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Grit in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In the United States today, educational opportunity is not equally distributed. Statistical data show a persistent educational achievement gap that disproportionately affects students of color or with a low socioeconomic status. There have been countless efforts to reform this inequality within the American school system; however, many efforts have ignored underlying issues regarding power structures and may instead be rooted in the biased beliefs of dominant culture. Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Public Charter Schools, in particular, emphasize seven character strengths that are intended to promote success for their students and bring them to and through college. Such traits may provide valuable insights on the intersection of education and on structural issues such as culture, power and race. This thesis explores the intersection of the character strength grit as proposed by Angela Duckworth and how it intersects with equity. The hope is that through the use of teacher interviews and classroom observations, readers can better understand how teachers understand the racial or socioeconomic implications of teaching grit in their classrooms.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As policymakers once again turn their eyes toward education and school reform,

the landscape looks bleak; the United States is still struggling to fulfill its most basic

promise of equal opportunity for all citizens. As has been the case for decades, data

indicate the existence of a persistent educational achievement and opportunity gap

disproportionately affecting both students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and

students of color (Editorial Projects in Education Research, 2011). Low expectations and

commonly held assumptions have perpetuated the prevalent belief that inner city and

rural children are "doomed to low grades, poor test scores, menial jobs and hard lives"

(Mathews, 2009). Attempts at education reform are numerous and, whereas some have

attained limited success and a closure of the achievement gap, other efforts have proven

ineffective, costly and even detrimental to students' success. As the urgency for K-12

education reform continues to build, many reformers and scholars have advocated for the

inclusion of character education or the teaching of non-academic skills in schools. The

common narrative by these reformers is that schools are the most well-positioned social

institutions to teach skills that students need for college and career readiness and that

there may be no skill more needed by students than grit.

Termed by positive psychologist Angela Duckworth, the concept of grit has been

covered heavily in popular culture, including in Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed:*

Grit, Curiosity and the Hidden Power of Character, articles in *The Atlantic* and features

on *National Public Radio* (Tough, 2013; Kamenetz, 2015). In fact, in response to many

popular articles and discussions about grit, Duckworth (2016a) outlined and defended her hypothesis and concept in *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, a book released the same year as this paper. For Duckworth, grit is the ability to persevere through obstacles while also having the passion to achieve long-term goals. In her words: "To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down seven times and rise eight (Duckworth, 2016a).

Without hesitation, schools have bought into Duckworth's hypothesis that grit is necessary for success and have begun to consider how grit – as one part of their character education curriculum – could inform their curricula. For example, students could exhibit grit in pursuing a long-term project or by correctly identifying it in a literary character. Grit instruction could consist of stories of 'paragons of grit', as Duckworth terms them, and how their passion and perseverance prepared them for success outside of school. Consequently, these schools have begun efforts to inculcate and measure grit in students. By focusing on the development of grit within institutions of education, students are, according to Duckworth, able to better commit to long-term tasks, demonstrate resilience during difficult situations, and show more success in every aspect of life (Duckworth, 2016a).

However, this practice has not been without criticism. The very definition of grit appears to be oft-misunderstood and mistakenly compared to hard work or self-control. Duckworth's definition appears two-fold in her academic research as passion and

perseverance towards long-term goals, but there is a clear mismatch between her definition and others' perceptions of the concept.

Arguments against the application of grit education in schools include concerns that it ignores structural issues that stem from poverty, unfairly expects students to push through rather than challenge adversity, contributes to authoritarian politics in which individuals are pushed to persist or follow orders despite being in situations that ought to be questioned, and embodies and emboldens values of the dominant culture (Gow, 2014; Herold, 2015 in Tampio, 2016). In addition to concerns regarding the appropriateness of teaching grit in the schools, other critics argue that it is simply not a feasible topic to assess and promote in classrooms (Zinshteyn, 2015). Factors that contribute to this include poor implementation integrity - possibly due to lack of understanding of the concept - and the overall subjective nature of grit, as educators are unable to fully and accurately assess its presence in students. Additionally, these critics argue that many teachers, due to their own biases and privileges, may overlook non-traditional "gritty" actions that students make in the classroom or that occur in their home lives, instead only looking for their narrow conception of grit. For some students, the act of attending school on a regular basis is a demonstration of grit in the context of the challenges that they may face at home or on their way to school. If teachers do not recognize those instances of grit and instead assess students solely based on the observable actions narrowly defined by dominant culture, teachers risk mislabeling, disciplining or entirely missing students' gritty actions or experiences (Powell, 2016).

Duckworth's definition of grit is new and does not match a traditional, dictionary definition of "firmness of character" or an "indomitable spirit" (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Her tweaking of the definition is notable and worth consideration towards why she might have chosen to use the word grit rather than passion, or simply perseverance. Though there does not appear to be research on Duckworth et al.'s definition development, this context is crucial to understanding the current state of research and the later results of this study.

To date, only a few studies have examined the connection of grit and other character traits to academic outcomes. No studies have focused on the intersection of grit, culture, power and race among students or for teachers (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Milson, 2000; Romanowski, 2005). Given that teachers are an integral part of the learning experience and critical influence on students' successes, there is a demonstrated need to better understand how teachers (a) have interpreted the popular narrative of grit; (b) integrate it into their classroom; and (c) adapt their pedagogical approaches to teaching grit. This study examines the intersection of grit and equity through the perspectives of teachers in two schools in the Northeast United States. Through the use of individual interviews, classroom observations and a qualitative focus group, this study provides information about teachers' perceptions of grit and its presence in schools and encourages further research into this important concept that could have far-reaching implications for student outcomes.

Review of Literature

Failure to acknowledge the current role of race and class in America's schools is a mistake. Serving as the key place where family, community and governmental policy meet, schools and their students are directly influenced by their surrounding social environment (Gutmann, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Numerous factors can affect a student's academic achievement. However, race and class arguably have the largest impact on the day-to-day life of each of our fifty million students in the United States, in both urban and rural settings. Such factors have both obvious and covert impacts. For example, race and class impact the ways in which students are perceived by their teachers and in how they are supported in their pursuit of academic goals (Howard, 2010). Research has shown that some schools maintain a culture of low expectations tied to student historical performance, overall school demographics and teacher experience working with diverse students (Ibid.). Ultimately, these factors and countless others drive inequity in educational and life opportunities between white students and students of color (Murray, Waas & Murray, 2008; Warikoo, 2004).

