



# SUMMARY OF RECENT RESEARCH

UPDATED: JANUARY 2019

WRITTEN & COMPILED BY:

ALEA THOMPSON,  
PHD CANDIDATE IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY  
STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

# EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT COURSE

## Executive Summary

### Course Description

The Leadership Skills Development (LSD) course is a co-authored course by Mawi Learning and Florida Virtual School. The course is a two-semester online course where students learn leadership skills, including their goal-setting strategies, problem-solving skills, decision making and communication skills, time and stress management, and team building skills. The course invites students to engage in self-discovery and they develop the skills needed for success in high school and beyond.

### Overview of Study

The study was conducted in partnership between Florida Virtual School and the Educational Research Institute of America. The study covered three primary areas of research: a review to assess the research base of the course, a standardized assessment analysis to evaluate student performance on a course assessment, and an anonymous student survey.

- **96%** of students said the course helped them become a better student
- **93%** of students said the course helped them prepare for their career
- **96%** of students said the course helped them develop their confidence

## Results

**Research base.** The Leadership Skills Development course is based in the body of literature on the impact of social-emotional learning skills and non-cognitive abilities on student success. The course focuses on key skills identified as critical to student success, including Growth Mindset, Locus of Control, Grit, Goal-Setting, Social-Intelligence, and Delayed Gratification. These concepts are presented with strong hooks, engaging content, and a focus on application that makes them personal and relevant to users.

**Student assessment performance.** Using subject matter and course experts, performance level descriptors and cut scores were established to create a criterion-referenced indication of student performance on the course midterm exam. According to these benchmarks, 81% of students performed at the *Advanced* level of the exam.

**Student survey.** Over 400 students completed a survey asking about their experience with the course. Students overwhelmingly reported positive experiences, with 94% of students saying they would recommend it to a peer and 94% of students saying they would often or sometimes use the leadership skills from the course. In open ended responses, students demonstrated a high level of understanding of leadership skills and how they impact not only their own lives but their capacity to help those around them. Most importantly, students recognized how the skills and strategies can help them now and in the future.

Given the success in these three domains, the evaluation found the Leadership Skills Development course to be effective and impactful for students.

# POWERFUL EDUCATOR RESEARCH BASE

## Executive Summary

The Powerful Educator course is based in the best research on supporting teacher and student growth. As educators build their powers as individuals, they are better able to teach the powers to their students. The research underscores what we at Mawi Learning know: educators are the key to unlocking student potential.

### Powerful Educator Impact

Over 98 percent of educators and administrators recommend Powerful Educator. After the course, educators reported statistically significant growth in key success indicators, like their belief in their impact on students, and in Growth Mindset behaviors like teaching brain growth strategies and positive feedback systems.<sup>1</sup>

### Effective Professional Development

Professional development (PD) can be a key intervention for teachers, their classroom, and their schools.<sup>2</sup> But most PD isn't effective--one-and-done workshops, minimal follow up on key concepts, and no support for sustained changes.<sup>3</sup> But Powerful Educator is built on the foundational research for what works in PD: collaborative content and time for discussion, flexible implementation schedules, and sustained learning and support.<sup>4</sup>

### Turbo

The Turbo Button is the central metaphor in Mawi Learning for taking action to improve your life and the lives of others. It is based in the science of agency<sup>5</sup> and of internalized locus of control<sup>6</sup>-- the belief that you have the power to control your life and actions.

Research shows that teachers who have an internal locus of control--they believe they have the ability to make a difference within their classroom--tend to be more satisfied with their job and have a higher-rated job performance.<sup>7</sup> Internally-oriented teachers tended to be more flexible with their teaching strategies, felt that they could effectively manage students' behaviors, and were able to provide multiple types of productive feedback.<sup>8</sup>

### Core Competencies:

- **Turbo:**  
Building agency for educators to enact change in their classrooms
- **Relationships:**  
Creating strong support networks so educators can reach all students
- **Mindset:**  
Strengthening educators' growth mindsets and empower them to teach growth strategies.
- **Skills:**  
Creating practical, applicable strategies to build students' skill and confidence
- **Voice:**  
Celebrating educators' passion for their work and empowering them to expand their impact

1. Calculations available on request

2. Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W.-Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. (2007). Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement (REL 2007--No. 033). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

3. Gulamhussein, A. (2013). Teaching the teachers: Effective professional development in an era of high stakes accountability. *Center for Public Education*.

4. Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.

5. Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 1-26. ; Farrington, C.A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T.S., Johnson, D.W., & Beechum, N.O. (2012). *Teaching adolescents to become learners*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

6. Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs*, 80(1), 1-28.

7. Judge, T.A., & Bono, J.E. (2001) Relationship of core self-evaluations traits with job satisfaction and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(1), 80-92.

8. Cook (2002) *Teacher locus of control*. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 6(3), 285-296.

## Relationships

To forge powerful relationships with students, Mawi Learning encourages educators to build strong support networks for themselves and their students with a focus on building strategies to reach all students.

