

Character Development: Gritty Youth

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College posters, campaigns, billboards, online programs and websites, large scale national initiatives, shelves in Barnes & Noble full of how-to's and expert opinions. In a college bound culture, everyone is looking for the key to college admission and college success. How do we get kids to go to college and stay until they graduate? Often innate intelligence has been used to predict achievement and ability. Angela Duckworth, University of Pennsylvania Professor, believes that a better predictor of achievement and success is *grit*, a character trait she coined, which is perseverance and passion for long-term goals.

ACHIEVEMENT VS INTELLIGENCE

Research findings:

- ❖ Most individuals use only a small portion of their resources; a few push themselves to their limit.
- ❖ For the majority, highly gifted people do not end up in the upper echelons of their field.
- ❖ In a long-term study of gifted children, the most accomplished men were only 5 points higher in IQ than the least accomplished men.

Why do some people accomplish more than others of equal intelligence?

DELIBERATE PRACTICE

In chess, sports, music, and the visual arts it has been found that expert performers spend no less than 10 years honing their skills through “deliberate practice,” and world-class achievers spend twice that amount, 20 years, of practice. Therefore it takes no less than 10 years, or 10,000 hours, to reach top achievement in your passion or profession.

Deliberate or effortful practice is focused planned trainings and activities that are designed to improve performance, and typically involves anxiety and frustration. You are doing or practicing things that confuse you because it's on the edge of your abilities. By going outside of your comfort zone, you are exposing yourself to new ideas and trying to deliberately grow.

DELIBERATE PRACTICE & GRIT

Those who engage in more hours of deliberate practice are those who are committed to improving their performance. They find these hours of practice intrinsically rewarding. Gritty people have the capacity to sustain effort in projects over a long period of time, whether that is several months or several years.

They see achievement as a marathon and what sets them apart is their stamina to stay on course. Duckworth suggests that the top leaders in every field have the character trait of grit because they have the greatest amount of deliberate practice as they have the drive and passion to keep going toward, and beyond, that 10,000 hour mark.

WHAT DOES A GRITTY INDIVIDUAL LOOK LIKE?

- ❖ Works strenuously toward challenges;
- ❖ maintains effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and stagnate progress; and
- ❖ set extremely long-term objectives and do not swerve from them even without positive feedback.

GRIT SCALE

Duckworth created a Grit Scale to measure perseverance and passion and to predict one's level of achievement. She has tested her scale on several populations. The table below summarizes her studies and findings.

	Population	Background	Result
Study # 1	Freshman cadets entering U.S. military academy, West Point in July of 2004	West Point's rigorous admissions include SAT scores, class rank, leadership, and physical aptitude. Despite this, 1 in 20 cadets drop out during the first summer of training.	Grit scores predicted completion of the rigorous summer training better than any other predictor (self-control, whole candidate score, & academic GPA).
Study #2	Finalists in the 2005 Scripps National Spelling Bee	West Point provided information on vocational pursuits, whereas this gave a look at extra-curricular achievement.	Grit predicted advancement to higher rounds in the competition.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Grittier individuals go further in formal education. As we study college success and the ingredients that make one student succeed over another, grit may be one of those necessary factors. Finding ways to teach and incorporate grit into school or youth program curriculums may help students become better prepared and ready to take on high school, college, and beyond.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Books

How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character

Paul Tough argues in this book that the key ingredients for success are found in character, not intelligence and test scores. He provides recent research and how to change how we raise children.

Online Resources

Grit Scale

Link provides several versions of the Grit Scale that can be used by youth development programs, parents, or teachers.

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/gritscale.htm>

Online Videos

True Grit: Can Perseverance be Taught?

In a 2009 TEDx Talk, Dr. Angela Lee Duckworth presents a definition of and her research on grit. She presents a clear easy to understand overview of grit.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaeFnxSfSC4>

True Grit, Can You Teach Children Character?

Presented by NBC News' Education Nation, this interactive presentation and panel discussion shares the recent research on mindset by Carol Dweck and grit by Angela Lee Duckworth.

<http://www.educationnation.com/index.cfm?objectid=D8F266A4-0693-11E2->

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References

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- Duckworth, A.L. & Quinn, P.D. (2009). Development and validation of the short grit scale (grit-s). *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91(2), 166-174.