Over the past three decades specifically, there have been a variety of targeted efforts to eliminate the achievement gap between white students and students of color. Whereas some of these efforts have been driven by federal education reform such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) or the Race to the Top Fund, others have been imagined and implemented by charter school networks or by educational reform organizations such as Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) or Teach For America. Organic local efforts through grassroots organizations such as the Harlem

Children's Zone or Chicago Teaching Fellows have also developed (Howard, 2010). Over the past few decades, the academic achievement of students of color and of those from a low-income background has entered the forefront of people's minds and of policy development. Current focus is on the use of character education as one way of improving academic achievement for underserved populations. This approach has been particularly popular with charter school networks and non-traditional public schools.

Charter schools, originally intended to serve as centers for educational innovation and to provide opportunities for parents to have more choice in their child's education, run the gamut in their overall effectiveness, particularly in serving students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (Carruthers, 2012; Davis & Raymond, 2012). By holding all educational agencies such as districts and charter school networks accountable for gains in student learning, particularly among groups of historically underperforming students; the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) served as a monumental push in accountability and in holding all schools, including charters, to high expectations of student achievement and success.

Perhaps best known by their motto – *Work Hard, Be Nice* – the KIPP public charter school network operates on the core belief that students can *only* be successful in college and in life with the development of key character traits such as grit (KIPP, 2015). Along with other traits such as curiosity, zest, tenacity, motivation, and a growth mindset, KIPP schools have incorporated grit into their daily activities, quarterly projects and classroom interactions. KIPP schools have then achieved scaled success across the country in standardized test scores and college-graduation rates, partially attributed to the

use of character traits in their curriculum and the infusion of the traits, which they call character strengths, throughout entire school cultures.

KIPP schools overwhelmingly serve students-of-color and students who come from a low-income household. In fact, nationally, more than 86% of KIPP students are eligible for free/reduced lunch and over 95% are students of color. In the past, KIPP schools have been criticized for their overwhelmingly strict discipline policies – having been described as "no excuses", "paternalistic" or "devoted to sweating the small stuff" (Carr, 2014). Some students and educational critics have even described the culture as the "Kids in Prison Program" (Ibid.). As critics have noted, these "zealous disciplinary tactics" are "overrepresented in poor urban districts" and contribute to "persistent racial gaps in students' experiences" (Ibid.). A concern exists that the character traits infused in KIPP curricula may also be used to enforce a strict discipline culture – for example, disciplinary measures may be used when a student is not exhibiting "grit" or is perhaps exhibiting too much "zest" within the classroom. This may only further the intense racial gap in school discipline.

Given that grit is so crucial to school culture and discipline in these schools serving largely students-of-color, it is worth investigating the intersection between race and grit. Schools do not release disciplinary data to the public, traditionally, but previous studies have indicated that black students are disciplined at disproportionally higher rates than white students. In a school that utilizes a no excuses culture; one infraction may lead to large consequences. For students who are faced with challenges at home only to come to school forced to conform, this could be incredibly demoralizing. Teaching grit may

appear to be a net positive for students in the aggregate, but if not exhibiting grit in a no excuses school leads to discipline, students of color could be subjected to policies that do not account for their own individual circumstances or backgrounds.

As one method of assessing student grit and in building a school culture that values character, KIPP schools utilize character report cards to show how students are progressing in their development of grit (see Appendix A). Some descriptors used in the report card include student's abilities to: "get over frustrations and setbacks quickly", "finish whatever he or she begins" and in "invigorat[ing] others". These character traits, used in some – but not all – of their schools throughout the country are rooted in Duckworth's research on grit as the "perseverance and passion to achieve long-term goals" (Duckworth, 2016a). Aspinwall and Tedeschi (2010) claim that the development of these critical skills for life success occurs throughout individuals' lives, including within the classroom. By experiencing and practicing the ability to bounce back from adverse situations, students can develop personality traits and build the ability to deal with the aftermath of stress and trauma caused by unfavorable encounters within the classroom (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). By incorporating these skills into classroom curricula, as KIPP schools have done, students then are able to benefit from increased self-efficacy and educational gains (Jensen, 2009).

A first glance at a KIPP school might suggest that these character skills are directly linked with success in and outside of the classroom and that if students master these skills - as assessed by their teachers, they will ultimately be successful. Yet scholars, educators and psychologists disagree on what it means and what it looks like to

be resilient or "gritty" (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Kamenetz, 2015). While some students may encounter situations that require a certain level of "grittiness" daily, others may be identified or praised as having grit, despite not being exposed to the same level of adversity or persisting at the same rate. Grit looks different based on individual situations and can be subject to wide and varied levels of interpretation based on a rater's own cultural background, biases and cultural norms. One teacher might interpret a student continually coming back to writing a story in a journal as gritty, while another may view it as too insignificant or as not showing passion or perseverance in any way. One teacher might interpret a student arriving at school late as a time-management concern, when in fact, it might be an instance of grit for as a student who works every day to prepare his brother for school while his or her parents are working. The variation is wide and interpretation requires a lens of cultural competency and a deep understanding of every individual child.

Research indicates that any student can perform poorly or face adversity; however, "students who are living in poverty, who [hold] membership in a [non-dominant] race or ethnic group, [acquired a] first language other than English, [are a product of a] single-parent family composition, parents' low level of education, [or] rural geographic status" are more likely to be subject to adverse risk factors than other students. (Barr & Parrett, 2001 in McMahon, 2015). For these students, adversity may be more of a daily factor in their life that affects their "vision of education as a means of achieving success" (Peart & Campbell, 1999 in McMahon, 2015). As McMahon asserts, there is then a "need to examine the school policies and practices that enhance or hinder

student success and to acknowledge that some students experience greater risk of academic underachievement than others and that academic achievement is a gatekeeper to life chances for adolescents and adults." (McMahon, 2015). This inequality in experiences and unclear definition of what it means to have grit informs this study and the desire to learn more about how teachers interact with grit. Teacher definitions of grit may rest on cultural biases, racial stereotypes or beliefs, dominant cultural understandings and on middle-class values and aspirations that maintain the status quo and the power of cultural capital -- and so, it is important that these are investigated so as to provide further insights and to reduce inequality in American schools (Delpit, 1995).

As noted before, to date very little is known about grit and about its impact on students in schools. Though Duckworth et al.'s (2007) research indicated that grit is predictive of success for a variety of individuals, including students at West Point Military Academy, National Spelling Bee contestants, Teach For America teachers, and salespeople at a vacation-time-share company, there is still a dearth of academic research surrounding her claim that grit can equal success (Duckworth et al., 2007). Yet schools across the county, particularly urban charter schools, assess grit in students and implement programs to promote it. This past year, nine California school districts have started to "incorporate measures of character into their accountability systems" and Duckworth herself "worries [that she's] contributed, inadvertently, to an idea [she] vigorously oppose[s]: high-stakes character assessment" (Duckworth, 2016b). Duckworth continues on:

> A 2011 meta-analysis of more than 200 school-based programs found that
> teaching social and emotional skills can improve behavior and raise academic

achievement, strong evidence that school is an important arena for the
development of character.