Research consistently supports the idea that caring teachers can improve academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students.<sup>9</sup> High-risk youth overwhelmingly cited the motivational support and inspiration of their teachers as important in their growth and success.<sup>10</sup> Positive teacher-student relationships even had a larger impact on student learning than other commonly cited factors like home environment and socio-economic status.<sup>11</sup>

## Mindset

Researchers highlight the impact of the growth mindset, the belief that anyone can grow their abilities and intelligence through sustained effort, on student and educator growth and success. In *Powerful Educators*, teachers analyze their own mindset and the mindsets their students hold. The module encourages educators to “practice what they preach” by modeling positive growth mindset strategies and practices in the classroom

The research on growth mindset has found that building a growth mindset creates physical and functional changes in the brain that allow for increased achievement.<sup>12</sup> Studies have shown that students with growth mindsets outperform their fixed mindset peers in both academic and non-cognitive areas.<sup>13</sup>

## Skill

In *Powerful Educator*, skill is the constant incremental push toward increasingly challenging goals. By defining skill as focused on application and continual growth, Mawi Learning takes a process-based and context-specific approach to skill-building.

Looking specifically at the practices educators can use to build student skill, researchers have highlighted a diverse array of methods to help students learn and apply knowledge-- including setting mastery goals rather than performance goals. When students are encouraged to set appropriate goals, they tend to increase their self-efficacy, academic achievement, and academic interest.<sup>14</sup>

## Voice

Voice has three key parts: passion, relevance, and autonomy. By asking educators to examine opportunities to bring joy, meaning, and freedom into their classrooms, *Powerful Educator* encourages a student-responsive approach to learning that can spark increased motivation for teachers and students.

Teachers who engage in autonomy-supporting behaviors that give students meaningful options to guide their own experiences and learning in the classroom, which increases engagement.<sup>15</sup> For true relevance, students must be able to apply the subject matter to their lives and find value in the work, which leads to an increase in motivation and connection to their school.<sup>16</sup> When students are passionate about their work, they connect to their interests and fully engage in active practice.<sup>17</sup>

9. Murray, C., & Malmgren, K. (2005). Implementing a teacher-student relationship program in a high-poverty urban school: Effects on social, emotional, and academic adjustment and lessons learned. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*(2), 137-152.

10. Smokowski, P. R., Reynolds, A. J., & Bezruczko, N. (1999). Resilience and protective factors in adolescence. *Journal of School Psychology, 37*(4), 425-448.

11. Hattie (2009) *Visible Learning*. Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge.

12. Dweck, C.S. (2006) *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

13. Mangels, J. A., Butterfield, B., Lamb, J., Good, C., & Dweck, C. S. (2006). Why do beliefs about intelligence influence learning success? *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 1*(2), 75-86; Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience. *Educational Psychologist, 47*(4), 302.

14. Zimmerman, B. J., Bandura, A., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*(3), 663-676.

15. Reeve, J., Jang, H., Carrell, D., Jeon, S., & Barch, J. (2004). Enhancing students' engagement by increasing teachers' autonomy support. *Motivation and Emotion, 28*(2), 147-169.

16. Frymier, A. B., & Shulman, G. M. (1995). "Whats in it for me?": Increasing content relevance to enhance students' motivation. *Communication Education, 44*(1), 40-50; Johnson, L. S. (2000). The relevance of school to career. *Journal of Career Development, 26*(4), 263-276.

17. Markham, T. (2011). Project based learning: A bridge just far enough. *Teacher Librarian, 39*(2), 38-42.; Newell, R. J. (2003). *Passion for learning: How project-based learning meets the needs of 21st-century students*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press.

# EVALUATION OF THE MAWI LEARNING TURBO LEADER PROGRAM

## Executive Summary

### Overview of Implementation

Over the 2017-2018 school year, students in grades 6 through 8 at Aspen Middle School<sup>1</sup> participated in a control-group study to measure the effectiveness of the Turbo Leader program. Students in the experimental group completed the program during semester 1, while students in the control group completed the program after the end of study during semester 2.

### Program Evaluation

To increase validity and follow research best practices, the Turbo Leader program was evaluated using an externally developed and validated survey from Panorama Education. Each measure was assessed in an anonymous, digitized pre- and post-program survey. Pre-, midpoint, and post-program interviews and check-ins with educators and administrators were also used to triangulate the quantitative data and to build a fuller picture of the student experience with the Turbo Leader program.

### Study Results

When compared to a control group of students from the same school, students who completed the Turbo Leader program showed statistically significant growth in three social-emotional competencies: Growth Mindset, Sense of Belonging, and Self-Efficacy. In addition, students in 6th grade showed statistically significant improvement on the Grit measures.

After completing Turbo Leader, students reported statistically significant increases in:

- Key **growth mindset** indicators like the belief they can change their skills and abilities with effort
- Student **self-efficacy** beliefs like their confidence they can learn challenging and complex concepts
- Student **sense of belonging** and connection to the adults in their school

The ANOVA results for the SEL measures are as follows for measuring experimental group growth as compared to the control group:

- Growth Mindset measures were statistically significant for all grades at the .001 significance level,  $F(1, 747) = 27.72, p < .001$
- Self-Efficacy measures were statistically significant for all grades at the .05 significance level,  $F(1, 747) = 4.14, p = .042$
- Sense of Belonging measures were statistically significant for all grades at the .05 significance level,  $F(1, 745) = 8.07, p = .005$
- Grit measures were statistically significant for 6th grade students at the .05 significance level,  $F(1, 251) = 4.53, p = .034$

Full results and calculation tables are available the complete report.

Educators and administrators reported a successful implementation of the program with positive impacts on student confidence, academic self-image, and persistence as well as educators using a common language for student success and growth.

<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym for the school