
Table of Contents



Acknowledgments.....	v
Chapter 1 Anatomy of Grit	1
Chapter 2 Measuring Grit	27
Chapter 3 What Gritty Classrooms Can Learn From Gifted Education and Talent Development	53
Chapter 4 Integrating Grit, Mindsets, and Motivation.....	75
Chapter 5 Cultivating Passionate Students.....	91
Chapter 6 Building Grit at Home	107
Chapter 7 Creating a Gritty School Culture.....	125
Conclusion	139
Resources.....	143
References.....	149
About the Author	157

Anatomy of Grit



From pretty much my first day as a teacher in a small Oregon town, I started asking, why? Why won't they do their homework? Why don't they care about this stuff? Why can't I motivate them?

I never doubted why I was teaching or why I was there, but I just couldn't figure out why I struggled to engage some of my students. I tried everything I could think of, I experienced little to no success, and then I went to graduate school. I studied motivation at Portland State University in Portland, OR, and then went on to focus on coping, resiliency, and mental toughness at the University of North Texas in Denton, TX. And then, many years later, I was sitting in a staff meeting in a suburban Texas town and was shown Angela Duckworth's 2013 TED talk on grit.

In her talk, Duckworth (2013) described the challenges of teaching math to middle school kids. (No kidding, right?) She noticed that the students who performed the best in her class weren't necessarily the smartest—they were the ones who worked the hardest. As a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, Duckworth and her research team studied teachers, salespeople, and West Point cadets in order to learn more. Interestingly, they found that grit was the best predictor of success. Not IQ, prior achievement, or great hair . . . but grit.

The problem, according to Duckworth, was that educators have been too narrowly focused. Although we are really good at measuring achievement, she argued that we needed to consider how grit can be assessed and improved in our students if we really wanted to build their stamina and increase their likelihood for success in school and beyond.

I was completely inspired after watching Duckworth's talk. Her ideas made sense, which I appreciated as a teacher, and they were supported by research, which I valued as an educational psychologist. I wanted to do more, however, to inspire other teachers the way I was inspired during that staff meeting. So, here we are. I've outlined practical ideas for how teachers, parents, and administrators can work together to recognize and instill grit in their students.

This chapter provides a framework for the pages ahead. We're going to rewind to the 19th century in order to examine intelligence and how the conception of this construct has changed over time. We're also going to dissect grit so that we can study each component in depth. And that's only Chapter 1!

In Chapter 2, we're going to dig deeper into how grit is measured and examine ways teachers can support students in their grit development. Chapter 3 is focused on building grit in gifted students, specifically as it relates to elite talent development, and what all classrooms can learn from the field of gifted education. In Chapter 4, I integrate grit with what we know about growth mindset research and how teachers can use these theories in working with students. Because passion is such an integral component to grit, I've dedicated all of Chapter 5 to how teachers can cultivate passion in their students. I wrote Chapter 6 as a guide to help you work with parents, ensuring a streamlined approach to building grit in students. And finally, the last chapter is all about grit at the school level and how campus staff and administrators can work together to build a gritty school culture.

Each chapter ends with final thoughts and discussion questions to help you consider practical ways you can apply these ideas to your classrooms. I also included a compilation of resources at

the end of the book that I hope is helpful to you. By the last page, if I've done my job well, you will be inspired and equipped with the knowledge you need to prioritize the building of grit in your students.

Intelligence Versus Grit

Beginning with Sir Francis Galton in the late 1800s, psychologists have been enamored by the individual differences that make up varying levels of intelligence. Studying intelligence began as a very practical matter: Educators needed to identify which students would need special help in school, and the military needed to quickly assess the abilities of its recruits. There were even some years when scientists toyed with the idea of limiting procreation to those who met certain intellectual criteria. I'm not kidding.

You are likely familiar with the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, a five-factor instrument that assesses fluid reasoning, knowledge, quantitative reasoning, visual-spatial processing, and working memory (Roid, 2003). The scales have undergone five iterations since 1916 and are frequently used to determine appropriate special education interventions.

Most recently, Howard Gardner's (2000) theory of multiple intelligences started discussions centered on the myriad ways we can demonstrate intelligence. Gardner identified the following learning styles: visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical. His research inspired an explosion of ideas in the teaching world. Teachers tailored their instruction to the learning styles of their students, but even still, they continued to struggle with motivating their students and increasing their achievement.

Clearly, we don't have this intelligence thing figured out just yet. But who really cares? Intelligence does not guarantee success or happiness or world peace. High school reunions are full of smart people who accomplished little. Keeping up with old friends on

social media reveals stories of people with limited intelligence who surprised everyone by their achievements. Sure, there is research to indicate that performance, particularly in traditional learning environments, can be predicted by intelligence. But we are finding that something more is needed in this society of hashtags, drones, and self-parking cars.

Grit is about internal fortitude and zeal.