But we're nowhere near ready — and perhaps never will be — to use feedback on
character as a metric for judging the effectiveness of teachers and schools. We
shouldn't be rewarding or punishing schools for how students perform on these
measures.

Given how little is still known about grit, this study makes the deliberate choice to focus

on urban schools. Specifically, the study will aim to determine how student grit is

defined, interpreted, and assessed in classrooms. Furthermore, the study will examine

teachers' consideration of ecological factors, such as race and socioeconomic status when

identifying and interpreting actions and traits they associate with grit. Are students in

these institutions actively observed for and graded on their grittiness? How do teachers

define and act on their perception of grit, and how have they have interpreted it? Do

teachers consider of even approach the complexities of race in the classroom and how

students-of-color might be impacted by the teaching and assessment of character traits

such as grit? Understanding and answering teacher's perceptions of grit in the classroom

can help administrators, teachers, and policymakers develop stronger approaches to

supporting and advancing positive learning outcomes for all students.

Conceptual Framework

In order to better understand the intersection of grit and race and how teachers

understand it, this study grounds itself in Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) critical

theory of race in education, which is "used to analyze social inequity that is covertly

demonstrated through racist practices within academic institutions" (Brown-Jeffy &

Cooper, 2011). Defined by Solorzano and Yosso (2000), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is:

a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze and transform those structural, cultural and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of students [of color] and asks such questions as: what roles do schools, school processes and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic and gender subordination (As quoted in Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

It may be easy or useful to look at schools, curricula and the concept of grit using a psychological lens, especially given Duckworth, et al.'s (2007) focus and specialization in positive psychology, but in using CRT, this paper holds a focus on how grit might covertly serve as an agent of subtle discrimination and of conformity to the generally accepted dominant culture. Specifically, this paper is grounded in the variety of ways that teachers and students experience the intersection of race and cultural conflict in the classroom (Delpit, 1995).

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Drawing on a pilot study conducted as a part of a graduate research methods course, my coursework in teaching and learning pedagogy and on my studies in the sociology of education and cultural and educational policy studies; I have developed a strong interest in the ways in which educational systems can increase student outcomes through innovative educational models. The assessment of student outcomes and understanding of how to scale the impact of highly effective teachers intersect my personal and professional work. Race, class and ethnicity impact the lives of students daily and it would be a disservice to my students not to investigate how dominant cultural narratives or beliefs might hold students back from reaching their full potential. To view character traits as a panacea would be misleading; but it would also be a mistake to ignore their potential impact on student success.

To date, research has focused on the psychological underpinnings of non-academic and character skills as well as their ability to change student mindsets. This study has the potential to further existing research by focusing on the teachers' perceptions of grit and how their perceptions intersect with their individual identities, race, power, cultural factors and inequality. Thus, a qualitative approach was adopted to answer study questions using teacher interviews. As described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon. Given this and the need to address research questions through teacher interaction, there was a deliberate focus on meaning and understanding, utilizing the researcher as a primary instrument for data collection and analysis and developing rich descriptions to describe a particular phenomenon (i.e. grit) (Ibid.). In this specific research methodology, teachers' lived experiences are crucial to building understanding and to shedding light as to motivations, implicit thoughts, ideas or assumptions.

The literature reviewed above then gives rise to the following questions, whose answers will guide understanding and further research on grit and race in schools:

1. To what extent, if any, do educators consider the racial implications of grit and character education in their classroom?
2. What sociocultural or school factors inform how teachers implement character education and understand and recognize the concept of grit in their classrooms?

CHAPTER TWO

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Two urban schools in the Northeast United States were selected from which to recruit participants for the current study. One of the schools was a charter school with approximately 500 students and an explicit focus on character education; the other was a magnet school with approximately 350 students and a focus on positive behavior interventions and relationship-building – with no explicit focus on character education. Both schools served over 80% students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch and over 65% of students at both schools were students of color. The choice was made to use these two schools as research sites due to convenience and because of the importance of gathering rich data from at least two schools that diverge in their structure (e.g. charter v. magnet). Data was collected in the Spring of 2016 over two separate visits to each school for individual interviews, classroom observations, and a teacher focus group.

Robust qualitative note-taking focusing on the remembered experiences, discussed motivations and knowledge from teacher interviews, which provided the most insights for how teachers interpreted grit; while classroom observations provided an opportunity to witness teacher actions and student responses. Teachers were asked questions from a pre-approved protocol (see Appendix B) and shared stories, anecdotes and insights as a result of probing from those protocol questions.

Participants

Participants at both schools were recruited through a normally-scheduled school faculty meeting where I introduced myself and my proposed research questions to groups of elementary and middle school teachers. The only restrictions for participation in the study is that all teachers directly work with a diverse population of students and have a firm understanding of the concept of grit prior to volunteering to participate in the study. No incentives were offered to teachers and they were each provided copies of consent forms at the faculty meeting (see Appendix C) and were offered the opportunity to opt in or out of each of my three qualitative research methods. They were again afforded this opportunity prior to the start of any research with the specific teachers.

A total of 14 individual teachers participated in this study and the group was diverse in almost every respect, save for gender. Many participants self-identified as a person of color or as otherwise sharing the backgrounds of the students that they taught. All teachers had taught for at least three years and were in at least their second year of teaching at the schools used as research sites.

Finally, it is worth noting that the exclusion of traditional public schools was deliberate given the difficulty and barriers to conducting research in the most convenient school district. My limited investigation of the field has indicated that few public schools have incorporated character education into their school-wide curricula at this time, which further limited my research sites to schools that were provided with more flexibility in their curricula, specifically charter and magnet schools. By juxtaposing a charter school specifically with a magnet school in my selected research sites, research data became

more robust and better illuminated the ways in which teachers understand and interpret grit in their classrooms.

Instruments

All study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Loyola University Chicago. Principals at the two schools consented for recruitment and study procedures to take place on their campuses. All participants were assured of information confidentiality and the right to opt out of the study or to choose not to answer any question at any time.

For individual interviews with teachers, recordings were made and transcribed when written permission was provided; handwritten notes were also taken in order to provide support and context. No recordings were made of classroom observations due to IRB requirements. The teacher focus group was recorded and transcribed pursuant to the privacy and confidentiality requirements of the IRB. No identifying information was used in notes or retained from recordings at any time. All recordings were destroyed following transcription.

