

REFLECTING ON THE IMPACT OF GROWTH MINDSET TEACHING ON REDUCING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS IN A 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

In a dynamic fifth-grade classroom, managing student behavior and keeping them engaged is crucial for creating a productive learning environment. Traditional disciplinary approaches often overlook the root causes of disruptive behaviors and boredom, potentially hindering individual student progress and causing disruptions throughout the entire classroom. Utilizing Dewey's (1933, 1989) concept of reflection and Greenberger's (2020) Guide for Reflective Practice (GRP), this reflective narrative explores integrating growth mindset principles into classroom behavior management strategies to foster a more inclusive and inspiring educational environment. By moving away from fixed mindset perspectives, which see abilities as innate and unchangeable, educators can encourage students to embrace challenges, persevere in the face of setbacks, and ultimately improve both behavior and academic achievement. In this reflective narrative, the author highlights the potential of growth mindset interventions to transform classroom dynamics, offering practical insights and strategies for educators who aim to enhance student engagement and cultivate a continuous learning and resilience culture.

Key Words: *Reflective Practice, Growth Mindset, Classroom Management Plan*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic environment of a fifth-grade classroom, managing student behavior and maintaining engagement is crucial to fostering a productive learning environment. Disruptive behaviors and boredom not only hinder individual student progress but can also disrupt the overall learning experience for the entire class (Zoder-Martell et al., 2022). Traditional disciplinary approaches based on classroom expectations and consequences often fail to address the root cause of disruptive behaviors. Educational research, however, suggests that cultivating a growth mindset can significantly impact student behavior and achievement (Gopalan & Yeager, 2020). A growth mindset is a concept that explains that abilities and intelligence can be

developed through effort, learning, and persistence, whereas a fixed mindset views abilities as innate and unchangeable (Yeager et al., 2022; Yeager & Dweck, 2020). Educators can create a more inclusive and motivating learning environment by integrating growth mindset principles into classroom behavior management strategies.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The problem of practice is managing disruptive behaviors among fifth-grade students to foster a more productive and engaging learning environment. After teaching the third-grade classroom for four years, I was asked to teach fifth grade for the upcoming school year. The opportunity to switch grade levels was unexpected because teaching

older students was outside my comfort zone. Also, the class I was assigned was known for having lower-achieving students with behavioral issues. The report from a previous teacher included a list of students' behaviors, such as talking out of turn, disrespectful language and actions, not following directions, physical aggression, disruptive noises, and off-task behaviors. She also stated that she tried different methods to mitigate disruptive classroom behaviors, but nothing worked.

Despite my teaching experience and understanding of classroom management, I initially felt intimidated by the new fifth-grade role. First, while core management principles remain consistent across grade levels, the developmental differences between third and fifth require adjustments. Second, fifth graders are more socially aware, seek greater autonomy, and are more likely to challenge authority or question rules (Aydogan, 2017). Their peer dynamics are also more complex and might require a nuanced approach to conflict resolution and group work. Finally, the class I would be teaching had a reputation for behavioral challenges that previous teachers struggled to address. After careful consideration, I accepted the challenge, believing my experience, knowledge, and effective classroom management plan could positively impact students' lives and education, potentially making a difference where other teachers have struggled. My new fifth-grade class had 17 boys and four girls.

A few weeks into the new school year, I realized my classroom management plan was unproductive. Even though my students knew the expectations for behavior, some seemed indifferent to the consequences for violating the classroom expectations. Students talked out of turn, used disrespectful language and actions, did not follow directions, and made disruptive noises. Whenever I introduced a new concept during a lesson, some said they were not good at it and refused to try. The behavior strategies used previously with third graders, including praise for good behaviors and specific consequences for disruptive behaviors, had not worked in my current fifth-grade classroom. This disconnect led me to reconsider my approach, as none of the techniques that had worked in the past seemed to resonate with my new group of students. Every day, I hoped that tomorrow would be better, but most of my teaching time was spent managing

disruptive students' behaviors. I knew that implementing growth mindset strategies into learning is beneficial as it teaches students resilience and hard work. However, working with a group of students who seemed not to care about the consequences set an unknown and unexpected experience for me.

The purpose of this reflective practice was to understand the causes of students' misbehaviors in class and examine the effectiveness of growth mindset strategies in reducing disruptive behaviors and mitigating boredom in a fifth-grade classroom. This discovery was made while researching effective strategies to reduce students' disruptive behaviors, as I struggled to implement new classroom management techniques without a clear starting point. The challenges I faced led to a loss of joy in teaching and a lack of visible progress in the classroom. I knew I had the authority to refer students to the office, assign detention, or give up. I was determined to provide my students with a different, more positive experience than they had the previous year. Reflecting on my exhausting teaching days, I decided to reorient my behavior-managing strategies by developing an individualized, structured plan that emphasized positive reinforcement and focused on resilience and effort to promote a growth mindset among students.

REFLECTIVE READINESS

The learning objective for this reflective practice narrative was to evaluate the effectiveness of growth mindset teaching strategies in reducing disruptive behaviors and mitigating student boredom in a fifth-grade classroom, thereby enhancing overall student engagement and academic performance. I wanted to understand the root causes of disruptive behaviors in my class and why consequences for undesirable students' choices were ineffective. Despite my efforts, my skills in addressing behavioral issues did not work, and communication with students' parents did not improve the situation.

When evaluating the problem of disruptive students' behaviors, it is crucial to cultivate the necessary attitudes that will allow for reflective readiness and growth. According to Greenberger and Or (2022), open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility are key attitudes necessary for addressing any problem of practice in education. Dewey (1933, 1989) stated that reflection helps individuals consider the reasons behind

things and how to act based on experience and theory. Reflecting on my experience with open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility enables me as a practitioner to approach complex issues effectively, indicating my readiness to reflect and helping me achieve my learning goal. This reflective practice would allow me to gain deeper insights into the root causes of disruptive behaviors and to develop more effective strategies for fostering a positive and engaging learning environment.

