

Fostering Grit and the Growth Mindset through High-Impact Practices

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Abstract: *This paper examines the potential to foster “grit” and “growth mindset” in an undergraduate curriculum through the use of high-impact practices.*

Keywords: *Grit; Growth Mindset; High-Impact Practices.*

Purpose of the Study

Grit and the growth mindset have both experienced a surge in popularity over the past decade with regards to determining student success and as a means of effective instruction. The authors of this paper, having previously researched student success as a result of a transformative experience, continue to serve on various committees related to the first-year experience, retention, and overall student success via high-impact practices.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of select high-impact practices with regards to student success when corresponding instruction on grit and the growth mindset are also integrated into the undergraduate curriculum via mentoring. In this instance, those high-impact practices examined include service learning and student-faculty research.

Review of Relevant Literature

Grit, defined as a “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087), has been found to account for success beyond IQ and the Big Five trait conscientiousness. While the topic of grit does have its criticism (limitations of self-reporting questionnaire, consistency of behavior as compared to consistency of situation), enough data exists regarding high school graduation, academic conscientiousness, school motivation, and standardized achievement test scores (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014) to warrant consideration as a predictor of success in higher education. It further begs the question if grit can be determined to be a predictor of academic success, can grit be taught?

Inherent to the notion that grit is a learned trait is the knowledge that intelligence is malleable rather than fixed at birth. By operating under this assumption, individuals are capable of a “growth mindset” (Dweck, 2006), one where students become more focused on the process of learning rather than simply the outcome. In order to achieve this outcome, it becomes apparent that students require not only challenging assignments but also instruction, or mentoring, on how to effectively approach these tasks.

Research Methodology

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Select students that have been deemed as successful and/or integral student leaders by the authors were administered a questionnaire including a few open-ended questions regarding grit and the growth mindset. In addition, Likert-style survey questions were included inquiring as to the effectiveness and perceived benefit of mentoring practices with regards to career development and social support in relation to the respondents' own personal and professional development. The career development functions included sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments; the social support functions investigated included role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1983). To conclude the questionnaire, individuals were asked to identify and rank the high-impact practices that they had personally experienced and benefitted from.

Results

Similar to prior research, the mentoring function of challenging assignments ranked high as being extremely beneficial with regards to having an impact on student success. Furthermore, the high-impact practices identified as being experienced the most and ranked highest in perceived attribution toward personal and professional success were service-learning projects and student-faculty research. Themes related to student associations of grit and the growth mindset also provide avenues for further research.

Discussion

With much attention being paid to means of increasing student retention across college campuses, and data demonstrating that high-impact practices can play a role, the authors have demonstrated that service learning and student-faculty research are found to be beneficial for students when considering career development. Accordingly, these specific high-impact practices align with the notion of challenging assignments, as a function of mentoring relationships, are critical to personal and professional growth.

References

References

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