The use of a focus group was chosen very deliberately as it provides a group setting where ideas can be built and expanded upon. For teachers, it provided an opportunity to 'bounce ideas off of each other' and for the researcher to learn more about what tensions and knowledge might exist 'below the surface'. Hennink (2014) notes how discussion leads to a "different type of data not accessible through individual interviews". The question protocol for both individual interviews and the teacher focus group was the same - semi-structured so as to build rapport with the group and to allow the discussion to

flow naturally and not be limited by the questions themselves (See Appendix B). In every situation, the approved questioning protocol was used, though the conversation was allowed to naturally progress and deviation was allowed. Given limitations in recording students and obtaining consent, classroom observations were limited to qualitative note-taking about the environment and student/teacher interactions witnessed.

Data Analysis

Data was collected in one of two ways – recordings and/or qualitative notes. Per the requirements of the IRB, individual interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, unless the teachers in the individual interviews specifically requested not to be recorded, which occurred a total of four times.

Transcripts and notes were then re-read for patterns and themes by the principal investigator multiple times over the course of approximately a week. As noted later in the study, respondent validation was also used to confirm intentions and statements. Key themes and patterns were highlighted manually and five themes arose: (1) teacher knowledge; (2) external factors; (3) school culture; (4) implicit/explicit character education; and (5) assessment.

Overwhelmingly, over sixty percent of quotes or comments were associated with either teacher knowledge or external factors, specifically on race and culture. This led to a study focus on these two areas in particular and informed both findings and implications. Overall, data in the forms of codes and quotes provided valuable qualitative insights into how teachers grapple with the teaching of grit as well as the racial and societal issues surrounding the teaching of the character trait.

Validity

Crucial to this study was its qualitative reliability and validity. To ensure that results and conclusions drawn from study data are meaningful to the students, schools and communities that might use these insights as a basis for further research, research triangulation through the usage of multiple school sites and the sampling of multiple teachers working in different classrooms was used. Triangulation helped to confirm emerging findings and to identify points of convergence within the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There were notable potential threats to validity within this study, including the limitation of a focus group as being an avenue for individuals to express their true feelings or if they feel uncomfortable in participating in group discussions about race and privilege or about what is taught within the four walls of their classroom. Another threat could have been bias and privilege as a white male conducting research on race and on the impact that this could make in transcription coding and in findings discussion. To combat these two potential threats to the study's validity, teachers were presented with the option of providing additional comments or thoughts in a secure, anonymous and individual way during my time at the school site, though no participants accepted this offer.

It is worth noting that at both schools, all teachers attending the faculty meeting volunteered to be informally interviewed and allow for a classroom observation, but only few volunteered to participate in a teacher focus group. As noted earlier in this study, some schools have recently adopted new approaches to assessing character and it is

possible that teachers may have self-excluded from the focus group to avoid discussion on this or on their practice with their colleagues. There is also the possibility that teachers may have initially felt comfortable with joining the focus group only to learn that questions might broach topics such as race, class and ethnicity and so, then opted out so as to avoid potentially sharing a controversial opinion or impacting their collegial relationships. This may have been even more important in schools where department chairs and teacher leaders may have had some type of personnel impact on their colleagues. This was unanticipated for in the initial design of the study and notable as I analyzed my results.

Finally, respondent validation was used and teacher participants were solicited for direct feedback on the research protocol and on accuracy of investigator notetaking (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). Given that this research took place in schools and that teacher interviews took place in time-constrained contexts, it was incredibly important that misunderstandings were addressed at the outset and that participants believe that their story and our understanding and synthesis of the focus group discussions "ring true" for the teachers themselves (Ibid.).

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS

The findings from this phenomenological qualitative study were derived from transcripts and interview data from four individual classroom observations, 12 separate teacher interviews, and 1 teacher focus group that included 4 veteran teachers. A total of 14 total teachers participated in this study.

The findings and results were linked to the two research questions and led to the identification of three key themes: 1) teacher knowledge of grit; 2) teacher understanding of external factors such as race and culture; and 3) the ways in which grit is exhibited and taught in the classroom.

Teacher Knowledge

Interviews indicated that teachers were already familiar with grit and could provide their own definitions of the term. In fact, when probed with an initial question about character education, 8 of the 12 teachers who were individually interviewed immediately began to describe characteristics of what they termed as grit. Though none of the 12 teachers had the opportunity to learn about grit in their teacher preparation program (both alternative and traditional), 6 out of the 12 participants described how they first learned about grit online or through a colleague. These referrals may be due to grit's recent surge in popularity or due to a lack of innovation in teacher preparation. In one teacher's words:

> My principal emailed me an article a few months back about how soft skills like working hard and never giving up were the answer to classroom improvement. I took it with a grain of salt, as I do most PD [professional development], but when you think about it, it makes sense. That's what jobs want. That's what we know, like, makes a successful person. Why shouldn't it be taught in schools? What's one more thing, right?

No teachers in the individual interviews or focus group had received any formal instruction on the topic of grit. That said, some teachers had engaged with research or participated in broader workshops about non-academic traits.

> When asked to define grit in his or her own words, one teacher shared that:

> I had always thought that it was important to get back up after you've fallen, to never ever give up. And grit was a way of putting that into a single word. It's not new. It's not earthshattering. I just want all of my students to feel that way and know that they can. To know that one bad grade doesn't mean you can't get a great grade next time.

> When asked how one might define grit to their students, another teacher shared that:

> It's about not quitting. It's pushing through the mud and keeping at it, no matter what obstacle life throws your way. Our students have that naturally; they just need to know that it's important in the real world.

> One kindergarten teacher employed by the magnet school immediately shared at the beginning of her interview that teaching grit is similar to teaching mindfulness. When probed further about how mindfulness might bring about or reinforce grit, the participant argued that "mindfulness brings about awareness about the world and the actions that we take." She continued:

> Students, especially at the elementary age, sometimes get stuck in a 'lose-lose loop,' where actions lead to consequences and people might feel hurt, but by making a 'win-win loop,' students are able to see how even when bad things happen, they can always turn it around by working harder.

Her comments reflect a limited understanding of grit, but her example and a later classroom observation where she asked students to "keep pushing, it's hard, but think how great it'll feel once you're done" suggests that her understanding of grit may be developmentally appropriate for her students. The statement furthermore indicates that by incorporating systems thinking into her classroom, this teacher is interpreting or reinterpreting grit in her own way – thus giving the word its own individual and unique meaning to her and her students.

These comments suggest that teachers have a baseline understanding of grit and that the larger discussion about the merit of character traits related to grit has entered into these schools, at least among interviewed teachers. Yet, despite their general understanding of the concept, no teachers implicitly or explicitly identified that grit has two separate components. Mere persistence or talent is not synonymous with grit. Across classrooms and schools, there is confusion on what grit looks like and how to assess it.