To achieve the learning objective, I was prepared to reflect deeply on my teaching practices and classroom management strategies with an open and accepting mind, a wholehearted commitment, and a sense of responsibility for my actions and their impact on others. Open-mindedness is “an active desire to listen to more sides than one” (Dewey, 1933, 1989, p. 136). I approached this reflection open-mindedly, recognizing that my methods needed significant adjustments, and I needed the willingness to explore evidence-based approaches.

As Dewey (1933, 1989) described, wholeheartedness involves fully immersing oneself in a task or process. In my approach to the reflection process, I strove to embody wholeheartedness through my dedication to fostering a positive learning environment where all students can thrive. My commitment to reflection is demonstrated by my ongoing efforts to understand the complex dynamics of my classroom. I consistently analyze my teaching practices and remain open to making necessary changes to enhance student behavior and engagement. This dedication stems from a deep-seated belief in the importance of continuous improvement in education and a genuine desire to support each student’s growth and development.

The third indicator of reflective readiness is taking responsibility, which involves individuals following through and completing tasks (Greenberger & Or, 2022). I take full responsibility for the learning environment I create. It is my duty to continuously improve my teaching practices and address any issues that arise. I was willing to see the reflection through regardless of whether the outcome was one that I expected.

WORKING IDEAS

An essential component of the reflective practice process involves investigating the elements

contributing to uncertainties within one’s field of study (Greenberger, 2020). This step involves using professional knowledge and personal insight to uncover the root causes of the current issue (Greenberger, 2020). Practitioners engaging in this analysis can better understand their challenges and develop a more comprehensive grasp of the underlying issues. Drawing on my professional experience as a private elementary school teacher and intuition, I suspected that lack of engagement, attention seeking, academic struggles, emotional or psychological issues, and a lack of clear expectations and consequences might have contributed to the unexpected failure of the classroom management plan, which primarily focused on consequences for each undesirable student behavior.

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT

Various factors can contribute to a lack of student engagement. One pattern I have observed is that when students find lessons irrelevant, uninteresting, and difficult to understand, they are more likely to become distracted and engage in other activities, such as talking with peers or fidgeting with items on their desks. Additionally, the advanced fifth-grade curriculum and increased expectations for independent work (Hollenstein et al., 2024) can lead to disengagement and boredom in some students. The disengagement often manifests as talking out of turn, lack of attention, or off-task activities. For instance, the increased complexity of fifth-grade material might overwhelm some students, leading to frustration and disengagement. A student struggling with advanced mathematical concepts might tune out during lessons, feeling incapable of keeping up with peers. The sense of being left behind can result in off-task behaviors as a coping mechanism.

Understanding the root causes of student disengagement is critical, as these factors directly influence academic performance and classroom behavior. While teachers can observe disruptive behaviors, the underlying reasons for lack of engagement may vary among students. While disruptive actions may appear as willful misbehavior, they are often coping strategies for students overwhelmed by curriculum complexity or irrelevant material (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020).

This working idea calls for further research because understanding disengagement is crucial

for developing effective interventions. Research could help identify specific triggers for disengagement in fifth-grade classrooms, such as curriculum pacing, teaching methods, or individual learning styles. Investigating this idea could reveal unexpected connections between engagement levels and factors such as socioeconomic background, previous academic experiences, or emotional well-being. Exploring the reasons behind disengagement, such as mismatches between teaching styles and student interests or gaps in student preparedness, can provide valuable insights into how to adapt instructional methods.

Analyzing disengagement through the lens of existing literature benefits me as a practitioner by helping to pinpoint specific causes based on well-founded research. This approach deepens my understanding and helps me apply evidence-based strategies to improve student engagement and foster a more supportive classroom atmosphere. By delving deeper into this topic, educators can gain insights that will allow them to create more engaging learning environments and proactively reduce disruptive behaviors. This research is essential for creating interventions that make learning more accessible and engaging, helping students feel empowered rather than resistant in the classroom.

ATTENTION SEEKING

Some students might exhibit disruptive behaviors to gain attention from their peers or the teacher. These attention-seeking behaviors can stem from various reasons, such as a lack of attention at home, low self-esteem, insecurity, or a strong desire for social validation. Students might believe that negative attention is better than no attention, leading them to engage in behaviors that disrupt lessons. The disruptions can manifest as excessive talking, making inappropriate noises, interrupting the teacher, or deliberately acting out to elicit reactions from classmates. While often viewed negatively due to their disruptive nature, these behaviors can also be seen as a call for help or a sign of unmet needs. Understanding the underlying causes can help educators develop more empathetic and effective intervention strategies.

Attention-seeking disruptions negatively impact the learning environment by diverting the teacher's attention from instruction and reducing other students' focus. The peer audience might

unintentionally encourage this behavior through laughter or approval, especially in a socially aware fifth-grade class. If not addressed promptly, these behaviors can escalate, leading to a cycle of disruption that affects the overall classroom atmosphere. Disruptive behaviors motivated by the need for attention often signify deeper socio-emotional challenges that students bring into the classroom (Simpson, 2022). These behaviors, while challenging for teachers, offer an opportunity to develop more empathetic, supportive approaches that address students' unmet needs for validation and social connection. Researching attention-seeking behavior can help identify strategies to foster positive recognition and supportive classroom interactions, minimizing disruptions. By directly addressing students' social and emotional needs, educators can create environments where students no longer need to seek attention through misbehavior, leading to healthier, more productive learning experiences.

ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Students who struggle academically may act out as a way to avoid complex tasks or hide their inability to perform well. These students might refuse to participate in class activities, engage in disruptive talking, or misbehave. When faced with challenging academic content, struggling students may experience anxiety or low self-esteem. Rather than risk embarrassment by attempting a task they perceive as too difficult, they might choose to disrupt the class instead. Disruptive behaviors serve as a defense mechanism, deflecting attention from their academic shortcomings to their behavior.

For example, a student struggling to understand a math concept might start making jokes or distracting others to avoid being called on to solve a problem. Similarly, a struggling reader might act out during reading activities to escape the discomfort of potential public failure. Disruptive behaviors can also be a cry for help. Students may unconsciously hope their actions will draw attention to their struggles, leading to additional support or modified expectations. However, without proper intervention, this cycle can lead to further academic decline and increased behavioral issues.

Academic struggles can create a negative feedback loop. Students who fall behind may feel increasingly overwhelmed and discouraged,

leading to more disruptive behaviors. This, in turn, causes them to miss more instruction, exacerbating their academic difficulties. Academic struggles are closely linked to disruptive behaviors as students try to deflect attention from tasks they find challenging or embarrassing (Dierendonck et al., 2020). Addressing these struggles through targeted research is critical for developing classroom strategies that encourage resilience, persistence, and positive academic risk-taking. Further investigation could reveal effective methods for identifying and supporting struggling students early, helping to prevent the cycle of avoidance and disengagement that often leads to behavioral issues. A better understanding of these dynamics can enable teachers to create instructional approaches that reduce frustration and build student confidence.

EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

Emotional distress or psychological issues, such as anxiety, depression, or trauma, may lead students to exhibit disruptive behaviors. Students grappling with these challenges often struggle to regulate their emotions and actions in the classroom. For example, an anxious child might become fidgety or argumentative when stressed, while a depressed student might withdraw from activities.

These issues can manifest in various ways, including sudden outbursts, defiance, inability to focus, or inappropriate social interactions. A student who has experienced trauma might be hypersensitive to specific classroom triggers, leading to seemingly unprovoked disruptions. Similarly, a child with undiagnosed ADHD might struggle with impulse control, resulting in constant interruptions or an inability to remain seated during lessons. Understanding the emotional and psychological factors behind disruptive behaviors is essential for creating truly inclusive educational spaces that address the whole child, not just their outward actions.

Emotional and psychological challenges significantly impact students' ability to engage and behave constructively in the classroom. Issues such as anxiety, trauma, or undiagnosed behavioral conditions often manifest in unpredictable behaviors that disrupt the learning environment (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2021). Research in this area is crucial for developing responsive interventions that consider each student's emotional landscape,

equipping teachers to create more inclusive and supportive classrooms. By addressing these underlying factors, educators can reduce reactive, disruptive behaviors and foster a stable learning environment where all students can thrive.

LACK OF CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AND CONSISTENT CONSEQUENCES

When classroom rules and expectations are not clearly defined or consistently enforced by a teacher, students may test boundaries and engage in disruptive behaviors. Since I was teaching a third-grade level for four years before accepting a new position, my management plan may not have accounted for the developmental stage of fifth-grade students. Younger students might respond better to immediate consequences. Still, fifth graders, being older and more independent, may require strategies that acknowledge their growing need for autonomy and understanding of consequences as related to long-term goals.

Unlike attention-seeking behaviors, which are driven by a desire for personal recognition, lack of engagement might originate from a mismatch between the instructional methods and students' interests. While academic struggles might lead to frustration and acting out, attention-seeking is driven by a need for social validation. Students may perform well academically but still have disruptive behaviors to gain attention, indicating a need for socio-emotional interventions.

Academic struggles are different from lack of engagement or attention-seeking behaviors. When students struggle academically, they show frustration, avoidance, or acting out when the work is too challenging. Unlike academic struggles, which are specifically related to learning content, emotional or psychological issues might arise from factors outside the classroom, such as family problems or personal trauma. Lastly, unlike engagement issues, which relate to how interesting and relevant the content is, or attention-seeking behaviors driven by social needs, lack of clear expectations and consistent consequences is related to classroom management practices. Clear expectations and consistent consequences provide a structured environment, and their absence can lead to confusion, making it difficult for students to know how to behave appropriately.

Classroom management is most effective when students clearly understand behavioral expectations and trust that consequences are fair and consistent. Inconsistent enforcement can create confusion and lead students to test boundaries as they gauge appropriate behavior (Kessels & Heyder, 2020). Researching how consistent expectations impact student behavior can help teachers refine classroom management strategies to be more developmentally appropriate and effective. This understanding is vital for fostering a structured, respectful classroom environment where students feel secure and motivated to meet established standards.

Reflective Narrative

Greenberger's (2020) Guide for Reflective Practice (GRP) emphasizes that a crucial part of reflective practice involves writing a reflective narrative. The narrative should provide a detailed and comprehensive description of my experiences leading to a significant realization. By presenting my experiences in this reflective format, I can share my feelings, experiences, and assumptions while offering context for the reader.

Teachers are often called "problem solvers by nature." I have encountered this phrase repeatedly, such as during faculty meetings with our empowering principal or during my graduate program with encouraging instructors. While I use it for self-affirmation, I have noticed that this phrase implies teachers should focus on "fixing" problems rather than identifying root causes. Though I still value the saying, I have begun intentionally reflecting on my teaching practices to understand better why certain student behaviors become problematic and how to address their underlying causes.

My problem-solving confidence was tested when asked to transition from teaching third to fifth grade. I was initially honored to be selected for this long-vacant position, but my excitement quickly diminished upon learning I would inherit a class known for behavioral challenges. Despite years of teaching experience, I felt unprepared. My classroom management strategies were designed for third graders, and teaching fifth grade was outside my comfort zone. I worried about managing challenging behaviors while providing effective academic support and maintaining strong parent-teacher relationships in this unfamiliar context.

