Intersectional Growth Mindset for Serving First Generation Students

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Who are first generation college students?

• Students whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree or higher (CSU definition)
• Students whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree (TRIO definition)
• Students who are the first in their family to attend college (National Center for Education Statistics)
Why Is This Important?

• Approximately 34% of students in college
• More likely to attend college part-time
• Less likely to complete degree
  – At CSU, graduation gap is largest between first gen students and non-first gen students, 25% are first gen
• More likely to be placed in remedial coursework
• Higher rates of student loan borrowing

(Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016)
Introduction to Mindset
Fixed Mindset

- Intelligence is set and can’t be changed
- Expect learning to happen automatically
- Success is related to outcome
- Reluctant to seek out help or invest effort
- Fear challenges
- Less likely to accurately estimate ability
- Mistakes are sign of ability/intelligence, or lack thereof
- Failures become part of one’s identity
- Perpetuates stereotypes

“The fixed mindset does not allow people the luxury of becoming. They have to already be.” (Dweck, 2006, p.25)
Growth Mindset

• Intelligence can be developed
• Expectation that learning will be difficult
• Success is related to process
• Believe that efforts lead to accomplishments
• Seek out and thrive on challenges
• Believe that they can possess ability
• Mistakes are opportunities for learning
• Gain confidence as they meet challenges

(Dweck, 2006)
Mindset Language and Cues

• “That was a good guess.”
• “I’m just not a math person.”
• “At-risk”
• “I’ve always been good at writing, so I decided to become an English major.”
• “Students who fail chemistry aren’t cut out for our major.”
• “The teacher never explained content clearly, so that’s why I wasn’t able to pass the class.”
First Generation Student Example

• Think about an interaction with a first generation student
  – One where you may have left feeling like you could have done something differently
    • We all have them
  – What were some messages the student expressed that were fixed mindset? And growth mindset?
  – How did you send fixed mindset messages? And growth mindset messages?
Benefits of Growth Mindset

• Positive perspective on challenges
• More engagement in processes
• Confidence
• Greater academic achievement and successful study habits (Dweck, 2006)
• Resiliency to face academic and social challenges (Yeager & Dweck, 2012)
  – Non-cognitive skill development
So, growth mindset is the answer, right?

• Growth mindset is not a catch all solution for serving first gen students
• Who is represented by growth mindset theory?
• What’s missing?
• What is assumed by growth mindset theory?
Intersectionality Theory
Intersectionality

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde
Intersectionality

- Multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities.

- The theory proposes that individuals think of each element or trait of a person as inextricably linked with all of the other elements in order to fully understand one's identity.

- Intersectionality is a term to describe overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

Collins, Patricia H. (2015)
DeFrancisco, Victoria P.; Palczewski, Catherine H. (2014)
Intersectionality Theory

- Occupation
- Education
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Sexuality
- Language
- Age
- Heritage/History
- Immigration Status
- Geographic Location
- Ability
- Income
- Gender
- Aboriginality
- Family Status
First Generation Student Example

• Reflect back on the student you were thinking about before…
  – Jot down some known/perceived social identities that were intersecting with their first generation status
Identity Salience
Identity Salience

• First generation (FG) identity is not a visible identity, it is one aspect of a person’s sense of self and saliency is always in flux

• Constant reminders of being a FG student, lead to greater saliency
  – It’s important that we do not identify students solely as FG students or we erase other aspects of their identities

• Saliency of FG identity is impacted by context
  – Examples: Situational context (home vs. school) and the type of campus (selective, public, community college, or university)

• First gen student identity seems to be on the periphery and not as center as other identities (ex: race, ethnicity class, gender, age, sexual orientation, nationality, other)

(Orbe, 2004)
Identity Salience

- Privilege impacts identity salience
  - First generation (FG) status may not be the most salient if a student has more privileged identities
- Saliency varied based on students’ other identities:
  - Those FG students who were White, from a middle to high socioeconomic status, and of traditional college age were more likely to experience being a first generation college student with a variable salience.
  - Interestingly, the only four-year university participants to describe their FG status as non-salient were traditionally aged European American male students.
- In comparison, holding marginalized identities impacts salience in one of two ways:
  - Students of color, students from a lower socioeconomic status, and nontraditional female students most often described a high saliency regarding their FGC status
  - For those who have more subordinated identities, FG status may not be the most salient

(Orbe, 2004, 2008)
Multiple Identities

• Nationally:
  – First generation students tended to be older than their peers and were more likely to have dependents.
  – Students of color were more likely than white students to be first-generation students.
  – First-generation students had a lower median household income and more unmet financial need compared to students whose parents attended college.

  » (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2016)

• At Colorado State University in 2014:
  – 1034 new first generation students
  – 626 White/International/NR
  – 408 Students of Color
  – 473 Pell Eligible
  – 21 Pell Eligible and Students of Color
  – 825 CO Resident
  – 209 Non-Residents
Putting the Pieces Together
Bridging Intersectionality and Growth Mindset

• Role of privilege
  – Who is more likely to be exposed to stereotypes?
  – Who can “afford” to take risks without fear of failing? (role of family)

• Environmental cues
  – Systemic structure of higher education (language, reward system, placement process)
  – Mattering and belonging
  – Context Matters
  – Political climate

• Imposter syndrome/Code Switching

• Trauma and Mental Health Issues
Advising Implications

• Application to advising theories
  • Does this framework naturally connect to certain styles/approaches to advising?
• How does mindset influence a student’s major/career choices?
• How do your biases/mindset as an advisor influence interactions with students?
• Help students self-reflect on personal identities and their salience
  • Partner with campus resources
What Are Non-Cognitive Skills?

Recognize and Promote Existing Non-Cognitive Skills
Best Practices

1. Know your data.

2. Demystify higher education processes and procedures for students (provide clear pathways to success).

3. Ditch higher ed “jargon.”

4. Critically evaluate institutional policies and environmental messages.
Best Practices

5. Honor the role of family/community in the student’s educational experience.
6. Consider engagement opportunities while recognizing other demands on the student’s time and resources.
7. Involve allies and role models in the process.
8. Contextualize/normalize failures and successes.
9. Make the impossible seem possible.
Models at Colorado State University
Examples of Practices at CSU

• First Generation Award
  – Community for Excellence

• First Generation University Initiative Events
  – Faculty focused
  – Student focused

• College initiatives
  – Aspirational role models
  – Student dinners
  – Website
  – Commencement recognition
Applying Intersectionality & Growth Mindset
Case Study Discussion

• Given what we have discussed about intersectionality and growth mindset:
  – In what ways did the students identities impact the messages they received about intelligence?
  – How did these show up in your appointment?
  – How do we (as individuals and as a University system) reinforce messages of intelligence?
  – How do you figure out what identities are most salient for students?
  – How did your perception of their identities impact your interaction with them?
Goal Setting and Next Steps
Setting Goals and Next Steps

- In your current role, what is a program/strategy that promotes growth mindset?
- In your current role, what is a program/strategy that promotes intersectionality?
- Taking what you have learned today, what are some of your goals in helping bridge growth mindset and intersectionality theory?

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With a partner, share one of your goals and next steps for using this information on your campus?
Resources

• NASPA Center for First Generation Success
• NACADA First Generation College Student Advising Interest Group
• I’m First
• National Center for Education Statistics
• American Youth Policy Forum (First Generation Section)
Thank you
Questions?

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References


