### Fostering Growth Mindsets in the early years

### 13 November 2024

Sara Richardson

Welcome everybody. My name's Sara Richardson. I'm a Be You National Manager.

Thank you so much for joining us for this webinar ‘Fostering growth mindsets in the early years’, supporting children and educators to be confident and involved learners.

Today I'm coming to you from the lands of the Kuarna people and I'd like to acknowledge and pay respects to Kuarna Elders past and present, and also acknowledge all the lands we are joining from today, and invite you to acknowledge the land that you're on either in the chat or in any way that you feel comfortable.

Today we are very excited to be joined by panellists, Fiona Boylan and Tess Herring, and we'll hear a little bit more from them later on. Fiona is a lecturer and researcher in early childhood education at Edith Cowan University and Tess is the service manager at Tumut Community Preschool, and they've both got some very interesting things to talk to us about growth mindsets.

So some of you may already know a little bit about Be You, and some of you might not. But just so that you know a little bit more, Be You provides educators with knowledge, tools, resources, and opportunities like this to create positive, inclusive, and responsive learning communities where every child, young person, educator, and family is empowered to achieve their best possible mental health.

So because we talk about mental health when we're with Be You, we are going to consider making sure that we're all safe to share and learn with each other. So on screen you'll see some help line numbers. So access these if you need to talk to someone. There's also a link in the chat to the web page where these helplines are available as well and you can print them out and share them and pop them up in your spaces as well if you want to.

The other thing about keeping safe, too, is maintaining confidentiality. So remember to share in the chat box or what you're reading from others, to be mindful of what you're sharing, and also what you're receiving so that everybody can feel comfortable.

So I have mentioned ‘chat’ a couple of times, and some of you, I can see, have already found the chat function. So a little bit of housekeeping and navigating your way around. If you've been before you already know how to do this, but just a reminder.

So please use the chat function to share comments, any reflections, any thoughts. You'll find one of our team members, Blaire, in the chat box, and she'll be responding to some of your questions, sometimes together and sometimes privately to you.

If you have a question for the panellist, we ask you to submit that in a different way via the Q&A function. And later after the webinar’s finished Trish and Kyle, our other Be You Consultant team, will select some of your questions and offer them to the panellists for the Q&A session.

During the webinar we'll also be posting a link for a follow up online event. So we'll have this opportunity today, and then there's another opportunity for you to continue the conversation about growth mindset that we've started here today. There's also a handout with links to resources which Blaire will post in the chat a bit later on. So there's lots for you to hopefully start the conversation and then continue it with us as well.

So let's get started and get you involved, and I can see some of you still popping in where you're from today, and someone's asking about the recording. So yes, that's part of the follow up you'll get as well.

We're going to do a poll. So let's think about this statement: Which best reflects how you feel about your level of understanding and also your practice. So what you know, but also what you do to support growth mindset. So you don't feel confident at all. Don't know much. You're a bit unsure, you know, a little bit. You'd like to further your understanding and your practice, or you feel really confident in understanding and implementing strategies to support my own and other people's growth mindset.

So if you could just pop, respond to the chat, respond to the poll. We'll ask you a similar question at the end so we're hoping that what you learn today will help you learn a bit more and you might not have thought about how it might impact your practice yet, but hopefully, we'll have some conversations about that as well.

So we'll just pop that up. Wait for a little bit longer.

And when you think it's done, Maree, you can probably close the poll, and we can see what people, I'll put the results up. There we go. So, a few people not really sure, some people not very confident either. But a fair few of you are really keen to further your understanding, which probably makes sense, because then that's probably why here and we, I'm really sure that will happen. And there are a couple of people who are here who know a fair bit about growth mindset already, and also some strategies that they're putting in place. And I know when we listen to Tess and Fiona there'll be a whole lot more of those. So hopefully, even if you're confident that you're already doing some things, there's opportunity to confirm your practice, but also to learn some more. All right. Thanks for that, Maree, so we'll close the poll now.

So let's get started and I think what we really want to do is start hearing from Fiona and Tess. So I'd like to introduce Dr. Fiona Boylan. So, and I'm going to invite Fiona to tell us a little bit about herself, and then maybe respond to the question about why growth mindset's important for our own wellbeing and the mental health of children and adults that we work with. And also, I think I'm sure when you, as you do that, Fiona, you're going to talk about what growth mindset is, because that'd be really great to set the scene with that. So over to you, Fiona.

Fiona Boylan

Thanks, Sara, and thank you everyone for taking the time to come along today. I'm coming to you from Whadjuk Noongar Country in Perth in Western Australia. And as Sara said, I'm a lecturer and researcher at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia, and I'm really thrilled to be here today to be able to share what I know about growth mindsets and to inspire you to start to implement some of the practices that I'm going to share with you today.