I knew most incoming fifth graders through their fourth-grade teacher's frequent staff

meeting stories. Her unpleasant accounts detailed disrespectful language, failure to follow directions, speaking out of turn, constant seat-leaving, and disruptive noises. A year ago, I had merely offered sympathetic "hang in there" encouragement, relieved these were not my classroom challenges. Now, facing the same difficult experience, I found myself repeating that phrase as self-encouragement. A successful school year seemed unattainable, with my proven classroom management plan as my only hope.

My new class comprised 17 boys and four girls who preferred anything but learning. Daily, I repeated classroom rules, expectations, consequences, and plans. Boys dominated conversations, exhibited disruptive behaviors, and ignored rules. Students required constant task reminders and direction-following prompts. After several weeks, I realized my behavior management plan, based on consequences for undesirable behavior, was failing.

An analysis of students' academic histories revealed a clear pattern: most disruptive students struggled academically, particularly with task completion and staying motivated. Quieter students, on the other hand, often hesitated to participate in discussions. Additionally, the diverse backgrounds of these students presented unique challenges to creating a cohesive classroom environment.

The classroom dynamics were complex and multifaceted. For instance, a formerly home-schooled student, though generally shy, often mimicked the disruptive behaviors of peers. Another student, who had been expelled from a previous school, regularly disrupted the class by refusing to stay seated, making rude comments, and openly expressing his dislike for reading and writing. His defiant attitude negatively influenced others. Sports enthusiasts frequently interrupted lessons with off-topic comments. Quieter students avoided participation and assignment completion despite prompting. A homeless student, often alone during recess, struggled with focus and needed constant redirection. These varied backgrounds and behaviors complicated maintaining a productive learning environment.

Some days featured one or two problematic students; other days, the entire class seemed to test my patience. Inattention, distractions, interruptions, noncompliance, and aggression became routine. Surprisingly, misbehaving students

appeared indifferent to consequences, perhaps accustomed to warnings and office referrals from the previous year. Sometimes, students seemed to anticipate office visits, as verbal warnings, parent emails, and other consequences proved ineffective.

I attempted to reduce misbehavior through regular parent communication, knowing parental engagement typically improves student behavior. However, there was an incident that made me question the effectiveness of this approach in some cases. After sending a student to the office for misbehavior, I learned he had gotten into a fight with another student in the hallway on his way to the office. As per school policy, he was suspended for one instructional day. Upon return, he shared that his family had turned his suspension into a city trip where he played video games with friends. This experience prompted reflection on how traditional discipline might accidentally reinforce negative behavior rather than encourage positive change.

My consequence-focused classroom management strategy was not working. With low academic performance prevalent, I theorized that addressing disruptive behaviors might allow focus on academic skills. I wondered how I would take this group of kids and improve them in only nine months from where they started to where they needed to be. Though I had the authority to make office referrals, email parents, and assign detention, I wanted to understand students' unresponsiveness to rules and address root causes. Reflecting on what I knew about my students and what behaviors I observed in class with open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility, I decided to integrate growth mindset principles into my teaching strategies, transforming my classroom into a more engaging and supportive learning environment for all students. This transformation resulted in improved behaviors and academic performance. I also changed the ways I communicated with parents, which, in turn, helped me to learn more about students.

The transformation began when I reframed my perspective, viewing my class as an opportunity for positive change rather than a behavior-challenged group. One morning, instead of reviewing rules, I openly shared my thoughts and hopes with the students. I expressed how classroom disruptions challenged me as their teacher and asked for their help. I explained that they were chosen for my class because together, we could model exemplary

behavior. I emphasized our ability to accomplish difficult tasks through practice and my commitment to improving their grades and knowledge. My approach visibly surprised them.

I proposed a three-week trial period focusing solely on expectations without consequences, trusting their capacity, as future middle schoolers, to make good choices. I expressed belief in their ability to work hard and achieve shared goals, noting that we could return to familiar consequences if needed. Students responded with surprise and excitement. I asked them to write anonymously about their ideal teacher characteristics on one half of a paper and complete "I wish my teacher knew about me" sentences on the other. Their honest reflections would help me become their desired teacher and understand their unexpressed experiences. Though unsigned, I recognized the handwriting, gaining valuable insights into individual needs through this student evaluation.

Students' responses to the teacher evaluation revealed a clear desire for a patient teacher. They interpreted consequences for misbehavior as signs of impatience. This insight led me to restructure my approach, beginning with establishing clear classroom rules and expectations. I ensured students understood both the purpose of these rules and their role in creating a positive learning environment.

To foster a growth-oriented classroom culture, I emphasized effort, perseverance, and the learning process over natural ability, stressing that mistakes are valuable learning opportunities. We explored the concept of trust and its importance in our classroom community. Through lessons, videos, and discussions, I introduced growth mindset principles, sharing examples of individuals who succeeded through persistence. I demonstrated patience by actively listening during regular classroom meetings, where students could safely express their feelings and needs.

The second evaluation question revealed diverse student challenges and strengths. Responses ranged from academic concerns (reading difficulties, study skills) to personal needs (hygiene, hunger) and social challenges (finding friends for activities). One student expressed embarrassment about reading slowly aloud, while another sought a running partner for their first 5K. These responses highlighted the necessity of incorporating growth

mindset principles that emphasize perseverance and effort (Dweck & Yeager, 2019).

Based on these insights, I developed targeted approaches focusing on individual strengths and weaknesses, confidence building, basic needs, and goal-setting strategies. I worked individually with students to establish achievable goals. I also shared my goal of running a 5K marathon despite being a novice runner, which inspired several students to set their own fitness goals.

