p/a/th. I don’t know.

Mrs. Black: What else can you do to try to read it?

Amanda: I don’t know. I can’t do it. Can you tell me?

Mrs. Black: Patch.

When Amanda was faced with a challenge, she tried one strategy. When that did not work out for her, she appealed to the teacher and was then told the word. She only applied one strategy to attempt to word solve the unknown word and then gave up very quickly. During this, Amanda did not demonstrate Growth Mindset thinking. This was something that occurred with other students as well. 50% of the struggling students initially identified sounding it out as an effective reading strategy. This strategy can be effective for students at times, but it does not always lead the students to being able to word solve immediately, causing some students to shut down. I observed a student, Hayden, who became frustrated and stopped trying when his strategy didn’t work. See observation notes below:

Observation 3: This observation is taking place during a Guided Reading lesson.

Students are independently reading while Mrs. Black is checking in with the students individually. Hayden gets to a word that he is having trouble reading accurately. He attempts to read it once by saying the first sound /l/. He then puts his head on his arms on the table while Mrs. Black is working with the other students. When she is done working with the other students, she moves her focus to Hayden. She asks Hayden why he has stopped reading and he tells her it is because he got stuck on the word. She tells him to look at the first sound and check the picture to see if that would help. She then moves on
and works with the next student. Hayden again says the sound of the first letter, /l/, turns the page and then closes his book. He has to leave the room to go to a related service.

In the situations with Amanda and Hayden, the students tried one reading strategy and gave up when they did not read the word correctly the first time. I found this by comparing the answers from the pre-interview and post-interview, as well as looking at observations from the Growth Mindset lessons.

After Growth Mindset instruction, I found that more students had Growth Mindset thinking after instruction. Students changed their strategies to say things like try, try, try again; try my best; keep trying; and try hard. The students showed that they were aware that putting forth their best effort and trying can help them when they are struggling with a difficult task, like decoding a word. Hochanadel and Finamore (2015) explained that students are more likely to overcome challenging tasks if they have a Growth Mindset. I recognized this during an observation I completed after the instruction around Growth Mindset. See observation reflection below:

Observation 6: Students were paired with a partner in their class. They needed to work together to read a passage and then find the main idea and three supporting details. Almost all of the students were actively participating in this activity and were collaborating with each other. I walked over to a group of two students who were working together. One of the students was reading out loud but was struggling to accurately read. His partner encouraged him by saying “Keep trying, you got this! What’s the next sound?” Throughout the rest of this observation, I noticed that other
students were giving each other encouraging Growth Mindset phrases to keep working through challenging tasks.

Through this observation, the students showed their understanding of what a Growth Mindset is. I found that students were able to apply the Growth Mindset thinking to their own literacy and support their peers by using Growth Mindset phrases. The students were actively using the same phrases that were introduced to them in the lesson, like “keep trying”. The students were using this independently as well as encouraging their peers to work through something that was difficult. The students also demonstrated their use of Growth Mindset thinking in their writing pieces. See a student example in Appendix D.

This finding shows that when the students were introduced to the idea of Growth Mindset and given ways to implement it in their thinking, they were able to effectively demonstrate Growth Mindset thinking.

**Finding Two:** In looking through my data, I found that 82% of students that initially identified as a not good reader or okay reader now identify as a good reader after the delivery of Growth Mindset lessons and reading strategy lessons.
During the post-interview, I asked all of the students “Do you think you are a good reader? Why/why not? The students’ answers varied. Some of the students identified as good readers because of the amount of reading, the length of the book, or reading accurately. When I asked this question, some of the students identified as okay or not good readers. The following transcribed conversation is from the pre-interview with a student Joseph who is reading significantly below grade level expectations according to the RRR.

**Miss Roberts:** Do you think you are a good reader?

**Joseph:** I’m not good.

**Miss Roberts:** Why do you think that?

**Joseph:** I sometimes don’t know the words. Ummmm I sometimes don’t read lots.
**Miss Roberts:** Do you like to read?

**Joseph:** No I’m bad at it.

From this conversation, it was determined that Joseph identified himself as a “not good” reader. In a study done by Falth, Svensson, Carlsson, and Gustafson (2014), the researchers found that “there is a risk that children with reading difficulties, because of their low self-image, have negative feelings about reading and writing and therefore do not even make an effort” (p.33). Joseph identified as a poor reader and has negative feelings towards reading. He expressed that he does not like reading because of his ability.