A little bit about me. So I was an early childhood teacher for 25 years before I moved into working at a university. So I have a lot of experience working in the early years with young children and the research that I've done on growth mindsets actually stemmed from my work where I discovered Carol Dweck's theory about mindset. And I wanted to be implementing that in my early years classrooms and contexts. And I just couldn't find anything that was really suitable in the early years. So here I am all these years later now, hopefully being able to share some really useful practices with you.

So I thought we should start today by telling you what your mindset is, and then we can talk a little bit more about how you might foster mindsets in your settings. But a mindset is really a self-perception or a belief you have about yourself. And these self-perceptions, or these beliefs that we have determine our behaviour and our outlook and our mental attitude. And research has shown that there are 2 types of mindsets: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, and that these mindsets allow people to navigate the stresses and the challenges that can lead to higher levels of wellbeing, particularly when we have a growth mindset.

So there is some recent research. This was actually conducted with college level students. But this research showed that individuals with a growth mindset in particular, are less prone to mental health problems than individuals with a fixed mindset.

When we think about children and fixed and growth mindsets, young children are forming an identity of themselves as a learner and as a person, and we can really use this time in the early years to build strong foundations in mindset before they get to school. So supporting children to use a growth mindset and to recognise when they're engaging in a fixed or growth mindset can really assist them to hopefully be more flexible, adaptable, and also more resilient.

For educators, having a growth mindset will help you to be more confident and helps you to try new things in a safer way, in a safer space. Those with a growth mindset have also shown to have better mental health, to be more optimistic and just to be better able to buffer the effects of stress and anxiety.

And so there are recent studies that demonstrate that these beliefs that we have about ourselves can be changed. So we can change from a fixed to a growth mindset to improve our emotional wellbeing and our performance.

In the slide that you're looking at the moment you will see that there are 2 different types of mindsets represented there, a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. And this is actually a mindset continuum, although it doesn't really look like a mindset continuum, it actually is. And you can imagine that you move up and down the mindset continuum. We're not one mindset or the other. We tend to be a combination of those mindsets and different things might trigger us into one mindset or the other.

So if you have a fixed mindset response to something you tend to believe, for example, that your intelligence is static. So if we're thinking about learning here, a fixed mindset person tends to have a desire to look smart and therefore they have this tendency to avoid challenges, to give up easily when they face an obstacle, to see effort as fruitless, but also to ignore feedback. And they often feel threatened by the success of others, and so, as a result, they tend to plateau early and achieve less than their full potential.

Those with a growth mindset believe their intelligence and abilities can be developed, and so that leads to a desire to actually learn, and therefore a tendency to embrace challenges, to be more persistent in the face of setbacks, to see effort as a path to mastery. So that understanding that if we apply the right effort we'll improve. They learn from criticism, and they will find lessons and inspiration from the success of others. And so as a result, they tend to achieve at higher levels.

So when we're thinking about this mindset continuum, we might be more growth mindset oriented, for example, for reading than we are for maths. And we quite often will label ourselves in that way where we might say, “I'm never going to be good at maths. I haven't been good at maths in my life. I'm not going to get any better at it”. So it's important to think about the kind of language that we're using around young children when we're saying those sorts of things because it can pigeonhole children into a certain place where it's hard to move away from that.

So thinking about mindsets, I think it's really important to understand that when you're working with young children, your mindset can actually have a really big impact on the environment that you create, and also the mindset of the children that you're working with. So shortly we're going to be looking at some of the principles that I developed as part of my research and those principles are really like rules of thumb that you can use in your settings all of the time that can support you in fostering young children's growth mindsets.

So when we think about fixed and growth mindsets, a nice way to think of them is either as limiting you or providing opportunities. So when we have those fixed mindset responses to something that might trigger us, often we walk away we give up and we don't pursue something. And so that's a limitation for us. It's the same for children as well. When we have a more growth mindset response to something we can tend to view this as an opportunity to improve, to get better and to make progress towards something. So we see that there are really strong connections between being able to recognise when we're engaging in fixed mindset thinking, being able to switch that into growth mindset thinking and belief, and the effect that that might have on our wellbeing and our mental health, and those limitations and opportunities that it might provide for us as learners and for children as learners as well.

So the language that you use is also something that we're going to be touching on shortly, the environments that we set up, teaching children about the brain. These are all really important things that the research tells us we should be doing to foster growth mindsets. But then we have to think about, what does that look like in the early years? How can we adapt that to be suitable for really young children? And what does that mean for educators in terms of their practice, and the way that they might foster and implement mindset theory in your setting?