That something else may be grit. Duckworth (2016), a professor and researcher, has become the name associated with grit. She defined *grit* as sustained perseverance coupled with intense passion. Notice the absence of *intelligence* in that definition. Furthermore, what else is missing? Luck, talent, wealth, fairy godmother. . . . According to Duckworth, people can be successful if they can persevere through challenges and if they are passionate about their pursuit. Of course, it's easier to pursue when one has luck, talent, wealth, or a fairy godmother, but grit isn't about easy. Grit is about internal fortitude and zeal. It requires commitment, thick skin, and (I'm sure you've already guessed it) self-discipline.

Self-Discipline

Self-discipline is the ability to control an impulse in order to overcome a weakness. It's the ability to not grab a handful of Skittles when you pass by the candy bowl, to stay in and study when you want to meet up with your friends, to not respond to a text message while driving. This control over your behavior is based on a value judgment; you are making a difficult decision to pick the "better" choice.

This obviously implies that you recognize which one is the better choice. Raise your hand if you've taught a student who strug-

gles with impulse control, who has absolutely no concept that a “better” choice even exists. I know we’ve all been there. Although the ability to manage our impulses improves as we age, it’s definitely related to maturity, temperament, and genetics (Dewar, 2011–2015; Smith, Mick, & Faraone, 2009). I’m sure you’re thinking (again) that this is just one more thing you can’t control about your students. And you’re right.

Self-discipline is the ability to control an impulse in order to overcome a weakness.

However, there is an important part you play as a teacher. You can reward your students for exhibiting self-control. Depending on the age of your students, this could be the amount of time your students work independently or how they transition from activity to activity. The reward you provide could be a silly sticker, authentic and specific praise, or extra free time. The point is that you recognize and reinforce what you want to see in your students.

Wilhelm Hofmann and his colleagues (2013) studied self-control and how it relates to happiness. They found that people with higher self-control are not only happier with their lives, but happier in the moment they made the controlled choice. This shocked me, as I regularly wrestle my health conscience over my late-night snacks. I usually eat my carrots with a snarl, wishing I had picked the cookies. Even further, they reported that people with higher self-control put themselves into fewer positions where they would have to make a difficult choice. Basically, they are saying to not buy the cookies in the first place. (Ugh.)

The influence self-discipline has on student achievement is astounding. In a study of eighth-grade students, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that students with higher self-discipline outperformed the others on attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and admission to a magnet high school. Self-discipline explained more variance in these measures than IQ. See? I told

you intelligence was nothing to fret over. Grittier people are also more likely to keep their jobs, graduate from high school, and stay married (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). That's something, y'all.

And it's not even a research fad! We're talking Francis Galton in 1869, William James in 1890, and Sigmund Freud in 1920 *all* found that the ability to regulate one's behavior was crucial to success. And their findings have been replicated so many times since then (Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino, & Barbaranelli, 2011; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014). Self-discipline is important.

Duckworth (2016) proposed that goals are built into a hierarchy with actions at the bottom and goals above, all leading to a super stretch goal. Grit is the ability to stay focused on that super goal, regardless of distractions and setbacks. Self-control is the ability to choose to complete the actions leading to that goal instead of choosing an activity that does not lead to the goal. It doesn't necessarily even need to be a negative activity. For example, my super goal was to write a bestselling book about grit in the classroom that would be so revered that I would end up on a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. (Yes, I realize there are some issues with my logic here, but a girl can dream.) A lower goal was to read Angela Duckworth's (2016) book on grit. An activity leading to that goal was reading every day. A competing activity was picking up a "fun" book to read (sorry, Angela). Reading the "fun" book isn't going to harm me, but it's also not getting me any closer to my super goal. Encouraging students to attain their goals can be accomplished in much the same way. Figure 1 is an example of a student's super goal. Attaining a super goal requires self-discipline, which ultimately leads to perseverance.

Perseverance

Perseverance is a behavior, a purposeful action to pursue a goal or task despite obstacles. Perseverance is Kennedy Cobble,