We implemented an achievement calendar where students documented their mistakes and correction strategies, emphasizing progressive improvement over immediate perfection. Individual successes emerged: the struggling reader received daily practice support, the disruptive pencil-tapper earned drumsticks by sharing novel math solutions, and the student with hygiene concerns received discrete assistance with basic needs. Weekly opportunities for students to teach short lessons on their favorite subjects fostered empowerment while reinforcing the value of effort and perseverance.

I transformed parent communication from problem-focused to progress-oriented, regularly emailing parents about their children's positive qualities and goals. Parents responded enthusiastically, noting behavioral improvements at home. This celebration of incremental progress enhanced student confidence and motivation. The positive transformation in my fifth-grade class was so profound that the old consequences list became obsolete.

EVALUATION OF IDEAS

Reflective practice is a cornerstone of effective teaching, beginning with identifying uncertainties or problems and then defining and analyzing these issues to understand their root causes (Dewey, 1933, 1989). In my experience, the primary issue I faced was the ineffectiveness of my classroom management plan while teaching fifth-grade students. Disruptive behaviors were prevalent, and the connection between these behaviors and a lack of student engagement became evident. Addressing this problem through the lens of growth mindset theory offered promising avenues for mitigating such behaviors. This section evaluates strategies for addressing disruptive behavior, focusing on a growth mindset, and compares them with other approaches to determine their effectiveness in a fifth-grade classroom setting.

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT

Lack of engagement is one of the most widely recognized contributors to disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Not actively engaged students are likelier to become bored and seek attention through negative behavior (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020; Rubow et al., 2019). The challenge for educators, mainly those new to the profession, is identifying the underlying causes of disengagement and implementing strategies that foster active participation. A growth mindset approach, as proposed by Dweck and Yeager (2019), can be instrumental in addressing this issue. The theory posits that students who believe their abilities can improve through effort are more likely to engage in learning and exhibit positive behaviors.

Growth mindset teaching encourages students to see challenges as opportunities to grow rather than threats to their self-esteem. This perspective can transform their attitude toward learning, leading to increased engagement. Hasty et al. (2023) supported this idea, noting that positive teacher-student relationships—often cultivated in growth mindset-oriented classrooms—predict fewer externalizing behaviors and higher levels of engagement. Teachers who emphasize effort, persistence, and the value of learning from mistakes create a classroom environment where students feel motivated to participate actively, reducing the likelihood of disruptive behavior.

While teaching a growth mindset offers significant benefits, it also presents some challenges. One criticism is that it may oversimplify the complex nature of student engagement by primarily focusing on individual effort. Kessels and Heyder (2020) argued that disengagement often results from factors beyond the student's control, such as the relevance of the curriculum and teaching methods. Although a growth mindset can help reduce disengagement, it is essential for educators to address these external factors by ensuring that the material is both relevant and engaging. Therefore, while a growth mindset is a valuable tool, its effectiveness may be limited if it is not supported by broader pedagogical strategies that cater to the diverse needs of students.

ATTENTION-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Attention-seeking behavior is another common cause of classroom disruption, particularly among

students who feel overlooked or neglected. These behaviors often manifest as students acting out to gain attention from teachers or peers (Simpson, 2022; Tanase, 2019). Growth mindset theory can play a role in addressing this issue by shifting the focus from seeking attention to valuing effort and learning. When students internalize the belief that their abilities can improve with effort, they may be less inclined to seek external validation through disruptive behavior and more motivated to engage constructively in the classroom.

However, while a growth mindset can help reduce attention-seeking behavior, it is important to recognize that this approach may not address the underlying emotional or social needs driving such behaviors. Some students may have unmet needs that require more targeted interventions, such as counseling or social-emotional learning programs. For instance, research by Kessels and Heyder (2020) suggests that some students use disruptive behavior as a coping mechanism for academic challenges or social rejection, indicating that a growth mindset alone may not be sufficient to address the root causes of attention-seeking behavior.

A more comprehensive approach involves integrating growth mindset principles with strategies that address students' social and emotional needs. For example, teachers can provide positive reinforcement for effort and progress while also creating opportunities for students to build social connections and develop self-regulation skills. This dual approach can help reduce attention-seeking behavior by addressing the cognitive and emotional factors contributing to it.

ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Academic struggles are frequently cited as a significant contributor to disruptive behavior. Students who experience difficulty with their schoolwork may act out to avoid challenging tasks or mask their academic deficiencies (Simpson, 2022). The growth mindset framework offers a promising solution to this issue by encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than as indicators of failure. By fostering a growth mindset, teachers can help students develop resilience in the face of academic challenges, reducing the likelihood that they will engage in disruptive behavior as a coping mechanism.

Research supports the effectiveness of growth mindset interventions in improving academic outcomes and reducing misbehavior. For example, studies have shown that students who adopt a growth mindset are likelier to persevere through complex tasks, seek help when needed, and maintain a positive attitude toward learning (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). This shift in mindset can lead to improved academic performance, reducing the frustration and anxiety that often lead to disruptive behavior.

However, there are limitations to the growth mindset approach. Some researchers argue that while a growth mindset can be beneficial, it may not fully address the broader range of factors contributing to academic struggles. For instance, students with learning disabilities or significant socio-economic challenges may require additional support beyond what growth mindset interventions can provide (Dickinson et al., 2023). Therefore, while promoting a growth mindset is important, it should be part of a broader strategy that includes individualized support and accommodations for students with specific academic needs.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

Disruptive behaviors in the classroom can also stem from underlying emotional or psychological issues. Students dealing with emotional dysregulation, trauma, or behavioral disorders may struggle to manage their emotions, leading to behaviors that disrupt the learning environment (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2021). Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes behavioral management strategies, emotional intelligence training, and, potentially, therapeutic interventions.