Seven of the teachers interviewed used the word resilience or perseverance in place of grit at one point during the individual interview, but no teacher used the word passion in any interview. This could be for a variety of reasons, but suggests that teachers are not as familiar with Duckworth's research or with the theoretical underpinning behind grit. As noted earlier, Duckworth et al.'s (2007) definition of grit lies mostly in academia and so teachers in practice appear to have re-interpreted grit in their own ways.

Race and Culture – External Factors

Data collected through interviews indicate that this select group of teachers has an understanding of how grit may serve to oppress students of color and the impact that the

teacher-student relationship could have on student development. One teacher, who had a

previous background in implementing character trait development for the school system,

describes these external factors expertly:

> Kids in poverty, at least the kids in [school name], exhibit grit all the time. Sure, grit is taught here. At school. But there's a natural resiliency, coming to school every day, being passionate about what they are learning – and that's grit. The circumstances that our students face outside of [school name], that's grit. We get it. By focusing on it and acknowledging it so much and applying that grit to collegiate circumstances, we work to level the playing field, making them more likely to succeed in life.

Two other teachers in the focus group agreed with this sentiment, either nodding

their head or verbally agreeing. External factors such as poverty, systemic racism, or

socioeconomic status matter. One teacher shared in her individual interview that:

> We have to recognize the assets of our students. Low expectations and deficit-based thinking based on race, on—on—size—on, whatever. It doesn't work here. All our students are impacted by society. They're impacted by race. They're impacted by how much money their parents make or how many jobs their parents work. That's part of them. But our schools make a difference despite that.
> When teachers in the focus group were asked about how they might "believe

one's culture or ethnicity may impact the way in which they work" teachers unanimously

said that it mostly depends on the parents. One teacher remarked that "culture or ethnicity

played a significant role, but not a controlling role." Instead, as two teachers agreed –

cultural norms might lead to "something like comparing answers or difference in

approach on how students might approach a teacher with a question," but that when it

came to independent classroom work or to how students interpret and identify with

character traits, much more important is the "involvement and approach of the parents."

In this way, teachers view parents as partially responsible for the teaching of character

traits to their children.

Throughout data collection, it was clear that the charter school focus group provided the most robust conversation on race – answering the question: "How do you believe that your understanding of race, culture, class, and ethnicity affects how you teach grit?" The room was entirely silent for perhaps 45 seconds before the first participant spoke up: "It doesn't," she said. "Two totally separate things." Another teacher shared: "Listen, I'm a white woman. I was never prepared for teaching in [a city]. I didn't grow up with racism. It didn't impact me. But it impacts my students. And it impacts how I teach everything, even grit […]. I'll never get it. But I can make sure my curriculum is relevant, my real-life examples are on point and my students know I care."

The room again became silent as the three other teachers appeared to process her statement. The room remained silent until I redirected the conversation by asking whether they discussed race directly with their students. Again, the room of four veteran teachers was silent and the tension in the room was palpable.

When no teachers spoke up, I asked with jest – "does that mean you don't talk about it" and a few teachers smiled sheepishly as though it was something they should have done, but have not. I explore this moment more in the discussion.

Overwhelmingly, it appeared that teachers in the urban research sites had a basic understanding of student circumstances and how social factors such as race and class might factor in, but had not considered it to a great extent. Instead, many teachers have only considered race and class tangentially and have instead placed the focus almost entirely on academic outcomes. One teacher remarked:

> I guess I feel sometimes powerless. Like there are all these things that are holding my students back and that there's nothing I can do. I am comforted by knowing

that there are huge wins that happen every day. Students can overcome anything. I've seen them do it. As their teacher, I support them, but it's my students who actually do it.

Applications of Grit in the Classroom

There was slight variation in how teachers defined grit and in how they considered the intersection of race with grit; but perhaps even more variant were the differences in how teachers applied or taught or grit in the classroom. This was an unexpected result. After all, if definitions and implications differ – so would how grit is displayed in a classroom. When asked about examples used to give students a grasp of how grit applies to real world experiences, one teacher noted that it almost always comes from literature and an example of this was seen in a classroom observation. In the study participant's eighth grade classroom, she moved around the room individually checking student papers and asked them to read their answers and discuss with a classmate. When talking about a recent novel that they had read, the study participant and classroom teacher said:

> Can you reread that last paragraph about Stanley? […] He keeps walking and walking, pushing through his thirst to get to the stream at God's Thumb. [Student name], can you tell me what character trait Stanley is exhibiting most here?

Students immediately, almost in unison - despite the question having been asked to only one student - answered that it was grit. Despite a strong classroom example and student engagement with grit, it was also evident that this was an incorrect understanding of the term by the students, who likely learned their response from their teacher or in a previous lesson.

When asked about exemplars of grit tied to real-world experiences, another

teacher shared that:

> My students don't need me to guide them in doing that. Lunchroom
> conversations, passing periods - they use our character trait words, calling
> someone's game gritty, or noting how much self-control it must have taken to do
> 'X'. It's kind of cool to see. It's them making these concepts relevant.

At the charter school where the focus group was held, teachers shared how grit

also features prominently in discussions at parent/teacher conferences:

> Yep, we grade grit. Every teacher, every class. On a level 1 to 5 – very much
> unlike the student to very much like the student. At PT [parent/teacher]
> conferences, it's a conversation starter. Do you see these same things at home
> where they are gritty – [do] they get passionate and work hard despite challenges?
> Do you see these same things at home where they are quiet or withdrawn and
> might need to exhibit zest more? You talk about why, if it's different across
> different classes, subjects. These are much more rich conversations and parents
> appreciate that. Parents feel like we know their students on a much deeper level
> because we look at character and frankly, we do. Discipline and guidance aren't
> separated here. We know what's going on in their lives and we know that what we
> see in the classroom isn't the full story.

Other teachers, individually interviewed, also shared that grit applied differently in

different teacher's classrooms and that students adopt quickly to knowing what individual

teachers expect when it comes to 'grit':

> I call it out. Johnny is showing grit today by working on his nonfiction exhibition.
> But [non-participant teacher] uses it in student project conferences. It's just
> different.

Teacher applications of the trait in classrooms were variant, but overwhelmingly,

when probed, teachers were almost unanimously skeptical of assessing the teaching or

learning of personality attributes or character traits, fearful that they might be held

accountable if students do not progress year-over-year in grit. For all teachers, this had a

direct influence on how they taught or interpreted grit. One teacher expressed this directly

during the focus group:

> I know that, like, all eyes are on me to help bring our students to grade level, especially at [school name]. Our students come to us from all different backgrounds and while I think I'm a good teacher, I also know that there's only so much that I can do. I was never prepared to teach grit and have to kind of, like, figure it out.