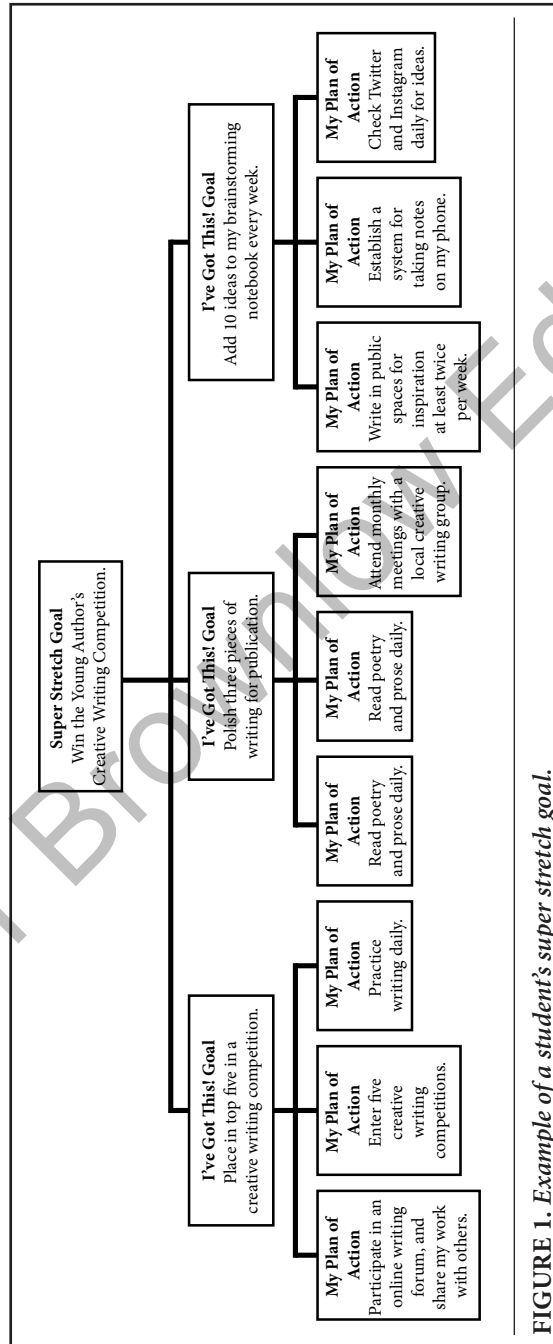


FIGURE 1. Example of a student's super stretch goal.

who started her battle with cancer a decade ago at 14. Since then, she's beat cancer four times and is now pursuing a career in education (Minutaglio, 2016). Perseverance is Jack Andraka who was rejected 199 times before he was granted a science lab at Johns Hopkins University to develop an easy and inexpensive test to detect pancreatic cancer (Tucker, 2012). Perseverance is Mustafa Khaleefah, who moved to the United States as an Iraqi refugee in sixth grade, started playing football as a high school sophomore, was heavily recruited by a dozen colleges, and then committed to Michigan State University (McCabe, 2016).

I encourage you to brainstorm this idea of perseverance as it applies to people you and your students know. The reason why this is important is simple: It's easy to talk about the perseverance of these unique individuals, but many of us don't have Kennedy's experiences (thankfully), Jack's opportunities, or Mustafa's circumstances. It's not easy to recognize perseverance in ourselves and in the people we know. And if we can't recognize it, how can we celebrate and repeat it?

Perseverance is a behavior, a purposeful action to pursue a goal or task despite obstacles.

Perseverance is *not* to be confused with compliance. One way to think of compliance is the adherence to rules and expectations. Anyone who has participated in a school fire drill knows that compliance is important here. However, another kind of compliance is the submissive, unengaged completion of assigned tasks. This type of compliance should in no way be the goal of a teacher. If you're a sheep herder or a snake charmer? Fine. But not a teacher. The difference lies in where the behavior begins. Compliance is something forced onto you. It's like saying you're sorry just to end an argument, even when you don't feel sorry. You're not committed enough to approach the conflict with an attitude of perseverance. You would rather just give in and move on. (I may be speaking

from experience here.) Classrooms are full of students completing assignments out of compliance. They're quiet and working, but far from engaged. When faced with a challenge, their effort will be minimal toward solving it—if they don't just give up. Students who complete their assignments out of compliance are not going to become gritty. They aren't developing a passion, and they won't persevere when things get tough.

In a 2016 *Fortune* 500 Insiders Network forum, Greg Hyslop, the chief technology officer of The Boeing Company, made the case that perseverance is the most important skill a millennial can have. Hyslop argued that most of Boeing's projects could take a decade or more to complete, but that many younger employees won't stick around to their completion. Those who stay with a project long term learn the problem solving and conflict management skills that are critical to being successful in innovative fields. Those who quit and move onto the next shiny object miss out on those skills. (Go ahead and picture one of those people right now. I know you know one.)

Showing perseverance, especially in an imperfect situation, shows that you are trustworthy. In the wise words of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, "You can stand me up at the gates of hell, but I won't back down." Obviously the particular gates of hell can vary throughout your life—the point is you don't give up. By sticking with something, you show those around you that you are committed to the task, regardless of the obstacle.

Additionally, by not giving up, you are also teaching yourself some valuable lessons. You recognize that your life is in your control, that you dictate what happens. In this realization, you gain power over the decisions you make. You can also learn something from the pursuit of a challenge, perhaps expanding your interests in a new direction. Imagine what this can do for your students, your students who are shuffled from class to class, who have little say in their daily activities or routines. But they do have control over how they respond to the obstacles they experience, and, in that moment, they have the power needed to build grit.