Growth mindset teaching can contribute to this effort by helping students develop a more positive and resilient attitude toward their challenges. By encouraging students to believe in their capacity for growth, teachers can help them build the confidence and persistence needed to overcome emotional and psychological barriers to learning. However, it is essential to recognize that a growth mindset alone may not be sufficient for students with significant emotional or psychological issues. These students may require more specialized support, such as counseling or behavioral therapy, in addition to growth mindset interventions.

Martínez-Martínez et al. (2020) research highlights the importance of integrating emotional intelligence (EI) training with growth mindset principles to address disruptive behavior effectively. The study suggests that students who are taught to regulate their emotions through EI training are better equipped to handle the frustrations and challenges that can lead to misbehavior. When combined with growth mindset teaching, EI training can create a supportive classroom environment where students feel capable of managing their emotions and engaging positively in learning activities.

However, there is some debate in the literature regarding the most effective strategies for addressing emotional and psychological issues in the classroom. While some researchers emphasize the importance of individualized interventions, others advocate for broader, classroom-wide approaches that focus on creating a positive and inclusive learning environment (Zaheer et al., 2019). The challenge for educators is to find the right balance between these approaches, ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed.

LACK OF CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

A lack of clear expectations is a significant factor contributing to disruptive behavior in the classroom. When students are unsure of what is expected of them, they are likelier to test boundaries and engage in behaviors that disrupt the learning environment (Oliver & Reschly, 2014). Establishing and consistently enforcing clear expectations is crucial for maintaining order and promoting positive behavior in the classroom.

Growth mindset teaching can support the effort by framing expectations to encourage students to view them as opportunities for growth rather than rigid rules. For example, teachers can present classroom expectations as guidelines that help students develop important life skills, such as self-discipline and perseverance. This approach can help students internalize the value of meeting expectations, reducing the likelihood of misbehavior.

However, there is some disagreement among researchers about the effectiveness of specific classroom management strategies. Caldarella et al. (2020) suggest that traditional methods, such as reprimands, are ineffective in consistently reducing disruptive behavior and might even worsen the situation by creating a negative classroom

atmosphere. In contrast, approaches emphasizing positive reinforcement and growth mindset principles are more effective in promoting long-term behavioral change (Granero-Gallegos et al., 2020; Marder et al., 2023). While clear expectations are important, they must be implemented to support student's growth and development rather than simply punishing misbehavior.

While there are many causes of disruptive behavior in the classroom, including academic struggles, attention-seeking, emotional issues, and a lack of clear expectations, the growth mindset framework offers a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges. By encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for growth, promoting resilience, and fostering a positive attitude towards learning, growth mindset teaching can help reduce disruptive behaviors and create a more supportive classroom environment. However, it is important to recognize that a growth mindset is not a cure-all solution. It should be part of a broader strategy that includes addressing the diverse needs of students, providing individualized support where necessary, and creating a positive and inclusive classroom climate. Integrating growth mindset principles with other evidence-based strategies, such as emotional intelligence training, positive reinforcement, and clear expectations, can create a holistic approach to classroom management that effectively reduces disruptive behavior while promoting student engagement and success.

While qualitative observations offer valuable insights into the potential effects of growth mindset interventions, incorporating quantitative data could provide a more robust evaluation of their impact on student behavior. Behavioral incident reports, for example, can track the frequency and types of disruptions over time, allowing educators to measure changes in specific behaviors (Marshall et al., 2024) after implementing growth mindset strategies. Additionally, surveys administered to students can capture shifts in self-perception, motivation, and engagement (Yavuz, 2019), offering a structured means of assessing whether students internalize growth mindset principles in ways that positively influence behavior.

By analyzing quantitative data, educators can identify trends and assess the consistency and extent of behavior improvements, establishing clearer

connections between growth mindset teaching and behavioral outcomes. Quantitative measures can also reveal variations in effectiveness based on factors like individual student backgrounds, instructional styles, or classroom dynamics. Such findings would allow for a more nuanced understanding of where growth mindset strategies are most effective and where additional or alternative supports may be needed. The data-driven approach would complement the qualitative analysis, supporting a comprehensive evaluation of the growth mindset's role in classroom management.

DECISION

Reflective practice, as articulated by Dewey (1933,1989), involves a deliberate process of identifying problems, exploring potential causes, and evaluating those causes through the lens of existing literature. This approach is essential when addressing disruptive behavior in the classroom, especially within the context of fostering a growth mindset. The growth mindset framework emphasizes that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort and perseverance, which directly counters the fixed mindset that often underlies disruptive behaviors (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). In evaluating the causes of disruptive behavior among fifth graders, I considered several possibilities: academic struggles, teacher-student relationships, attention-seeking behavior, and a lack of engagement. These causes were assessed by synthesizing relevant literature to determine the most plausible explanations for the observed behaviors.

Disruptive behavior can often be a manifestation of more profound academic struggles, where students might engage in negative behaviors to divert attention from their difficulties (Kessels & Heyder, 2020). Students who perceive themselves as incapable of success might adopt a fixed mindset, leading to disengagement and acting out. Encouraging a growth mindset can help these students see challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats to their self-esteem. According to Amemiya et al. (2020), when students trust their teachers and the educational environment, they are more likely to accept discipline and engage in the learning process. Building this trust is crucial for implementing growth mindset strategies, as it allows students to feel secure enough to take risks

and embrace the learning process, reducing the likelihood of disruptive behaviors.