During the reading strategies lessons, I made sure to review strategies that would take a further look into what a student should do if he or she comes to an unknown word. In the pre-interviews, a lot of the students identified sounding out words as a strategy. In the reading strategy lesson, I introduced the strategy “Try, Try, Try Again” (Servallo, 2015) see appendix C, which encourages students to use more than one strategy when stuck on a word. I wanted all of my students to understand that there are several strategies to use when stuck, not just sound it out. I wanted to do this because I felt that if a student was stuck on a word and sounding it out did not work, he or she would feel like they were failing because that was the only strategy he or she tried. This could connect directly to identifying as a not good reader. If the only strategy he or she tried did not work, there is a possibility that he or she would shut down because of this.

After the delivery of the reading strategy lessons and the Growth Mindset lessons, some of the students’ answers were different when asked if they were a good reader. Four out of the five students that originally identified as not good or okay readers on the pre-interview now identified as good readers on the post-interview. Below is the transcribed conversation with Joseph during the post-interview.
**Miss Roberts:** Joseph, do you think you are a good reader?

**Joseph:** Yeah. I am a good reader!

**Miss Roberts:** What makes you a good reader?

**Joseph:** I really try my best. I know to fix my mistakes. I skip a word if I don’t know it and go back when I read more to know it.

Like Joseph, many students now identified as good readers. The students were able to provide reasons for why they felt they were good readers as well. It was shown that most all students felt like they were good readers after some direct instruction around the concept of Growth Mindset and reading strategies.

**Finding Three:** In collecting and analyzing my data, I found that 82% of students identified Growth Mindset as an effective strategy they could use while reading.

**Figure 8**

*Figure 8:* Indicates that during the pre-interview, two students identified Growth Mindset as a useful strategy. During the post-interview, 15 students identified Growth Mindset as an effective strategy to use.
During the pre-interviews, there were only two students who identified Growth Mindset as a strategy they could use while reading. When asked what someone could do to be a good reader, the students’ answers were: “never give up” and “keep trying.” When first looking at this data, it appeared to me that my students did not connect the idea of trying their best and never giving up to being an effective reading strategy. I found it necessary and relevant to implement the lessons around Growth Mindset. I wanted my students to understand that persevering through a task connects to being a good reader.

Researchers have collected data and completed studies that show having a Growth Mindset can be beneficial and helpful for students. Helgeson (2016) found Growth Mindset to be an effective strategy for students. Helgeson (2016) believes that students need to be explicitly taught how to embrace the mindset. He concluded, “Students must be explicitly taught how to embrace this mindset” (p.2). With this knowledge from Helgeson’s finding, I reflected on the way my students answered the question about strategies during the pre-interview.

As teachers we are always encouraging our students to put forth their best effort and to try their hardest because we want to see our students succeed. Even though this is something that a lot of teachers are constantly telling their students, there is a possibility that the students do not realize the importance of this or how to actually apply it to their learning. I also thought about how the students might not know how to identify Growth Mindset phrases as a strategy that would be helpful and effective for them to show they are good readers. From this, I found it pertinent to explicitly teach my students about Growth Mindset and then give them an opportunity to apply this to their own learning.

During the first lesson around Growth Mindset, I introduced Growth Mindset to the students so they would be familiar with the phrase “Growth Mindset”. The students participated
in small hands-on activities where the students sorted phrases into Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset groupings. Through this activity, I saw mostly all of the students understand the concept of Growth Mindset. The students were able to put the correct phrases into the correct group. For example: “I can keep trying” went in the Growth Mindset group and “I am just not smart” went into the Fixed Mindset group. I then taught another lesson around Growth Mindset about a week later. During this lesson, the students needed to work together and have discussions around how the character in the book, “The Dot”, was showing she had a Growth Mindset. After this, I had the students participate in a Growth Mindset writing activity.

For this activity, the students needed to respond to the prompt “How can having a Growth Mindset help you become a better reader?” During this activity I observed something different than I had previously in other observations. In the previous observations, I saw that students had their heads down and some students were sitting and not working. During this observation, all of the students were working. When the students were stuck on something, I saw their hands go up and they would ask for help. I saw students using the word wall when they were stuck on a word, which was something I did not observe previously. From these observations, I felt that the students were using Growth Mindset to work through the task.

