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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Transform Your Math Class Using Asset-Based Teaching for Grades 6-12.

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ALIGNMENT EXERCISE: WHY ASSET-BASED PERSPECTIVES?

Each chapter of this book includes an Alignment exercise. The purpose is to engage in a reflection or an activity aligned to the chapter. A supplemental study guide aligns with all of the activities included in this book that you can download and use as a resource. The study guide provides you with additional reflective activities that you can engage in by yourself or if you are working with a group of colleagues.

In Chapter 1, the Alignment exercise is an introduction to the book. We will consider our current understanding of asset-based perspectives, including what they are and why they are essential. Pause and reflect on the following questions before reading the rest of the chapter.

■ ■ ■ Try This

Reflect on the following questions:

1. What does it mean to have an asset-based perspective?
2. How are asset-based perspectives similar to and different from a strengths-based or growth mindset view? What other education initiatives seem similar (or contrary) to asset-based perspectives?
3. Why is an asset-based perspective essential in education today? ■

We hope this exercise elicited your understanding of asset-based perspectives and how they are similar yet distinctively different from other constructs. Let's unpack each of these questions a bit. In doing this, we are sharing with you our experiences and the input of other experts in the field. The answers to these three questions are our answer to the *why* of writing this book.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE AN ASSET-BASED PERSPECTIVE?

Asset-based perspectives mean starting with what's already there or what is known instead of focusing on what's missing. To start with what's there, we must first learn to listen for the reasoning and sense-making of the person or people we are communicating with. We ask questions or engage in a task that surfaces ideas that engage students in activating background knowledge. This work recognizes that all students bring prior experiences, strengths, talents, and resources to the learning process and can contribute meaningfully in an authentic learning environment (Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics & Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, 2024). Student thinking is central and is valued. Mathematics learning environments that are asset based feature students and teachers using language that draws on mathematical strengths and teachers using routines designed for students to surface those strengths and build meaningfully on them toward new learning goals. In asset-based learning environments, the teacher facilitates discussions that amplify what students know and aligns and builds those ideas toward the lesson's content goals and learning progressions.

This book will provide multiple aspects of using asset-based perspectives that increase student outcomes through the lens of language, routines, and our systems. In future chapters, we will highlight that specific language, routines, and systems are not strictly asset or deficit based but their use falls somewhere along a deficit-to-asset continuum. Changing our classrooms is not necessarily about discarding old practices and adopting new ones; it can also be about reshaping and revising existing practices to better reflect asset-based perspectives. We'll use illustrations of this deficit-to-asset continuum throughout the book to remind us all that adopting asset-based perspectives is about a continuum, or a movement over time, not about flipping a switch.

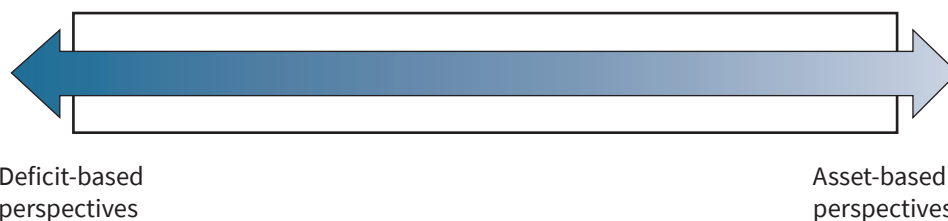


Table 1.1 compares key features of asset- and deficit-based perspectives. The distinction is not about who we are as educators but about how we attend to situations. Do we start with what is accurate or good with a situation, or do we start with what is inaccurate or missing? Do we listen and use student thinking, or do we tell steps and say things like “This is easy” or “You just have to follow these steps”? The overview is a first step to reflect on our practices, as well as to do better when we know better. My own efforts are to be more aware when I (Joleigh) am using deficit perspectives and to do my best to shift to be more intentional with implementing asset-based perspectives. As you read Table 1.1, what does the asset-based perspective look like in a classroom? What does the corresponding deficit-based perspective look like? How would an intentional focus on using asset-based perspectives enhance your practice? What would it mean for your classroom and your math department or school?

TABLE 1.1 Characteristics of Asset-Based Perspectives and Deficit-Based Perspectives

ASSET-BASED PERSPECTIVES	DEFICIT-BASED PERSPECTIVES
Center students’ current understandings and work	Focus on errors, mistakes, or incomplete thinking as something that needs to be immediately repaired
Consider students’ current state of understanding as a foundation on which to build	Center what students <i>should have done</i> rather than what students did
Instructional routines are implemented with the mindset that students have lived experiences and funds of knowledge to draw from	Instructional routines are implemented with the assumption that students do not have funds of knowledge to draw from
Provide students with clear feedback about their current performance and how to build on it	Teacher lesson notes perceive deficits or lack of knowledge in student work without a clear path to improve
Teacher voice and actions strengthen students’ identities as competent doers of mathematics	Teacher voice and actions foster fixed-ability mindsets and negative mathematics identities
Recognize that students can be successful in any math pathway and that they select courses based on their interests	Label students and place them into tracks based on perceived ability