Teacher-student relationships also play a critical role in student behavior. A positive and supportive relationship can foster a growth mindset, as students feel valued and understood, promoting engagement and reducing disruptive tendencies (Dickinson et al., 2023; Hasty et al., 2023). Teachers who emphasize growth and provide consistent feedback create an environment where students are motivated to improve. Conversely, negative teacher-student interactions can reinforce a fixed mindset, leading to a cycle of disengagement and disruptive behavior (de Ruiter et al., 2020).

Attention-seeking behavior is another common cause of disruption. Students who do not feel adequately recognized may act out to gain attention, even if it is negative. A growth mindset approach can redirect these behaviors by encouraging students to seek attention through positive academic achievements rather than disruptions (Caldarella et al., 2020). By acknowledging and rewarding effort and progress, teachers can shift students' focus from seeking attention through negative behavior to seeking validation through their academic efforts.

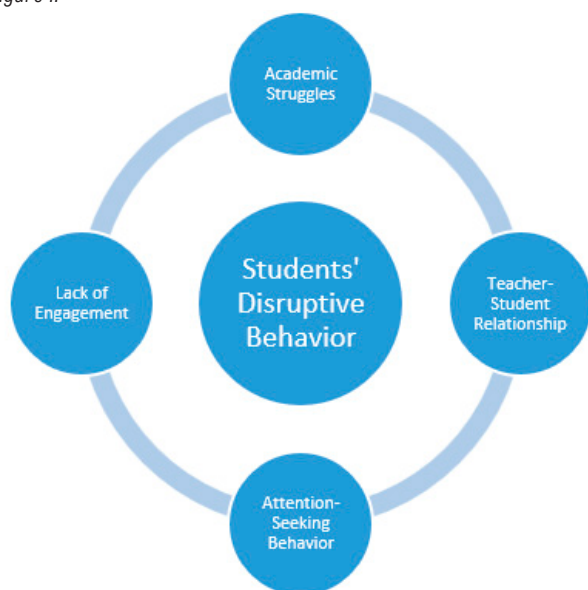
Finally, lack of engagement is a significant factor in classroom disruption. Students who do not find the material relevant or challenging may disengage, leading to disruptive behavior. Promoting a growth mindset can enhance engagement by framing challenges as opportunities for growth and learning (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). Engaged students are more likely to participate constructively in class, reducing the likelihood of disruptions. As Gomes et al. (2023) suggested, employing a workshop-like approach where individual feedback is provided early in the learning process can foster deeper engagement, aligning with the principles of a growth mindset.

After synthesizing the literature and reflecting on the observed behaviors, I decided to focus on the following four factors as the most plausible explanations for disruptive behavior among fifth graders: academic struggles, teacher-student relationships, attention-seeking behavior, and lack of engagement. These factors align closely with the principles of a growth mindset, providing a framework for addressing and potentially reducing disruptive behavior. While other factors may contribute to disruptions, the selected factors are

particularly relevant to the developmental stage of fifth graders, where social dynamics, self-perception, and academic challenges are especially pronounced.

The decision to emphasize these factors is supported by the literature, which consistently highlights the importance of a growth-oriented approach in fostering positive behaviors and academic success (Amemiya et al., 2020; Caldarella et al., 2020; Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). Figure 1 illustrates the decision-making process and the rationale for focusing on these key factors. Educators can create a more supportive and engaging learning environment that encourages positive behavior and academic growth by integrating growth mindset principles into evaluating disruptive behaviors.

Figure 1.



REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Scholars advocate for a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing student misbehavior, arguing that the roots of such behavior are multifaceted. Skinner et al. (2022) highlight that academic struggles are one of several interconnected factors influencing student behavior. Their research suggests that academic challenges can exacerbate behavioral issues, but these behaviors are often rooted in a complex interplay of academic, emotional, and environmental factors. The concept of a growth mindset offers a promising framework for addressing these interconnected

factors, as it encourages students to view challenges as opportunities for development rather than as insurmountable obstacles. By fostering a growth mindset, educators can potentially mitigate the academic struggles contributing to disruptive behavior while simultaneously addressing the emotional and environmental factors.

Lee and Lee (2020) emphasize the importance of addressing the whole student rather than focusing narrowly on academic performance. The holistic approach aligns with the principles of growth mindset teaching, which underscores the development of students' abilities through effort and perseverance. Growth mindset interventions can help students reframe their academic struggles, reducing frustration and negative behaviors that arise from perceived failure. By teaching students to embrace challenges and persist in the face of difficulties, growth mindset instruction improves academic outcomes and enhances emotional resilience and behavioral self-regulation.

Effective classroom management is critical for reducing disruptive behavior, and integrating growth mindset principles into classroom management plans can enhance their effectiveness. Traditional classroom management strategies, including setting clear expectations for behavior and establishing consistent routines, remain essential (Marshall et al., 2024; Wolff et al., 2021). However, classroom expectations and routines can be more impactful when combined with growth mindset strategies. For example, Zoder-Martell et al. (2022) found that classroom management systems aligned with positive behavior interventions effectively address disruptive behavior. Growth mindset teaching, which encourages students to see mistakes as learning opportunities, can reinforce these positive behavior interventions by reducing the fear of failure and promoting a willingness to engage in challenging tasks.

Building positive relationships with students is another fundamental aspect of effective classroom management. Booker (2022) notes that when teachers demonstrate care and concern for their students, it fosters a sense of belonging and respect, which can reduce disruptive behavior. Growth mindset teaching complements this by promoting a culture of mutual respect, where both teachers and students understand that effort and persistence are valued. The cultural shift can

improve teacher-student relationships, as students feel supported in their learning journey rather than judged for their mistakes (Oliver & Reschly, 2014). The supportive environment can reduce behaviors driven by frustration or a desire for attention.