So when we're thinking about those beliefs that we have, we can think about it a little bit like an iceberg. So those beliefs tend to sit under the surface of the water. We can't always see those beliefs really clearly, but we see them in the actions, the observable kinds of behaviours that we might engage in often indicate those hidden beliefs that might be hidden underneath the water level. So the iceberg analogy is a nice way to think about mindsets, and we can't always see what someone is thinking or believing, but the actions that they engage in really help us to start to think about, is this a fixed mindset behaviour or is it a growth mindset behaviour?

And one of the things that quite often happens too is the self-talk that will go on in our heads. And so, as educators, recognising for yourself when you're engaged in that very negative self-talk that is connected with fixed mindset thinking along the lines of “I'll never be good at that.” “It doesn't matter how much I try, I'm not going to get better at that.” “I've always been told that I'm not smart enough for that” or “I just can't achieve at that.” And recognising that fixed mindset talking is important and thinking about how you can switch that into growth mindset self-talk.

And then as an educator, of course, that means with young children thinking about how you recognise that self-talk in young children, perhaps before they're even talking. What does that look like in terms of behaviours that they might be engaging in? And what can you do as an educator to support children to switch from that more negative self-talk to that more positive growth mindset oriented self-talk, to open up and create those opportunities for learning and achieving and to develop children's self-confidence and self-efficacy.

So I think I'm probably at the end of my explanation there, Sara.

Sara Richardson

Yes, Fiona, I'm nodding away and you can't see me. And so I guess, you've already started to talk a little bit about some of your design principles, and so I think, and given us a little bit of a taster about this. But it'd be really good for you to perhaps give us a little bit more information about what you found in your research that supports the development of children's growth mindsets. You've talked to us about how important ours is, and then you've started to begin, you know, begun that conversation about what we can do to support children, so it'd be great to hear a little bit more about that.

Fiona Boylan

Absolutely. I'd love to share that with you. So you'll see a slide that's coming up on the screen now and these are the 9 design principles that I developed as part of my research. So my research was working with a group of early childhood educators, and whilst these design principles are there to help you support children's mindsets they're also really useful for you to start to think about developing your own growth mindsets.

So I wanted to start in the interest of knowing we have limited time here, to tell you what I think the top 3 are that you could pay attention to, and then, if we've got time, I'll talk through some of the others on the list here.

So I think the first one that's a really important principle here is to know your own mindset and to model learning using a growth mindset. So what would this look like in practice? What it really means is going into your centres and modelling what learning looks like when we're learning something new. So for example, if you're learning Pilates or you're learning yoga, or you're learning how to sew, or to knit, or whatever it might be, going in and sharing with the children that you work with what that learning feels like and looks like. So when we learn something new, quite often we have to put a lot of effort in and a lot of practice in to get better at that. So a yoga analogy is learning to do the tree pose, and understanding that you're probably not going to get it the first time that you do that. You could even be doing that pose with the children and thinking about some strategies that you put in place to support your learning and your practice as you try to get better at that. So it might be rather than bringing your foot right up your leg you just put your foot on your ankle to start with. Or perhaps it's leaning against a wall and then slowly, progressively, taking some of those supports away until you get better at that.

So modelling learning something to young children is really important and talking out loud about some of those feelings that we have when learning something new doesn't go our way. So the frustration, recognising frustration, sadness and all of those emotions that children often feel, frustration when they're trying something new and it doesn't actually work for them the first time. So it's really important to think about your own mindset and how you use your mindset in your own learning so that you can then model a growth mindset to the children you're working with.

The second principle, and this one was actually one that the educators I worked with felt was actually the most effective for them, and this was teaching children about their brain. What it looks like, how it functions when we learn. So they found initially, this was a bit tricky. They weren't quite sure, how do we do this with young children? And they were unsure about the level of language they should use with children. Would the children want to know about words like neurons, neural pathways, synapses? All that sort of language that relates to the way we learn about the brain.

What they did find is when they started looking for some ideas on how they could do this with very young children, they actually came up with some really clever things about how you might adapt this and be suitable for young children. So on the slide that you're looking at at the moment we can see some examples there. So making a jelly brain. You can buy little moulds of the brain online, make up some jelly, make a jelly mould, and then talk to the children about, this is what your brain looks like. There are some fabulous books that you can read to children that talk about the brain. ‘The Fantastic Elastic Brain’ is a really great book for reading with young children and we will have some books in the handout. There are some videos that you might like to engage in. Ned the Neuron and ClassDojo have some videos around neurons and how neurons fire and they wire together when we engage in repeated practice. So the way to think about learning in the brain is really like walking through a field. The first time we walk through the field we make a pathway, we press the grass down as we walk, but it will probably pop back up again because we've only walked that pathway once. When we repeatedly practice something, we actually strengthen those neural pathways and so that pathway starts to flatten more and more. So the grassy field analogy is a nice way to think about what's actually happening in our brain when we learn. What's really important when we're learning is, we actually need to have a little bit of struggle. So we do need to have that feeling that things are hard and that we need to overcome some of that. So that's how we form those strong neural pathways in the brain.