"Figuring it out" appeared as a key theme for many of the teachers. Teachers felt that

they were certainly responsible for delivering content and for 'teaching grit', but that they

weren't prepared in knowing how to facilitate those conversations.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and examine the ways in which

teachers understand grit, teach it in the classroom, and how it might intersect with student

characteristics, such as race. By and large, the results revealed that individuals have

widely variant understandings of grit with no common definition or approach to its

teaching in the classroom. Even at schools that hold a special emphasis on character

education, intentional professional development on this popular cognitive trait has not

been available for the teachers in the study. Few of the teachers, if any, felt truly prepared

to teach grit as a character trait within their classroom. By conducting a variety of

qualitative research methods, I was able to see the demands and tensions of grit in the

classroom, learn how teachers enact and envision what they know about grit and better

understand the research questions.

Definitions

Teachers hold a variety of different understandings of the term, and often have the flexibility in their own classrooms to be able to define it for themselves – or to make their pedagogy or practice "look like" grit. This led to many teachers accepting without question their own definitions or understandings of the term. Faced with classrooms of over 30 students and daily situations beyond their control, most teachers lacked the time, resources and support to truly interrogate the term on their own and re-interpret it for their students in their individual classroom contexts. The school as an organization also did not provide opportunities for teachers to consider the term in context or with their peers. If teachers are able to rely on loose and inconsistent reinforcement of expectations from administrations surrounding character education, there is no incentive for them to critically question the term.

For grit education to have true meaning, schools teachers and students must all be invested in it. Investment in promoting grit perhaps may be the greatest strength of a strong school culture such as at KIPP. The stressors currently experienced by teachers were most clearly evidenced by the teacher who asked: "what's one more thing" – implying that there were more pressing concerns for her time in the classroom and that teaching grit was not worth her time. The school as an organization places many demands on teachers that pull them in competing directions – so truly, what's one more thing? Grit serves as one more requirement that teachers must meet and serves as yet another example of the lack of control that they experience within their own classrooms.

Teachers also appeared to be confused about the difference between self-control and grit, conflating the two in their definition. Duckworth shares that self-control is in the immediate, whereas grit is "passion and perseverance over the long haul" (2016a). Given that none of the teachers learned about grit in their teacher preparation program, this might suggest that this is simply an example of teacher education being slow to adapt to new research or, perhaps, a greater societal disagreement about what it might mean to be gritty. If teachers conflated self-control with grit, students might be under the impression that silence or acceptance of the rules is what is truly expected or that it is tied with success. This has the most significant implications for students of color who are more often strictly disciplined for 'lack of self-control'. Teachers that have or use an incorrect definition of the term may be more likely to inappropriately discipline or praise students based on misunderstood definitions.

These insights on teacher knowledge of grit, or even of character education more broadly, indicate that there are a variety of factors that might influence one's familiarity with grit. However, it is more likely that teachers hold a *sociocultural* understanding of grit and of the necessity/importance of character education rather than learning about the concept through professional development programs focused on the topic. This leads to situations exhibited in this study where lack of a strong definition means that teachers – and schools – aren't truly sure what they are teaching. This is most concerning in a policy environment where teachers and students are continually assessed for their performance. To solve for this, teacher preparatory programs must place an additional focus on social-emotional learning and character education. Continuing education and professional

development for teachers must be meaningful and useful to teachers. By focusing teacher

preparation, support and development on culturally responsive pedagogy, it then becomes

more likely that teachers will question and interrogate terms such as grit and be able to

critically evaluate the concept with their own students.

Assessment

In an era of value-added assessments and teacher merit pay, it is clear that

teachers are fearful of assessment and of new policies that could threaten their career or

their growth within a particular school or district. For some of the teachers interviewed,

their concerns with grit as a potential mechanism for assessment were not unwarranted --

as administrators had implemented such programs previously.

This has significant implications for both administrators and policymakers. To

implement the teaching of character most effectively and without pushback from teachers

and students, it must arise organically or as a distinct part of a school's culture, as it did

with KIPP's Work Hard, Be Nice culture. Teachers cannot be expected to simply 'teach

grit' and report back that students are now 'gritty'. Assessments, given the lack of a

central definition of grit among teachers and evaluators, are neither valid nor effective. If

policymakers and educators wish to teach and assess grit or character education more

broadly, despite valid concerns about its efficacy or definition, it would be ideal if they

were supported by strong professional development programs and the organic infusion

into curriculum and pedagogy--perhaps with examples from long-term teachers. No other

implementation or assessment program would be sufficient. Duckworth makes a strong

argument, as noted earlier: "We shouldn't be rewarding or punishing schools for how students perform on these measures" (2016b).

Race

Throughout the interviews and focus group, teachers shied away from the topic of race. While this was not entirely unexpected, it was nonetheless surprising how many of the teachers, including teachers of color, did not feel comfortable engaging in such conversations with their peers or in a situation in which they felt that they might be judged. This was most notable in the silences during the one focus group held.

Throughout the focus groups and individual interviews, it was clear to participants that this was not designed to be a veiled attempt to 'catch' a teacher in the act of poor teaching, judge their pedagogical approach or to identify racism, racist attitudes or stereotypes in the classroom. Instead, the goal was simply to learn how teachers understand grit and how they think about the intersection of equity and grit. Yet, results suggested that participants may have felt uncomfortable having conversations about race within the school building.

Particularly during the focus group that contained awkward silences, teachers made the deliberate attempt to steer the conversation away from race, even when re-probed. During individual interviews, stronger insights were gained, but silence within the focus group is itself an insightful recognition as it indicates that many teachers are still unprepared to have conversations about race, class and ethnicity. When probed about their silence, one teacher shared that "I just don't feel comfortable talking about this with my peers. I don't want to say anything that would accidentally get me in trouble or

labeled." This teacher perhaps summed up how many felt about the topic of race. This has immediate concerns for how teachers interpret and understand race in the classroom and how students of color might be disadvantaged, particularly with traits such as grit. If teachers pretend that it doesn't exist or refuse to discuss it, they do not have to grapple with the reality that educational outcomes are not equally attainable by all.

The common narrative surrounding grit is challenged in multiple different studies and increasingly in popular culture and in publications such as *The Atlantic*. Teachers in this study overwhelmingly espoused the belief that grit sets students up for a lifetime of success in both professional and personal pursuits and the concern that grit may be culturally biased or that teachers may interpret it in a way that rests upon dominant cultural beliefs was not sufficiently explored. Teachers, through their silences, chose not to engage with the question, which makes me concerned that a significant percentage of the teaching profession at large may not feel comfortable engaging in these critical but difficult conversations. In this way, it became clear that teachers are not considering critical race theory in their practice. By not engaging and through their silence, teachers appear not to be questioning or examining the roles that schools play in oppression.

