Grit, Tenacity and Mindsets for Educators: Coaching Ourselves and our Students for Improved Performance

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MISD iSummit August 20, 2013

Are YOU Intellectually Aggressive?
Setting the Stage

- High Stakes Accountability—its future?
- Nearly everyone is talking about some form of post secondary education: College, community college, technical schools

The single factor that most correlates with college success is NOT test scores. It is the student’s GPA.

- New non-cognitive ideas now coming forth:
  - Mindsets
  - Tenacity and ‘Grit’
- How are these concepts tied to educators?
We are going to talk about two basic ideas and try to contextualize them to your jobs.

Mindsets

Grit and Tenacity
The Power of Self Concept (Mindsets)

- Research shows that the variable that correlates most strongly with student achievement is self-concept.
- Self-concept is a person’s concept of “self” in a particular domain. The difference between self-esteem and self-concept is that the former is an overall view of oneself, whereas self-concept is domain specific.
- Describe a domain in your job in which your self concept is strong.
- Describe a domain in your job in which your self concept is weaker (and believe that no amount of hard work or effort would ever make it better).

Carol Dweck on Mindsets
A Fixed Mindset

- A Fixed Mindset is believing that basic intelligence is a fixed trait. You have a certain amount of intelligence and there’s nothing that you can do about it. Success is due to ability, not to effort.
  - Success is based in winning.
  - Feels comfortable when the risk is not greater than your ability.
  - When students struggle, they give up because they think they lack the ability.
  - Nothing ventured, nothing lost.
A Growth Mindset

- A Growth Mindset is believing that intelligence is something that can be developed. It can be improved through passion, study, effort, and education. The brain is a muscle. These individuals believe effort “ignites ability and turns it into accomplishment” (Dweck)
- Success is based on effort and growth.
- Feels comfortable when there is a lot of risk that creates challenge to ability
- Nothing ventured, nothing gained
Examples of Mindsets

- Steve Jobs on Rules for Success
- Will Smith on his Success
- Rita Pierson on Kids Needing a Champion
Mindsets

Think of a situation where, you, as an educator working with a subordinate, have assessed your performance as sub-par or less than satisfactory.

Think about this for a moment and then describe the situation with an elbow partner answering these questions:

- What caused you to describe the result as “less than satisfactory”?
- What reasons caused it to be “less than satisfactory”? Do you think you failed?
When you think about your different roles as an educator, do you hold different mindsets?

Possible roles:
- Work with colleagues
- Work with community
- Work with students
- Work with family

Mindsets:
- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...
Three Ways to Foster Positive Mindsets

- **Make a Note of Accomplishments** but focus on the other’s ROLE in the achievement. This helps others see and hear that their efforts (not innate ability) are what made the difference.

  - “You figured that out. Great!”
  - “You kept going even when you got stuck. Yes!”
  - “Feels good, huh? “
  - “Tell me how you managed that student so well.”
  - “I bet you are proud of yourself.”
  - “Your team told me you were very helpful figuring out the math problem this morning.”
Ways to Foster Positive Mindsets

- **Identity** – Comments can help individuals build a sense of who they are in the world. Build their *identity* as a successful person.

  - “Your idea reminds me of what I once saw a great student do”
  - “The way you opened your lesson reminded of an effective teacher practice of engaging students quickly. I always appreciate that whether it is in a classroom or a meeting.”
  - “It’s great that you’ve proposed two different ideas here. I’ll bet it was fun to see how they work out in two different ways.”
Ways to foster Positive Mindsets

- **Agency** – This is the feeling that one’s efforts lead directly to accomplishments, as opposed to luck being the main variable. Educators can build others’ sense of agency by talking to them in specific ways:
  - Asking “Why?” is a helpful way to get others to connect actions to effects.
  - “What might you do next?” helps others plan actions that will produce results and also communicates the belief that they can and will succeed.
  - “What is one decision you can make out of confidence today?”
Three ideas - Review

- Listen carefully to your language at home, at work, and in the community and see if it is appropriately praising the following:
  - Accomplishments
  - Identity
  - Agency

*Choice Words* by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey in *Principal Leadership*, December 2012 (Vol. 13, #4, p. 57-59)
What about Grit?

What is it?
- We define grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.

- Grit includes character traits like resilience, self-control, and persistence—characteristics that may matter more to academic performance than native intelligence.

- Grit and Mindsets are related
What is your Personal Grit Index?

Answer the survey in the context of your current job.
A Thought Experiment

- Imagine you’re magically “shaping” a high school senior. You’re lucky. Her starting point is that she’s at the 80th percentile in both IQ and “character”—a composite measure of traits like grit, tenacity, and optimism. You can increase either variable, but only by lowering the other variable by the same amount. For example, you could “shape” her into a kid who is in the 90th percentile in IQ but 70th percentile in character. Or vice versa.

- Where would you set the dial? Which variable matters more to you in generating success?

- If you find yourself leaning towards character, an important further question emerges. Is character a mix of genetics, parent modeling, and life experiences, with schools really unable to do much about it? Or can schools actually teach character, such that kids change for the better?

Michael Goldstein, CEO MATCH charter School as quoted in Commonwealth Magazine 2013
Researchers are not sure that GRIT can be developed or grown

- But they do know it can be modeled in classrooms
- By giving individuals language and support
  - Let’s be curious about this
  - Let’s be intellectually aggressive about this
  - Use evidence to support your ideas. WHY?
  - Ask an intelligent question of your partner before you ask the teacher
  - Let me show you some ways to be gritty here…
  - Practicing behaviors like persistence. If student gives up after one try, can he/she make a commitment next time to not give up until after two tries and so on

What can you do to model grit for others?
Mindsets, Tenacity and Grit

- These concepts are interrelated (feedback loop)
- Will become more important in the future for students as achievement is more broadly defined to be something beyond test scores
- Relates to 21st century skills – the Three Rs as well as the Three Cs
  - Creativity
  - Communication
  - Collaboration

What do these terms mean for YOU? Are YOU intellectually aggressive?
References