The educators had a go at making neurons with pipe cleaners. They used images, they used the analogy of my brain is like a muscle. So for my brain to fire and wire together, I need to have some of those difficulties, a bit like going to the gym. If I go to the gym and I watch you lift the weights, my muscles don't grow. I actually need to lift the weights to make my muscles stronger. There's things like brain hats and there's lots of different websites out there. I recently just bought a really great soft toy brain off Amazon. And I also got a neuron, a little soft toy neuron. So there are some really great resources out there that are being developed for young children to talk about their brains.

The third principle that I think is a really important one, that you can really start thinking about straight away, is the kind of feedback that you give to children. So providing feedback for effort rather than talent or ability. So there is a lot of research that has been conducted around this, and what we know is that when we praise for talent or ability it tends to keep fostering a fixed mindset. Whereas if we praise for effort and we notice the effort that children are putting in when they're trying to learn something new, we tend to be fostering a growth mindset.

So for the child who is a really fast runner, wins the running race and we say, “well done! You're such a fast runner.” What we're doing there is praising for natural talent or ability, which sends a message to the child that if I'm not a fast runner, then I'm not going to be any good at this. So what we want to do is think about the effort, noticing the effort, “you won the running race. I noticed you've been practicing and getting your starts right.” Or “you were practicing to make sure you could run that distance” or “you were practicing how to pump your arms when you were running.” So we really want to focus our praise or our feedback in on the effort that children are putting into whatever they might be learning or trying out.

So that's my top 3. The other things that you can do if we've still got a little bit of time, is to think about the kind of environment we're creating for children. We want to create an environment that allows children to make mistakes. So it needs to be a safe, supportive environment where they can try something, make a mistake, and to try it again. So that's another really important thing you can think about. And that might also be reflected in time. So do we allow children time to try things out? Do we repeat some of the things that we're doing? So they might get to try it on one day, but they might actually get to try it again on another day.

Holding high expectations was another really important thing that the educators that I worked with thought was important, and they had a lot of debate and discussion around this. They initially said, well, you know what this is in the Early Years Learning Framework. We know we have to hold high expectations, do we really need to say and state this as a principle? But what they did feel it's actually really an important one. So when we think about how we have high expectations of children, a nice way to think about this is what we might call the Goldilocks challenge. So thinking about children's capabilities and setting experiences where they have that opportunity to engage in something that will cause a little bit of struggle. Something that we could be there as an educator to support them with, and to scaffold their learning and their attempts at trying something new. But to make sure it's not too easy, it's not too hard, and that they do have some success as they're attempting to learn something new.

Another strategy we had there was setting goals with children and also assisting children with strategies for struggle. And using a common mindset language with parents and carers can also be really important.

So you'll see on the screen there now there are several resources that I have developed to support early childhood educators. So the Early Childhood Australia ‘Research in Practice Series’ has actually been around for a while and you might already be using that. More recently is the new book that I've written based on those principles that I was just talking you through. This book was released in September of 2024 and it's now available at essentialresources.com. And this book talks about more about what mindset theory is, but also gives you strategies for each of those principles that educators have tried and shared with me.

Sara Richardson

Thank you so much, Fiona. I know that was a quick whirlwind of your design principles, and I'm sure you could talk for a lot longer, and I'm sure we could listen for a lot longer, too. So thank you for adding a few more in than we had planned to talk about, and it was interesting. When you were talking. I was thinking about that whole idea of, lots of those things, but you know, effort and praising ability, and I was thinking, we even have to practice and maybe change our language to even first of all, notice. But then, what words do we say? Because it feels a bit uncomfortable, and we might make a mistake, and all of those kind of things. So it's very much. And you've touched on this. You know how we can support children. We need to, you know, embody those things, or practice doing those things for ourselves as well. So thank you so much for giving us a taster and some ways where we can go next. And I'm sure people have found that very interesting and useful, and look forward to. I'm sure they'll go exploring a little bit further, a little bit more.

So as we move on to Tess. What I might get you get people to do is 2 things just to help us transition and so we can hear from Tess is maybe pop a couple of things that you're thinking about in the chat. So that, you know, is there one thing that you really liked about what Fiona said, or something you're really interested in. The other thing you might want to do is have a quick wiggle or a quick movement, and then we'll start hearing from Tess. And one of the things that Tess, from Tumut Community Preschool is going to talk to us about is what how they've really, and I want to say really upfront, how Tess has led her team to really engage with growth mindset in a way that's made a I would imagine, a pretty significant difference to what it feels like to work there, and what it's like to be an educator at Tumut Preschool. So really looking forward to hearing about your experience. And I know you keep saying, Tess, you're only at the beginning, and you've still got lots to do. But this is all about growth mindset, too. Right? So really looking forward to hearing some of your story about what you've been doing with growth mindset.