Limitations

Although this study provided rich, qualitative data, there were some factors that could potentially serve to limit the findings. First and foremost, time constraints dictated the number of schools studied. As such, there were only two schools included with a total of 14 teachers interviewed. This may have led to selection bias or simply to a limited amount of perspectives that are unable to be generalized. There is a need for

further qualitative research using a larger sample size and broader research sites to better understand how teachers make sense of grit. Whereas this sample did show that interviewed teachers had a basic understanding of grit, there is also the possibility that teachers who declined to volunteer may not be familiar with the construct of grit at all or that they may simply not value its importance or buy into the belief that it is necessary or critical for student success.

Additionally, as mentioned before – there may have been some self-selection bias given that only charter and magnet schools were included as research sites for this study. While this choice was deliberate and made for convenience given the difficulty of conducting research in the local school district, it is notable that this is a significant blind area of this research and of the qualitative data just provided. Here, I have attempted to note these limitations wherever possible with the hope that future research might be able to extend this study's reach and scope.

Implications

Whether teachers are consciously doing so or not, many educators are already teaching grit. In order to properly assess grit to the depth it deserves, the common definition must become clarified, even in schools that claim to teach grit and character education more broadly. Duckworth (2016a) herself does this and pushes for a common definition – even by providing her most recent book on grit with the subtitle "Passion, Perseverance and the Science of Success". Even at schools with conscious character education and support from administrators, some teachers believed that grit was synonymous with mindfulness. Although there may be similarities in approach and the

ways in which these skills might be necessary in the classroom, they are not analogous. If teachers are ever to be able to effectively teach grit to students, they must first themselves have a strong understanding of the concept.

Prior to any assessment of students or teachers or wide-scale implementation of the teaching of character education, additional research is warranted. Much is still to be learned about why teachers are not receiving the support that they need to teach grit, yet are still being asked to teach it. Furthermore, it is unknown why there may be so many competing definitions – based on individual experience, research or intuition -- throughout the educational ecosystem. Future studies ought to truly critically examine the connections between grit education and student academic outcomes or career prospects.

Finally, there is a great need in the field, in teacher preparation and in continuing teacher education and support programs, to ensure that teachers have an understanding of student backgrounds and circumstances, regardless of the individual school or administrative policies placed on teachers. Teachers must have a critical understanding of race in order to be successful in urban classrooms, particularly when attempting to teach "character," which is, in and of itself, vague and variant. This is made even more important when many students might be experiencing systemic inequality and discrimination across society. Teaching grit will never work unless all teachers are able to recognize the inherent grittiness that students might bring to the classroom before ever sitting in a desk. Teachers that are not comfortable with talking about race may feel unprepared to discuss race in general and may never make the deliberate questions and connections between grit and race, deeply affecting the ways in which they then work

with students – especially students of color – in the classroom. This is the result of a failure on multiple levels, but one that can be corrected by more robust teacher preparation programs, additional focus on culturally responsive teaching, and on ensuring that educators are taught critical race theory prior to ever entering a classroom. These mindsets are crucial if we are ever to use non-academic skills to prepare students for college and career.

Conclusion

Psychologist Angela Duckworth has made the compelling argument that grit could be a beneficial concept in improving students' self-efficacy and in bolstering their ability to achieve at high academic levels. Although the research landscape is still sparse on grit, its applications in schools, and its true impact for student outcomes, this study supports the argument that teachers each have their own unique and individual understandings of what grit or character education might look like in their classrooms. Furthermore, data from this study indicate that many teachers have only tangentially or not at all considered how factors such as race may affect expression of grit in the classroom, and that few are able to discuss its importance and the ways in which grit may or may not contribute to oppression and subordination, per critical race theory. To bring about stronger student outcomes, teachers must develop a more extensive understanding of how race and grit might overlap and how interpretations of the term may have significant implications for student achievement and for the ways in which students perceive themselves within the classroom or in relation to their teacher. Given recent research that has suggested that teaching and modeling grit and trudging on in the face of

adversity can help to increase students' well-being and positive coping skills, as well as serve as a protective factor against anxiety and depression (Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010; Tugade & Frederickson, 2004), schools and researchers have an imperative need to work together to improve their understanding of the positive attributes of grit, its applications in schools, and how it interfaces with the field of sociology.

APPENDIX A

CHARACTER REPORT CARD AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS

KIPP Character Report Card and Supporting Materials

KIPP:CHARACTER
REPORT CARD

Jane Smith Grade: 8	KIPP Imagine Date: 01/28/11	Q2	Q2					
			Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6
	OVERALL SCORE	**4.30**						
Zest		4.28						
1	Actively participates	4.50	4	5	5	4	4	5
2	Shows enthusiasm	4.17	5	4	3	4	4	5
3	Invigorates others	4.17	3	4	5	4	5	4
Grit		4.11						
4	Finishes whatever he or she begins	4.00	4	5	3	4	4	4
5	Tries very hard even after experiencing failure	4.17	5	4	4	3	4	5
6	Works independently with focus	4.17	4	4	3	4	5	5
Self Control – School Work		**4.33**						
7	Comes to class prepared	4.50	4	5	5	5	4	4
8	Pays attention and resists distractions	4.50	4	5	4	5	4	5
9	Remembers and follows directions	4.17	4	5	5	4	3	4
10	Gets to work right away rather than procrastinating	4.17	5	4	4	4	3	5
Self Control - Interpersonal		**4.54**						
11	Remains calm even when criticized or otherwise provoked	4.50	4	5	4	5	5	4
12	Allows others to speak without interruption	4.83	5	5	5	4	5	5
13	Is polite to adults and peers	4.50	4	5	4	5	4	5
14	Keeps his/her temper in check	4.33	4	5	4	4	5	4
Optimism		4.25						
15	Gets over frustrations and setbacks quickly	4.33	5	4	4	4	5	4
16	Believes that effort will improve his or her future	4.17	5	4	4	3	4	5
Gratitude		4.25						
17	Recognizes and shows appreciation for others	4.17	4	4	5	4	5	3
18	Recognizes and shows appreciation for his/her opportunities	4.33	5	4	5	3	4	5
Social Intelligence		**4.33**						
19	Is able to find solutions during conflicts with others	4.17	4	4	3	5	4	5
20	Demonstrates respect for feelings of others	4.50	5	4	4	4	5	5
21	Knows when and how to include others	4.33	5	4	4	4	5	4
Curiosity		**4.28**						
22	Is eager to explore new things	4.17	5	4	3	4	5	4
23	Asks and answers questions to deepen understanding	4.50	5	4	5	4	4	5
24	Actively listens to others	4.17	4	4	5	4	5	3