After the writing activity, I conducted a post-interview with the students who initially identified as not good or okay readers, students who were struggling readers and students who received reading support, totaling seven students who were given the post-interview. From those seven students, there were five who identified Growth Mindset as a way to show they were good readers. Through all of these data collection, I found that students embraced the idea of Growth Mindset and were able to apply it to their own learning.
**Finding Four:** Most all students were able to identify themselves in the same way that the reading assessment identified them. All of the students that are reading below grade level identified as okay or not good readers. Five out of the 18 students identified as okay readers or not good readers. Of those five students that identified as okay readers or not good readers, four of the students are struggling readers according to the assessments.

The way students identify themselves has a connection to their actual academic abilities. Quirk, Schwanenflugel, and Webb (2009), completed a study where they looked into students’ self-concept as readers during their second grade year. The researchers conclude “…reading self-concept and reading fluency skill level are reciprocally related to one another across students’ second grade year” (p. 217). With this finding, it is apparent that students are aware of their academic standing as readers.

Initially the students identified themselves as not good readers or okay readers and only gave reasons such as sounding out the words, or putting their finger in as effective strategies to use when stuck on an unknown word. The students who identified as not good readers or okay readers also shared that reading takes longer for them than their classmates. One student Amanda (pseudonym) gave insight into this.

**Figure 9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Question- Miss Roberts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Response- Amanda</td>
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</table>
Figure 9: Shows an example of how a student identifies herself as a reader in comparison to her peers.

Amanda came to the conclusion that she was an okay reader based on a comparison to her peers. She was looking more into what her peers were doing and assessing her skills compared to them. She was not looking into what she does well as a way to identify as a reader. Quirk et al. (2009) also found that when students have low reading self-concept they might “struggle with reading early in academic careers” (p.220). I found it necessary and crucial to make sure that Amanda and other students who have the opinion that they are not good readers or okay readers to realize that they are good readers based on strategies they use and not just because it takes longer to read or because their reading level is lower than a peer’s reading level. I felt it necessary to make sure that my students knew that each one of them is a good reader for using a variety of strategies that help.

When I looked at the responses from the students who were reading below grade level, I found that many of them identified as not good readers and okay readers. I found that none of the students who are reading below grade level viewed themselves as good readers when I first spoke to them about this. In a study done by Chapman, Tunmer and Prochnow (2000), the researchers found that students with a lower self-concept about reading performed poorer on reading tasks.

My rationale for having those students participate in the post-interview was to determine if the students were able to view themselves differently after talking about things they do well when reading and to have a Growth Mindset about who they are as readers. After the lessons on reading strategies and Growth Mindset, these students changed their view of how their peers
viewed them as readers. Overall, this finding shows that students identify as a reader in the same way that the reading assessment identified them.

**Discussion**

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to better support my students around their literacy learning. I wanted to learn more about how I could inspire my students to work through tasks that are challenging. This study was centered around the succeeding research questions:

- How do my students identify as readers?
- How can learning about Growth Mindset impact students’ literacy identity?

From this study, I found three major findings. These findings include:

1. Growth Mindset thinking is an effective strategy for students to use while reading.
2. Students self-identified as good readers after direct instruction around Growth Mindset and reading strategies lessons.
3. 80% of students were effectively using Growth Mindset in their learning after direct instruction was implemented.
4. Most students were able to identify themselves as readers in the same way that the assessment identified them.

My data analysis showed that several students demonstrate Growth Mindset thinking after receiving explicit instruction around Growth Mindset. Data analysis also showed that after instruction around Growth Mindset, 82% of students identified Growth Mindset as a strategy they could use to be better readers. The data analysis showed that students responded well to the lessons around Growth Mindset and reading strategies because the students were able to apply these to their own learning. Dweck (2010) found similar results after working with students to
build their Growth Mindset. Dweck (2010) concluded, “Students with a Growth Mindset, on the other hand, view challenging work as an opportunity to learn and grow. I have seen students with a Growth Mindset meet difficult problems, ones they could not solve yet, with great relish” (p.16).

I also found that some of my students self-rated as a good reader after instruction around reading strategies and Growth Mindset. In a study done by Viljaranta, Tolvanen, Aunola and Nurmi (2014), the researchers found that “…students with positive beliefs about their own abilities and competencies show high effort and engagement in learning” (p.734). With direct instruction around Growth Mindset instruction and reading strategies, the students were able to embrace the concept of identifying as good readers.

