



IT WORKED!

Growing My Mind and My Mathematics

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My math story is related to Jo Boaler's work on the *Growth Mindset* and how I applied it to help someone learn mathematics--me. When I started this work, I was chosen to be the first math coach for my school as our district implemented academic coaching. I was absolutely terrified because I was sure I wasn't qualified, smart enough, or knew enough mathematics to help teachers teach math better. Even though I had taught 6th grade math for many years, been to every training and workshop I could afford and could fit into my schedule, and had the support of my principal, I just wasn't that good at math! I jumped into the job with both feet—continuing to study and participate in professional development, going into the classrooms, and working with anyone who knew anything about math and was willing to work with me.

The problem was, in spite of all my effort and training, I wasn't learning math to the extent that was necessary for me to coach successfully. I was the struggling learner in the room. I was terrified that I would be called on to answer a question I didn't know the answer to, or work with teachers, facilitators and other math leaders who knew so much more. What would happen to me when they found out how little math I knew?

I then changed districts and was introduced to Jo Boaler and the growth mindset. I read about her research and what she found about the effect of your mindset on your ability to learn math. For me, the most important findings were that: 1. your brain creates more synapses when you make a mistake than when you are correct, and 2. brain activity is greater after a person with a growth mindset makes a mistake than when a person with a fixed mindset makes one. A person with a fixed mindset, the one I used to have, believes that intelligence is fixed - either you're smart or you're not. I saw myself as the latter when it came to mathematics. Conversely, a person with a growth mindset believes that intelligence can be increased through things like taking risks and persevering.

Having a growth mindset is especially helpful when working with African American females as well as other populations once written off as "not as intelligent." Taking the time to educate teachers about what a growth mindset is and why it's important will not only help them improve their teaching, it will help those populations underrepresented in upper level mathematics classes have the confidence to take such courses.

To anyone struggling with mastering mathematics content, I would say, start with looking at your mindset. I still have a lot of mathematics to learn, but because of the work of Carol Dweck and Jo Boaler, I am confident in my ability to learn it. As I begin working with the 7th grade math teachers, I am excited by the opportunity to learn more math with them and share strategies on working with struggling learners. What I once saw as my greatest liability, has become one of my greatest assets.

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