SCALE
1= Very much unlike the student
2= Unlike the student
3= Somewhat like the student
4= Like the student
5= Very much like the student

ZEST
Actively participates
Shows enthusiasm
Invigorates others

GRIT
Finishes whatever he or she begins
Tries very hard even after experiencing failure
Works independently with focus

SELF-CONTROL – SCHOOL WORK
Comes to class prepared
Pays attention and resists distractions
Remembers and follows directions
Gets to work right away rather than procrastinating

SELF-CONTROL – INTERPERSONAL
Remains calm even when criticized or otherwise provoked
Allows others to speak without interruption
Is polite to adults and peers
Keeps temper in check

OPTIMISM
Gets over frustrations and setbacks quickly
Believes that effort will improve his or her future

GRATITUDE
Recognizes and shows appreciation for others
Recognizes and shows appreciation for his/her opportunities

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE
Able to find solutions during conflicts with others
Demonstrates respect for feelings of others
Knows when and how to include others

CURIOSITY
Is eager to explore new things
Asks and answers questions to deepen understanding
Actively listens to others

APPENDIX B

QUESTION PROTOCOL

Individual/Focus Group Interview Questions
Introductory & Rapport Building
I'd love to hear about how long you have been teaching? What about specifically at this school?
Tell me about how you entered the profession?
Tell me about the demographics of your classroom?
Grit as a Concept
Was the teaching of grit or character education a focus of your program?
When were you first introduced to the concept of grit?
SKIPPED: How do you feel grit has impacted your own experience as a professional?
Have you ever held or taken a formal workshop on grit?
Participant's Approach to Teaching Grit
How do you define grit to your students?
How do you think your students would define grit and how would you know this?
What strategies are used in your daily lessons to develop grit?
What examples do you use to give your students a grasp of how grit applies to real world experiences?
Tell me about how you address students that repeatedly fail to exhibit grit within the classroom?
How do your students show grit in the classroom? Do all of your students portray grit in the same manner?
Are there opportunities for your students to reflect on their successes in exhibiting grit? Their failures?
What challenges have you encountered in incorporating grit into your classroom curriculum?
School's Approach to Teaching Grit
Describe your school's culture in terms of how it promotes grit within the student body? What are the specific actions or steps that your school takes in order to foster "grittyness" in their students?
How do you think your principal or your colleagues encourage the teaching of grit?
Do you collaborate with your colleagues to teach grit?
Teaching and Learning Opportunities
How do you believe a student's personal circumstances may affect their ability to exhibit grit?
Do you believe grit is learned primarily within a classroom setting or within one's community?
How do you believe your understanding of race, culture, class, and ethnicity affects how you teach grit?
How do you feel an economically disadvantaged student may interact with grit compared to their more affluent peers?
How do you believe one's culture or ethnicity may impact the way in which they value independent work?
Is there anything else that you would like to share with me? Anything that we perhaps did not cover?

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title: *Grit in the Classroom*
Researcher(s): Tony Vaughn
Faculty Sponsor: Katherine Phillippo, Ph.D.; Judson Everitt, Ph.D.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Tony Vaughn for the final requirement of a master's degree in Cultural and Educational Policies at Loyola University Chicago. His research is under the supervision of Dr. Katherine Phillippo in the School of Education at Loyola University of Chicago.

This study will be conducted at each of the teacher's schools that are selected to participate. **Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.**

Purpose:
You are being asked to participate because you are a teacher in one of the selected schools for the study. This study, entitled, "Grit in the Classroom" seeks to learn more about how educators consider the societal implications of Grit and other character traits in the classroom.

Procedures:
If you agree to partake in the study, you will be asked to engage in an **individual interview** taking no longer than 30 minutes asking questions about your understanding of grit and resilience, your prior exposure to these terms, where you were introduced to these terms, how these concepts are integrated into your classroom culture, and about the potential racial or societal implications of Grit in the classroom. If you would like to continue with the study, you are also welcome to join for a 30-minute long **discussion-based focus group** with your peers about Grit in the classroom.

In addition to the focus group interviews, study participants may be asked if a researcher could **observe an academic class period**. These observations would be conducted in your classroom and at a date and time convenient to you. They would not be an assessment of your teaching ability and again, no notes or information from our observation will be shared with school administration or with others outside of the research team. You will have the opportunity to give or withdraw your consent to be observed at any time.

During focus groups, you will be recorded using a digital audio recorder, if you do not wish to be recorded you may choose to do so and you may still participate in the study. Participants must consent to audio-taping in order to participate in the focus group. Classroom observations will not be recorded.

Risks:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research study beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Benefits:
While there are no direct benefits from your participation, your responses may be helpful to improve and modify teacher development programs, help other teachers understand how grit and resilience could be implemented into their classroom, what methods of information are the most helpful for teachers to comprehend these concepts, and how teachers understand the cultural implications of character strengths in their classrooms.

Confidentiality:
Any information that is collected during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. These results will be presented at a final thesis defense and may eventually be revised and reworked for submission; any identifying information will be changed in order to ensure that all participants are kept confidential. **While the researcher will not share information about what participants say and that we will ask focus group participants to keep info shared private, the research team cannot guarantee that other participants will do so.** Audio tape recordings will be transcribed and then immediately destroyed.

Confidentiality may be breached in the event that you share that you might harm yourself, others, or someone else is harming you. As trained mandated reporters, we are permitted by law to report these instances to a governmental agency to get support for you or for others.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. **Even if you decide to participate, you are free to skip any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.**

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Tony Vaughn at dvaughn@luc.edu.

Additionally you may contact my faculty supervisor, Katherine Phillippo, Ph.D. at kphillippo@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Please indicate the research activities that you would like to take part in:

☐ Classroom Observation

☐ Individual Interview following your classroom observation.

☐ Participation in a discussion-based focus group with multiple participants.

Please indicate whether or not you agree to audiotaping for personal interviews. Focus groups will be recorded and classroom observations will not be recorded.

☐ Yes, I agree to be audio-taped for personal interviews.

☐ No, I would prefer not to be audio-taped for my personal interview.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

GRIT SCALE

	Not at all like me	Not much like me	Some-what like me	Mostly like me	Very much like me
1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Setbacks don't discourage me. I don't give up easily.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I am a hard worker.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I finish whatever I begin.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My interests change from year to year.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I am diligent. I never give up.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.	1	2	3	4	5

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