



**Washington State Association for
Supervision
and Curriculum Development**

**“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
www.wsascd.org**

**‘Critical Questions’ Series
August 2016**

TPEP 2.0: Is a Growth Mindset Just for Students?

What is making the difference in districts, schools and classrooms experiencing success with the new evaluation model in Washington State and those that are struggling? Is it new and better evaluation forms? Student growth goal-setting? Binders and binders of evidence? Or is it a difference that is parallel to one we see in the classrooms of effective teachers in our schools: a belief that people can grow and have the potential to learn under the right conditions? Conditions that include systems of support, a fearless press to strive for excellence, and trust between evaluator and educational professional. With the right mindset and these conditions, evaluation can move beyond pre-judgment, judgment and a punitive system, to the actual growth that we intend for all in our system: students and staff alike.

One of the six Core Principles that underpin the TPEP philosophy states: “Professional learning is a key component of an effective evaluation system.” Let us consider how this principle supports evaluators bringing a growth mindset to the TPEP table. The words “professional learning,” imply that teachers/educational professionals should not be considered a finished product. We should continually seek new learning to improve our practice. This principle calls us to continue to learn, i.e. grow. If we are expected to grow, then those who are helping us reflect on and monitor our growth, and ultimately judge that growth against a rubric, should believe that we have the potential to improve. Evaluators in a successful growth-centered culture, must initially view the people they are evaluating as having the capacity to grow and learn, or the evaluation could be completed after an initial observation in the early part of the school year. If we are setting goals and monitoring progress, then we should give time and opportunity for practice, and, yes, possibly a failed attempt, followed by another try to improve. How many of us view our own evaluation process as an opportunity to say, with learning and effort I can become better at this practice or that piece of the framework? How many of us have already decided, “I am not good at that instructional strategy, so I’m not going to try it”?

We should have high expectations for growth for ourselves, and press each other to improve. But do evaluators come to the evaluation process with a growth mindset for us? Desire for growth needs to occur to keep us from becoming complacent, or to move us to the uncomfortable space of recognizing blind spots or areas for growth. In order for us to grow as professionals through the

evaluation process, systems of support must be in place. Just as we would not expect a student to grow without support, we cannot set a non-negotiable for teachers to grow without providing supports including time, resources, and the ability to risk. The ability to risk costs nothing, but risk can be personally costly. Time and resources have the potential to be a financial drain. But does it cost much to have a conversation a couple of times a week to check on someone's progress, or listen to questions about the risk that has been taken and give a bit of feedback? The act of paying attention and listening to someone reflect on the risks he is taking, including progress and setbacks, can have a positive impact on the relationship between the evaluator and evaluatee, and may provide more insight than a binder of evidence presented at the culmination of the school year, when no adjustments can be made. Trust, challenge and support are the ingredients that undergird a growth mindset that can powerfully affect the evaluation process in a productive way.

As we start the new school year, and another round of TPEP begins, we should try bringing the same growth mindset to the evaluation process that we grant our students.

Evaluators, do you arrive at the pre-observation conference with a fixed or a growth mindset? Do you have ways to support teachers as they risk and take chances that will lead to their growth? Do you spend the time necessary to build trust that enhances your ability to push them to the next level of performance? *Evaluees*, do you believe you can and should grow, learn and improve?

Instead of revamping the evaluation forms again, or creating a new list of evidence to be collected this year, what if we focused on setting high expectations and creating a growth mindset for adults that the evaluation process could be used to facilitate and affirm that growth? At the end of the day, what could a little optimism and belief in potential hurt?

Submitted by:

Heidi Hellner-Gomez
Executive Director of Instructional Leadership
Sunnyside School District
heidi.hellner@sunnysideschools.org