**Conclusions**

**Growth Mindset is effective.**

The data collected in this study demonstrate that the concept of Growth Mindset is an effective strategy for these students. During the pre-interviews, the students did not recognize Growth Mindset as a strategy. Only two out of the 18 students recognized Growth Mindset as a helpful strategy they could use before direct instruction around Growth Mindset. Esparza et al. (2014) discuss the benefits for students when they demonstrate having a Growth Mindset:

Students with a Growth Mindset are more likely to seek out opportunities to learn, extend beyond assigned requirements, pursue learning opportunities both in and out of class, embrace and persist in the face of challenge, and utilize both feedback and study strategies to improve (p.10).

It is important for students to have a Growth Mindset when working through tasks that come easy to them as well as tasks that are challenging for them.
When students were working on their writing pieces, they demonstrated Growth Mindset. The students were not only able to write about how Growth Mindset would help them to become better readers, but they were able to actually apply it while writing. Students were demonstrating Growth Mindset by working through the task without putting their heads down or appearing to be physically upset while writing. In a study done by Yeager and Dweck (2012), the researchers found that it is valuable for our students to have Growth Mindset in their learning. The researchers found that students would become more successful if they demonstrated a Growth Mindset thinking. In working with my students during this study, they were able to utilize Growth Mindset and apply it to their learning.

The data collection showed that when students learned about Growth Mindset, they recognized, identified and implemented it as an effective strategy to use.

Positive thinking reflects self-concept.

The results of the data analysis in this study show that most students who initially identified as not good readers or okay readers changed their opinion and identified as good readers when they were asked a second time. The students participated in lessons around reading strategies and Growth Mindset to encourage them to identify as good readers. Having a Growth Mindset can allow for positive thinking which in turn could help the students feel better about who they are as readers.

It has been shown through research that when students have positive thinking, their self-concept mirrors this. In a study by Dewey and Bento (2009), intervention “around activating children’s thinking skills (ACTS)” was implemented. Dewey and Bento (2009) reported that “…qualitative data from staff involved indicated the increased self-esteem of students following intervention and general enhanced confidence levels” (p.342). As the students were introduced to
the intervention, they began to feel more comfortable and confidence which helped to build their self-concept.

In a study done by Laurian-Fitzgerald and Roman (2016), the researchers found that students had more positive self-talk after looking into Growth Mindset. The researchers report, “Instructors also noticed that they were hearing more positive self-talk when students were working on a challenging task” (p.13). There was a connection from their study to my study because my students started to use Growth Mindset phrases when working through difficult tasks. The students would say things like “I can do this” and would use strategies to help them instead of giving up as they had in the past. This is important because it showed that the students were using Growth Mindset thinking. Aditomo (2015) explained that Growth Mindset will encourage students to work through challenging tasks without being apprehensive. Students were working through challenging tasks and displaying they had positive thinking.

**Implications**

**Teachers and students need to use Growth Mindset language during instruction.**

During my study, I found that when students implemented Growth Mindset into their thinking, they had a better self-concept and identified as good readers. This stemmed from the instruction around Growth Mindset. Using Growth Mindset allowed my students to have a better self-concept, which motivated them to work through challenging tasks. After they participated in the Growth Mindset lessons, the students moved away from saying the task was too hard and now were saying that they could keep trying when they found it to be too difficult initially.

Modeling of a desired behavior or skill can be very helpful for students, causing them to follow the same pattern. In a study done by Methe and Hintze (2003), the researchers found that when teachers modeled something, students were more likely to succeed and achieve the end
goal. The concept of Growth Mindset could be new to some students, as it was with mine, so it is necessary that teachers model how to have a Growth Mindset and how to use phrases in order to be helpful and effective. According to Schunk (2013), “models can raise efficacy among observers who are apt to believe that they, too, will be successful if they follow the same behavioral sequence” (p. 163). If we want our students to excel in the things we teach them, we need to make sure that we explicitly teach them how to follow through on the skill.

**Students should partake in self-reflections.**

In my study, I found that students were often participating in negative self-talk. Some of the students would often settle with giving up on a topic because they would get stuck on a question or a word. The students would wait for a teacher to help them, they would wait for the time to run out, or they would put their work in a “working folder” and take out a book to read.