Oh, I meant to ask you a question. How did you introduce it to your team? I'm sure you're going to talk about that when you talk about all the other things. So over to you.

Tess Herring

Thank you, Sara, and thank you to everyone attending, and for the opportunity to be part of today's webinar.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the Wiradjuri land on which I'm speaking from today, and pay my respect to all the elders, past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us on this webinar.

As Sara mentioned, I'm the service manager of Tumut Community Preschool. We're a not for profit community based service, and we're located in Tumut in southern New South Wales. We have a team of 19 staff, and we're approved for 59 children each day, and our preschool has been around and operating for over 64 years.

So fostering a growth mindset in our early learning service really came about because we wanted to address, I guess, 3 main goals. Firstly, I wanted to continue to build on our ongoing approach to educator and staff wellbeing and to further focus on the culture that is needed to be able to do that. We wanted to develop educator understanding about growth mindset and its benefits for them and for children's learning. And we also needed to comply with the expectations regarding growth mindset within version 2 of the EYLF.

So as leaders of early learning services, firstly, I think it's important to remember that educators are people first. I think this is something that sometimes gets forgotten, particularly within the high expectations we have of our educators. The wellbeing of our staff is really as important as what they do in their professional roles. We have a responsibility to our teams to encourage a thriving working environment and to create the right culture to support and develop them as people and professionals.

So when I started looking at mindset and wellbeing, it was really clear to me that a culture that fosters a growth mindset helps educators develop positive attitudes, and you heard Fiona talking about that before. It helps them to build resilience, particularly as educators face so many challenges associated with their roles, and it supports ongoing staff learning. And in a continuous improvement system in which we all operate, it also helps us to adapt to change, to improve and try new things.

So my role is to make sure the teams' provided with whatever they need for them to be able to deliver high quality education and care for the children in our preschool. A part of that is designing systems and practices that support the wellbeing of every staff member on the team

Be You through a project with Monash Uni found that many of the existing wellbeing initiatives really focus only on self-care. And whilst our team consider that that's still very important, initiatives often don't consider the broader systemic issues within the workplace, such as relationships with colleagues, the workplace culture and the role leadership plays at all levels.

So we know that educator wellbeing can influence the relationships they have with children, and with families of those children, and of course, with work colleagues. So our approach has been pretty much about getting the workplace culture right. Making sure it's thriving, it supports everyone in the team, through positive relationships, strong leadership and a growth mindset perspective. It was important that our approach also aligned with our preschool philosophy and our key values, which are kindness, respect, integrity, and inclusion.

It was really interesting that whilst the team all agree that fostering a growth mindset is important part of their role. They're all very concerned about their understanding of mindset theory, and even about their own individual mindsets, and they were unsure shat an educator with a growth mindset looks like, and then how to effectively teach and model growth mindset with children. Our approach then, also included a focus on professional development, increasing our understanding of some of the key concepts.

So in addition to those goals, the new version of the EYLF has increased the requirement for educators to intentionally promote children's knowledge about growth mindset, and to implement practices that foster growth mindset with children.

When the EYLF came out, our team critically reflected on our practices, and how they aligned with the framework. We identified an opportunity to strengthen some of our existing practices so that we could integrate a growth mindset into our service, so that was definitely a goal in terms of meeting the requirements of the framework. It's pretty much non-negotiable.

So how we did that, we decided we would have a, we commenced the year with a workshop which involved the whole team collaborating over a full day to plan how we would promote a culture of wellbeing and how we could focus on our relationships, team communication and mindset perspectives.

So we initially spent some time increasing our knowledge about growth mindset drawing on material from Fiona, particularly on why mindset matters, from Jo Maloney and her work on applying the science of wellbeing for educators, a little bit from Carol Dweck's mindset theory, and we also drew from the Monash Be You research that looked at educator wellbeing as more than just self-care. And we used all of this information and research on the key concepts to inform our reflections as a team.

So we did learn together about what growth and fixed mindsets are, why it matters for educators and children. We looked at the mindset continuum and the fluidity of fixed and growth mindsets. And we talked a lot about what a growth mindset educator looks like and how we think we stack up against these characteristics. And we reviewed the importance of our own mindset and the language we use with each other and with children.

