

Seneca research supports growth mindset in education

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In 2024, Seneca Polytechnic collaborated with [Let's Get Together](#), a non-profit organization promoting equity and accessibility in education, to see how influential a children's book can be.

With support from Seneca's [Social Innovation Research Fund](#), the research team explored how True North Friends, a book developed by Let's Get Together, could help students develop a growth mindset.

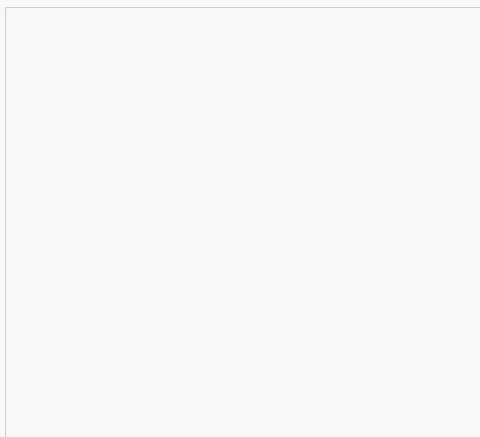
A growth mindset encompasses the belief that intelligence can be learned; that aptitude and temperament can be developed; that novelty and challenges support personal growth; and that self-acceptance and compassion develop social skills.

Research has found that people with a growth mindset may achieve greater personal development and resilience.

Alison Canning, executive director of Let's Get Together, said Seneca's study delivered valuable insights into True North Friends' strengths and ways to improve it.

"Having the data [from the] research is going to help us position the book to be an impactful community tool," she said.

The study invited Ontario-based K-6 educators, parents and guardians to evaluate the book through questionnaires and focus groups, examining its effectiveness in promoting growth mindset principles.



Felix, a character from True North Friends, is shown in an image from the book. (Illustration by Laura Makaltses)

Participants' feedback also guided the development of a teacher's manual to help integrate True North Friends into classrooms.

"We got to interview some teachers and parents ... and I've never done that before, so that was really fun," said research assistant Annalisa Canale-Parola, who graduated from Seneca with a Bachelor of Behavioural Psychology in 2023.

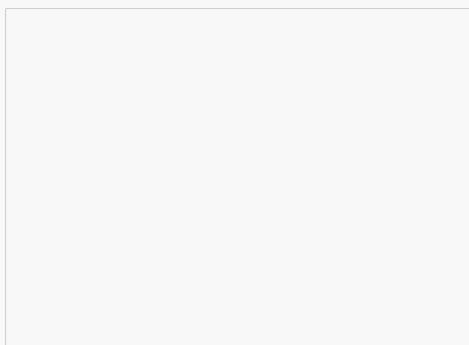
"The interviews brought insights that I hadn't thought of," she said.

Suggestions for how to make the book more effective included using simplified, age-appropriate language; limiting the introduction of complex concepts; and better explaining how teachers can build on students' theoretical understanding of the growth mindset to encourage new behaviours.

"[The study] pointed out a big gap, which is: how do you teach growth mindset?" Canning said. "It's easy to write a story and share it, but what I think was missing is how do you foster growth mindset? How does one start developing it? And that requires some sort of behavioural modification program."

Nonetheless, the research team found that True North Friends effectively promoted key aspects of a growth mindset, that it encouraged a positive shift in students' attitudes toward learning and overcoming obstacles and that educators believed the book resonated with their students.

The study found that the book offers promise as a tool that inspires lifelong learning and social harmony among children.



Felix, a character from True North Friends, is shown in an image from the book. (Illustration by Laura Makaltses)

After her team incorporates the study's feedback, Canning hopes the book will be ready for publication this summer. At that stage, Let's Get Together will work with schools, school boards and the greater community to integrate it into classrooms and homes.

According to principal investigator Chia-Lin (Lance) Chang, the study strengthened Seneca's role in fostering innovation and supporting future-ready educators and learners. It engaged Seneca students and graduates, who gained valuable skills in data analysis and resource development.

"I see this as a great option for employability, building connections," said Chang, who teaches in Seneca's School of English and Liberal Studies. "Integrating courses with practical experiences is a good idea not only for student recruitment, but also for student success."

The partnership also underscores how everyone wins when Seneca partners with industry.

"I would recommend for any organization that really wants to develop, create and innovate their programs or ideas to connect with Seneca," Canning said. "We wouldn't have been able to do this on our own."

To learn more about Let's Get Together and True North Friends, email Alison Canning at alison@letsgettogether.ca.

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