When I saw the students putting away their work and taking out a book during independent working tasks, I asked them why they put their work away. The students would often say that it was too hard and looking through a book would be easier. I took the time to sit down with them and talk about was difficult about the task. We discussed what could make it easier and how they could work through it to accomplish the task. With the knowledge from the instruction around Growth Mindset and when we reflected around this, the students were able to tell me what they would do to be able to work through the task to complete it.

After observing this, I felt a strong desire to help my students to self-reflect independently. In talking about what could be done to work through the task, the students found a lot of success. It is important for teachers to model how to make self-reflections, but I think it is important for students to be able to do this independently. McFarland, Saunders and Allen (2009), looked into the effectiveness of making self-reflections. The researchers found that
“…self-reflection can be beneficial in helping students learn…” (p.509). Through the study done by these researchers and the study with my own students, it was made clear that it is important for students to reflect on their own thinking to achieve success.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include time constraints, class size and makeup, and member checking. Due to the time constraints in this study, the research was conducted in a six-week period. Within this time, I needed to teach the lessons and implement the strategies with my students. I then needed to collect my data and analyze it. In my literature review I looked into the importance of peer interactions. Due to the time constraints, I was not able to fully gather data around this topic.

I conducted this study in one second grade classroom of 18 students. In order to generalize the results of the study, there would need to be further data collected with a larger group of students, possibly across multiple classes per grade level or classes in different grade levels. I completed my study in a blended special education classroom. Typically, the students in this class struggle more than students in a completely general education classroom. There is potential for differing results if the study was completed in a completely general education classroom as well as the blended special education classroom.

**Recommendations for further research**

Based on the research I have collected and the data from this study, I will continue to work with my students around building their self-concept. I will continue to work with the students while using growth mindset language. The data from my study showed that students responded very well to the use of Growth Mindset language. In moving forward, I will start off each school year implementing the concept of Growth Mindset. I will use the Growth Mindset
language and encourage my students to do the same. I will implement the strategy of making self-reflections to hopefully inspire students to identify as good readers.

Based on the research I looked into around the concept of peer interactions, a suggestion for further research would be to look into students of differing levels working together. A possible question to research further is:

- Would having children of different skill levels working together have an impact on the ways students identify as literacy learners?

It would be interesting to see if having students of different reading levels work more closely together would have any impact on how students identify as readers. On the pre-interview, students shared with me who they thought were good readers and all students picked someone who was reading on or above grade level. It would be interesting to see if this would have a positive or negative impact on how the students identified as readers.

**Overall significance**

This study is important as it looks at strategies for students to build their self-concept as readers and identify as good readers. It also looks into how to use Growth Mindset to encourage students to work through challenging tasks. The results of this study show that when students are taught how to use Growth Mindset thinking, they are likely to have positive feelings about themselves as readers. This study can be used for multiple grade levels and teachers to support students’ identity around literacy. This is important because it brings attention to the idea that it is necessary for students to demonstrate Growth Mindset thinking in their learning. Also, it shows the importance of students identifying in positive ways so they have good self-concepts as readers.
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Appendix A

Pre Interview Questions

1. Who do you know that is a good reader?

2. What makes that person a good reader?

3. How do you think your friends see you as a reader?

4. What can someone do to be a good reader?

5. Do you think you are a good reader? Why/Why not?

6. Are the people in your family good readers? Why/why not?

7. What would you do if someone said reading isn’t cool?

8. What would you say to someone that thinks they are a bad reader?

9. What are some things good readers do?

10. Does someone have to read fast to be a good reader?
Appendix B

Post Interview Questions

1. How do you think your friends see you as a reader?

2. What can someone do to be a good reader?

3. Do you think you are a good reader? Why/why not?

4. What would you say to someone that thinks they are a bad reader?
Appendix C

Readers Use More Than 1 Strategy to Figure it Out!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gl→a→d</th>
<th>Can the pictures help me?</th>
<th>?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read left to right.</td>
<td>Does it make sense?</td>
<td>Does it look right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'oo'</td>
<td>Does it sound right?</td>
<td>swing sw- ing Do I know any parts?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from 3.6: Try, Try, Try Again, Page 85

RUN into the first PART

1. Look < spring
2. Run spr ing
3. Read through spring
If I was stuck on a word I would say I will never give up.