In the context of growth mindset teaching, addressing the causes of disruptive behavior requires a multifaceted approach. While various factors contribute to student misbehavior, four key elements—academic struggles, teacher-student relationships, attention-seeking behavior, and a lack of engagement—are particularly relevant for fifth graders. Academic struggles often stem from a fixed mindset, where students believe their abilities are static and cannot be improved through effort. Growth mindset teaching challenges this belief, encouraging students to embrace challenges and persist despite difficulties, thereby reducing the academic frustrations that often lead to disruptive behavior (Amemiya et al., 2020).

Teacher-student relationships are also crucial in mitigating disruptive behavior, as positive interactions can foster trust and respect, reducing the likelihood of behavioral issues (de Ruiter et al., 2020). Growth mindset teaching supports the development of these positive relationships by promoting a collaborative learning environment where teachers and students work together to overcome challenges. Additionally, attention-seeking behavior, often a response to perceived neglect or low self-esteem (Marshall et al., 2024), can be addressed through growth mindset instruction, emphasizing effort and improvement over time. The shift in focus can help students seek recognition for their progress rather than through disruptive actions (Hasty et al., 2023). Finally, a lack of engagement, frequently linked to boredom or a sense of inadequacy, can be mitigated through growth mindset strategies that make learning more dynamic and inclusive (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). By encouraging students to take ownership of their learning and view challenges as opportunities for growth, educators can foster a more engaging and positive classroom environment, ultimately reducing the behaviors that disrupt learning.

Although many factors contribute to disruptive behavior in the classroom, integrating growth mindset principles offers a holistic approach to mitigating these challenges. Growth mindset-focused teaching can foster a more positive

learning environment by focusing on developing academic skills and resilience, encouraging constructive teacher-student relationships, addressing the root causes of attention-seeking behaviors, and enhancing student engagement. This approach is especially effective for fifth graders, as it reduces disruptive behaviors and promotes a culture of perseverance and self-improvement within the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future qualitative research on the long-term effects of growth mindset interventions on student behavior and academic achievement could offer valuable insights, especially as such strategies continue to grow in popularity across educational settings. Studies should explore how growth mindset approaches can be tailored to meet the diverse needs of students of varying ages, backgrounds, and abilities, as this would ensure that interventions are equitable and effective. Future Delphi studies involving expert educators, psychologists, and educational administrators could help identify forward-looking solutions and effective strategies for implementing growth mindset interventions across different educational contexts. These expert-driven studies could provide practical frameworks for addressing implementation challenges and developing best practices. Qualitative research focusing on student experiences and teacher perspectives could deepen our understanding of how growth mindset interventions function in real-world classroom settings. However, a limitation in this research area may involve isolating growth mindset effects from other variables, such as classroom environment or individual teacher styles, making it challenging to measure the direct impact of these interventions.

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT

Research on the causes of student disengagement should aim to identify specific factors in fifth-grade classrooms that contribute to a lack of attention and involvement. Potential focus areas include curriculum pacing, teaching methods, and individual learning styles. By examining the connections between engagement levels and factors like socioeconomic background, previous academic experiences, and emotional well-being, researchers could provide teachers with strategies to create more engaging, inclusive learning environments. However, a challenge in this research lies

in the diversity of student backgrounds, as it can be challenging to generalize findings across various socioeconomic or cultural contexts, which may affect how engagement is perceived and measured.

ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Future qualitative and quantitative research should examine the relationship between academic difficulties and disruptive behaviors. Qualitative studies could explore students' lived experiences, while quantitative research could measure the effectiveness of early intervention strategies and differentiated instruction methods. Studies could inform classroom environments that encourage both academic growth and behavioral improvement. Understanding this link is essential for teachers who need strategies to support students facing academic challenges before those challenges lead to behavioral issues. A limitation in this area is that academic struggles are often influenced by external factors—such as home environment or access to resources—that may be outside the teacher's control, which could impact the effectiveness of in-class interventions.

ATTENTION-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Attention-seeking behavior presents unique challenges that warrant deeper qualitative research, especially regarding root causes such as home environment, self-esteem issues, or social dynamics. Delphi studies involving expert educators and behavioral specialists could identify effective strategies for redirecting these behaviors constructively, helping students gain recognition through positive actions rather than disruptions. However, research in this area must consider that attention-seeking behaviors may vary widely among students, making it challenging to create universal interventions. Additionally, addressing the underlying causes often requires collaboration with parents or mental health professionals, which can present logistical and privacy-related challenges.

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Mixed-methods research on the impact of teacher-student relationships on disruptive behaviors could provide valuable insights into how communication, trust, and positive rapport contribute to a supportive learning environment. Qualitative studies could examine the nuances of how strong teacher-student relationships may

prevent disruptive behaviors, while quantitative research could measure their impact on classroom climate overall. However, a limitation in this research lies in the personal nature of these relationships, as each teacher's style and each student's unique needs and personality can affect outcomes. Standardizing interventions to fit diverse personalities and teaching methods can be challenging, making it difficult to generalize findings.

GROWTH MINDSET INTERVENTIONS ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Long-term quantitative studies and Delphi research on growth mindset interventions across diverse educational settings are necessary to determine their effectiveness over time and in different contexts. This research could investigate how these interventions impact students' academic trajectories and behavior as they progress through different grades. Delphi studies could help identify future-focused strategies for implementing growth mindset approaches. However, a limitation is that growth mindset interventions require consistent reinforcement, which may vary depending on teacher commitment and available resources. Additionally, these studies would need to account for differing cultural attitudes toward effort and achievement, which may affect how growth mindset principles are received and internalized by students.

By focusing on these areas through varied research methodologies, future studies can provide educators with a nuanced understanding of disruptive behaviors and equip them with evidence-based strategies to create more engaging and supportive learning environments. Expanding research in these areas will address critical gaps in educational practice, helping teachers respond to diverse student needs with evidence-based, adaptive interventions.

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