We also talked about, we also discussed our thoughts about the relationship we have with ourselves. Fiona talked about self-talk, and how important it is to be kind to ourselves and practice self-talk, positive self-talk. We talked about how our inner self-talk can impact on our behaviours and our beliefs. Linking all that with our existing reflective practices, we examined our self-relationship and self-talk habits using a whole range of reflective questions, and we did this over a fairly lengthy period of time on the day. We asked ourselves how kind and compassionate is our internal voice, so do we talk to ourselves like a friend or an enemy? Would we let other people talk to us the way we internally talk to ourselves? Do we belittle or berate ourselves? And are we hypercritical? And do we compare ourselves unfairly to other people, and then judge ourselves harshly? And how do we treat our mistakes? So do we see them as learning opportunities that we pick ourselves up from and dust ourselves off, or do we just punish ourselves for not getting things right all the time? And this one is particularly important for educators, do we set unreal expectations of ourselves?

But ultimately we asked ourselves, are we someone who we would like to work with? So staff were pretty honest, they were very generous in sharing their personal insights about themselves during these reflections, and it was surprisingly a great experience for the team. We all enjoyed actually taking time to focus on ourselves and having an opportunity, particularly for the educators to practice extending the kindness that they show everyone else in their roles as educators to themselves. We worked through how we can model and practice growth mindset, particularly including the language and phrases we could use, and we considered briefly how we provide and respond to feedback.

Identifying some of the barriers that prevent us from practicing a growth mindset and having positive relationships, particularly with ourselves, was really important. We felt we needed to see if the barriers were real, and what we could do to remove or mitigate them. So, for example, we talked a lot about positivity as being infectious. So if we walk into work with a negative mindset, this is also infectious. And what is it we need to do to switch that around. The team documented how those barriers or excuses would be addressed.

So, as I said the day was a lot of fun, it really needed to be, because, as sometimes the discussions regarding wellbeing can be uncomfortable for people. We used the online quiz, which provided a really good platform for discussion about our own profiles, and the common traits we found in the group, which was lighthearted and enjoyable.

So towards the end of our workshop, though we came up, we needed to come up with something tangible. So we came up with a set of team actions and commitments that we would implement. These included emphasising and recognising effort and perseverance in ourselves. They included challenging our practices and approaches and stretching ourselves to get involved in things we would normally probably avoid. Therefore, I guess, encouraging risk and inquiry, and we agreed to practice reframing our mistakes as learning opportunities, which, in a heavily regulated sector like ours, can be really difficult for educators, because making mistakes when educating and caring for children can have really significant consequences. So some of these things are just, not negotiable. However, we can reframe how we respond to those setbacks and frustrations when things don't work out as planned.

We agreed on how we can gently remind each other when we see old habits creeping back into practice. An example of that is, you know, shining a light on any negative chat that can so quickly become a harmful workplace problem. We also agreed that when we start to catastrophise or dramatize things and tend towards negativity, that we would all respectfully raise this with each other, so that this habit changes. And I guess we agreed to be kind to ourselves. We committed to practicing positive and kind self-talk, and avoiding comparing ourselves unfavourably to other people, and not being threatened by other people's success.

So I guess. Thank you for that first question, Sara. That's probably that in a nutshell.

Sara Richardson

Lucky I asked you the question.

There's just so much that you've done there. And again I want to acknowledge the leadership that you've shown in that to create a safe enough environment for your team to be able to explore and, you know, take risks and explore some of those things, and how you pointed out the fun aspect of that is, you know, just says something very much about, I'm sure, what your place is actually like to be like. And it's really interesting and fits like you've said a couple of times with the you know that wellbeing culture, and you framed it around that. So you explored growth mindset, but are really around how do we create a place where all of our wellbeing is taken care of, and how you've referenced that notion of beyond self-care is not just, you know, looking, it's way deeper and much more systemic and linking that to things like the earliest learning framework, and you know things we kind of have to do. Which is, we can't escape it. You're right, it is just what it is. And we would call those some of those things you talked about really protective factors for mental health.

So I guess what I'm really interested in finding out now is, since you've been doing this work, and you had that workshop, and you've kind of committed to those actions and that kind of thing. I'm just wondering what difference you've noticed. What things have you noticed in your team? Maybe in the practice with the children? So it'd be really interesting to hear about that.

Tess Herring

I guess my focus has been on the difference. What I've seen in the team. So I think, Sara, the team would agree that we've seen a more positive, respectful working environment, one where they do feel safer and safe to implement the commitments we made, particularly around regarding reminding each other about positivity, kind self-talk, and I guess, just being more gentle with each other. At our weekly meetings we discuss staff wellbeing as a standing agenda item now. Which has helped to normalise the conversations about wellbeing, and the team feels safe and supported to raise concerns now that could impact on wellbeing, but before they actually do. At meetings and in daily interactions, we acknowledge the positive actions of staff and the effort and perseverance we see in the team, which really, I guess, has a benefit of recognizing our educators as valued professionals and as people. There's been definitely been an increased use of language associated with growth mindset. We hear the terminology used much more in everyday interactions.

