STORYTELLING GAMES AND GROWTH MINDSET: A WINNING COMBINATION IN A GRADE 9 AFRIKAANS FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE CLASS

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Introduction

There are many obstacles to overcome when learning and acquiring an additional language: including vocabulary learning, pronunciation, listening comprehension, grammar, and writing. In a study conducted by Wu and Chen (2004) on the foreign language anxiety of elementary school students in Taiwan, educators who provided the most anxiety were texts, speaking in front of others, spelling, incomprehensible input, and speaking to native speakers. These struggles can inhibit students when learning a second language.

I planned my research action in the hope of creating an environment where learning, having fun, and stretching oneself is celebrated and to help the boys understand the value of having a growth mindset in class and to provide opportunities for them to apply a growth mindset when thinking about their learning.

The Research Question

How might the introduction of storytelling games in an additional language class encourage a growth mindset in Grade 9 boys?

Research Context and Participants

St. Alban’s College is an independent Anglican School, located in Lynwood Glen, Pretoria, South Africa. My participants were 17 boys from my Grade 9 Afrikaans class. The boys were all approximately 15 years of age. I chose this cohort as they are energetic, adventurous, and open to explore new ways of learning.

The Research Action

- I introduced the concept of growth mindset.
- Boys completed a questionnaire to determine which mindset they apply when thinking about their learning of Afrikaans, identified the areas in their learning where they need to improve.
- I challenged the boys to stretch themselves through four storytelling games which are highlighted below. All of these games were played in Afrikaans.
- After each game boys reflected on their learning.

Game 1: Collaborative Storytelling

Game 2: Build a Story

Game 3: Two Truths and a Lie

Game 4: Sculpting a Story

Data Collection and Analysis

The following methods were used to collect data:

- questionnaires
- researcher field notes
- observations
- photos and videos
- exit slips

Data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The following themes emerged:

1. Games led to increased confidence.
2. Collaboration required by games fostered growth mindset.
3. The engagement and creativity inspired by games led to perseverance.

Key Findings and Discussion

- Prior to the project intervention, baseline surveys indicated that the boys approached learning Afrikaans with a fixed mindset.
- Boys’ responses also showed that they tried to hide their deficiencies, and lack of vocabulary and confidence instead of trying to overcome them.
- Almost half of the boys stated that they attempted to prove themselves to others in order to impress them, rather than improve their process of learning.
- The games set the stage for shifting attitudes towards learning the language in order for boys to build the confidence not to shy away from challenges.
- In learning to cultivate a growth mindset, it is important to acknowledge and embrace your weaknesses. The boys identified the areas in their learning where they need to improve, and for most of them it was to enhance and improve their vocabulary and practice speaking and listening skills.
- It was clear that the boys embraced the challenges and tried again if they didn’t succeed the first time.
- The themes that emerged from this research: increased confidence, collaboration, and perseverance are intrinsically linked to growth mindset where learning is a process of developing and growing skills.
- I introduced them to the concept of instead of I can... I can... which gave them a different approach to a task.
- Thinking about how you learn and implementing new strategies to learn directly links to a growth mindset.

Conclusions

- The introduction of storytelling games in a second language classroom helped in the development of a growth mindset in the boys.
- Storytelling games can be used as a tool to engage boys in an innovative and collaborative way in an additional Language classroom.
- Boys realised that learning, not perfection, was the goal, and that there were different strategies and methods to learn.
- Boys had time to reflect on their learning and used the growth mindset self-talk poster in their reflection and exit slips.

What did the boys say?

“It not only forced us to use new Afrikaans words but also forced us to be creative.”

“I enjoyed this game as we shared a lot of laughter and it stretched my brain to think creatively in Afrikaans”.

“Although this was difficult, I felt enthusiastic to play and learn some new Afrikaans words today.”

“It made me think in a different way.”

“I was always too shy to speak Afrikaans but these games gave me an opportunity to speak and make mistakes and not to feel judged by my peers.”

“The games helped me to feel comfortable making mistakes and that I could learn from it.”

Key Readings


International Boys’ Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2018 - 2019

Boys and Stories: Pathways to Learning