We've also reviewed a lot of our key practices just to confirm things we already do that foster growth mindset. Because educators have been doing that for quite a while. For example, our educators already seek and value children's ideas, and encourage children's agency, particularly as they co-plan learning together. But we also identified some of the practices we want to strengthen, such as how we provide feedback to children. Fiona talked about how important that really is, particularly around recognising focused effort and persistence with challenges rather than ability and talent, and by modifying our, so by modifying our learning spaces as well, and adjusting part of our routines, we've improved our temporal environment. So children have more time to collaborate and focus on challenges in a variety of situations, particularly in smaller and larger groups. Our educators are increasingly giving children the space to take risks, and acknowledging their mistakes or failures alongside children. So they're really using failures as a learning tool now.

Following the reflection day, the team said they felt they wanted to continue to work through the design principles that Fiona outlines in her book. So we really focus, I guess, looking back, and we didn't have the book at the time, we focused on design principle 1, but now our next focus is on, we're jumping to design principle 9. Which is how we can share growth mindset practices with parents and families. We felt that this was the next priority for us, because it's essential to have that consistency between home and the preschool. And it's important. I guess it's an opportunity to reinforce with families about how they respond to children and make them aware that the language and responses they use with their children also shape their child's mindset.

And the team have also, I guess, identified and asked for professional development on feedback techniques, it’s something we really struggle with. They wanted to, they want to improve their skills in effectively providing and receiving feedback with each other, but also with children. And I guess that really aligns with Fiona's design principle 6. Where educators provide feedback on effort rather than on talent and ability. So that will definitely be part of our future professional development plans as we continue our journey towards fostering wellbeing through a growth mindset culture.

Sara Richardson

Thank you. Tess. Yeah, lots of really interesting practical things. And actually, I was thinking about how it feels like you've done a lot. I really like how you're trying to tackle one thing at a time, like it's not, you know. It sounds like we're focusing on this now, and then we're gonna focus on that now. And I think, because I think that overwhelm sometimes for people is very real, and it feels like a, you know, it's too much, and we can't do it. And if you just keep doing one thing at a time and just keep going, it's that perseverance, really, isn't it and persistence. And being committed to It sounds like you kind of said, well, we're gonna do this, so we're gonna do this.

Tess Herring

Yeah, I think you have to make it fun. And I think the great thing about the 9 principles that Fiona's put together is that you can jump between them so you can pick which ones are relevant to you at that time, and which ones you know, you can, you're already addressing a little bit of, and ones that you maybe aren't. So you can use that, I guess, to tailor how you're going to tackle it, and it doesn't seem, as you said, as overwhelming, because you can break it down into bits.

Sara Richardson

Yeah, yeah, that's great. All right. Well, what we might do is we might get Fiona to come back on screen, too, and we're heading towards the end of the session, which it seems amazing.

So while we, while we're asking everybody to complete the final poll, which is the same question we ask you at the beginning, like hopefully, you have learned some things or have some new information to take away. What I'm thinking we might what I could ask, both of you, Fiona and Tess, is what if there was one thing that you think attendees could take away from today's session. What do you think it would be? You can either answer. I think we've got time to ask that one, and then I'll ask the other question as well.

Fiona Boylan

Yeah, go for it, Tess.

Tess Herring

I think one thing I would ask everyone if they were to take away would, I would suggest, get your hands on the research and the references mentioned today. Reflect on that material and concepts that's provided in it, and use that info to guide your practices, because, regardless of our roles, we should all seek to foster a growth mindset culture within our service, because it really does support educators to thrive and be confident, and it reinvigorates that passion in their role. So yeah, I would suggest get hold of the info and reflect on it and use it.

Sara Richardson

What about you, Fiona? Thanks, Tess.

Fiona Boylan

I think that's great advice, Tess, and certainly now that the book's published and developed and available for people that would be a great resource that you can go to to get started.

I think, agreeing with what Tess said earlier is, you can just start somewhere. You don't need, you know, there's a lot in the principles, and if you purchase the book you'll see there's a lot of information in there with lots of ideas. But I think just deciding as a workplace group what you would like to focus on first, and it might be that it is principle 1, where you start to develop your own knowledge of your own mindset and mindset theory before you then can move onto something else. I think it would be pretty hard to probably start anywhere else without having that knowledge of what mindset theory is and the impact that it can have on wellbeing and on learning and on achievement and motivation.

So you know, in the book there is that precursor with all of that information in there, and there are some suggestions in the book about how you might want to manage that as a staff group, whether it's through meetings or something like that, where you might focus on one thing and then come back together and talk about it, but I think don't be overwhelmed. But one of the things I was very intentional about with this research was that I didn't want this to be lesson plans where I give you a set of things that you do, because if we work on fostering growth mindsets for 30 days, and then we stop doing it. We're actually not fostering growth mindsets anymore. So the principles are there to be implemented all of the time as much as we possibly can in the places that we're working.

Sara Richardson

That's great. So let's have a look at the poll now, and see how people are feeling after they've heard your. Oh, look! That's so exciting. That's really great! So most, a couple of people felt not confident and were unsure, and no one feels like that now. So that's super exciting. And we've got people with growth mindsets who are able to shift and learn. And I think you pointed that, you talked about that, Fiona.

There's still people who are keen to learn some more, which I think we've given them lots of opportunities to think about that and some people increasingly confident, too. So that's fantastic. So we're super excited about that. And I guess that leads me to my next question. We can probably close those responses now, because there's a question about, and I'll ask both of you to respond and maybe Tess you can go first. But I'll also get, ask people in the chat to pop your responses to this, too. But what are you most excited about, or looking forward to? So Tess, I'd really like to hear from you, and then maybe, Fiona, but I encourage you, to everybody else to pop in the chat as well what they're looking forward to or excited about.

Tess Herring

I think. The thing that's most exciting is seeing the educators embrace a different way of being, really. Their own personal growth and changes and becoming advocates for growth mindset for themselves and for the children. I think that's been a real positive, and I guess just an increased level of positivity in the place is a real benefit, I think. So, that's what I'm most excited about.

Fiona Boylan

I think, for me, certainly the most exciting thing for me was to see this research have an effect on the updated version of the Early Years Learning Framework, you know, when I first started looking at mindset theory, and how I could implement it in my setting, and then, you know, started my doctoral study, I don't think in my wildest dreams I thought that it would have an impact on an early years policy document. So I'm so excited that this is making educators pay attention and start to think about, how can we actually do this in the early years, and what might this look like?

The other thing I'm really excited about for is where to next for this? So I've been engaged in a recent project where I've been working with some educators on how they can critically reflect using a growth mindset where they were implementing some changes in alignment with the new version of the EYLF and starting to think about, how do I overcome some of those obstacles when we want to implement change? And it's never easy, as Tess mentioned, we have lots of challenges and barriers that we're up against in early learning. And so thinking about as part of the critical reflection process. What does that look like, and what benefits does it have if you can critically reflect using a growth mindset. So I think there's so much potential for how this could be implemented in the early years, and you know where to next is, what other resources do early childhood educators need, you know? Let me know. What is it that you're looking for? Besides the book that I've written, what else can we support you with?

Sara Richardson

Yeah, that is exciting. I can't wait for that book or those resources. No pressure Fiona.

I guess from a Be You perspective. And I'm thinking about our work that we do. I think the connection to wellbeing and how growth mindset is a very practical thing that can be a tool for everybody's wellbeing and a protective factor for you know, one of our aims for Be You is that we have mentally healthy communities where everybody has good, positive mental health. And so you know anything we do that's a positive action and a planned action. And I think you talked really carefully, both of you, about it doesn't just happen. You kind of have to put things in place and pay attention to it, and make you know, persevere and make mistakes and try again. And you know all of those things we've been talking about if we want mental health to kind of be better for everybody. And Tess, I think you particularly talked about that creating that real safe space where these conversations can happen, and in ways that, you know, make it really meaningful. So I'm really excited about that I think. You know, it really fits with what we're, the vision we're trying to aim for as well.

And we're getting some really exciting things in the chat, and I know I told both of you not to look at the chat before, because it goes too fast, but it's really great. All the things that people are thinking about. And you know, some people are sharing some quite personal things about, you know that self-talk stuff that we had probably learned from really early on about what we can and can't do, and so trying to really challenge that or find ways to shift That is, I think it's been, yeah some people are mentioning that, too. And there are some questions coming up, but remember that there's an opportunity to respond to some of those questions later on in the chat, too.

So what we might do now is I'll just finish up with some, a little bit of housekeeping, and I would first like to, though, thank you, Tess and Fiona, for your knowledge, your expertise, your passion for this topic, and we've really appreciated, I particularly personally, have learned a lot already. And I'm looking forward to learning some more but I think you know the sharing this with other people, and particularly you, Tess, you know you're, you know, being really vulnerable enough to talk about what you've done and what's working and what isn't, I think, is really really helpful for other people to hear that. And Fiona, your expertise and knowledge, and now the resources that you're already providing and looking to provide more is, you know, really fantastic. So thank you both so much for sharing.

Also I want to thank everybody for jumping in and joining in. We thank our team behind the scenes for all your help. Remember that you can stay behind for the Q&A if you'd like to. But before you go you can see on your screen feedback. So we really look forward to hearing what you've you know anything that you want to let us know about that.

And so now what we'll do is move to the Q&A. We'll turn our cameras off, and go and have a quick wriggle, and you don't need to move to any other platform. Just have a wriggle, and then we'll see you in the Q&A. So goodbye for now everybody.

[END]