

Article 16

Integrating the Concept of Grit into a Curriculum for Counseling Practicum and Internship Students

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Abstract

The concept of grit has emerged as a significant predictor of success in a variety of fields in psychological and educational research. The literature distinguishes the concept of grit from resilience. Resilience is a characteristic of overcoming adversity and having the ability to bounce back, whereas grit is the tendency for an individual to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals. The purpose of this article is to discuss how the concept of grit may be beneficial in the supervising and mentoring of counselors-in-training during their field site experiences. Further, the article illustrates ways counselor educators can integrate the concept of grit into a practicum and internship course curriculum. The adoption and benefits of multimedia, experiential, and bibliotherapeutic approaches are also discussed.

Keywords: grit, practicum, internship supervision

Resilience has been described as skills or personal qualities that help an individual adapt to adversity (Lee et al., 2013). Although it has been studied in various ways across different academic fields, including psychology, education, human development and leadership, research in resilience has ranged from analyzing children who thrive despite their at-risk environments, to studying character traits such as optimism, and investigating individuals' positive emotions in the aftermath of crises (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). The common theme among the many descriptions and investigations of resilience in academic research, however, is having a positive response to failure and adversity and demonstrating the ability to bounce back from setbacks (Perkins-Gough, 2013).

Related to resilience is the concept of grit, which is defined as passion and perseverance for long-term goals (Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014).

Having grit entails focused effort and interest over time despite circumstances. It requires having an internal locus of control along with the ability to delay gratification (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). A person who demonstrates grit has a dedication to either implicitly or explicitly rewarded goals regardless of failures, adversity, or setbacks (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Researchers have found that grit is the one characteristic that has emerged as a significant predictor of success in a variety of fields such as the military, rookie teaching, and education, and may be as essential as IQ to high achievement (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Bernstein, & Ericsson, 2011; Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Kelly, Matthews, & Bartone, 2014). In fact, when compared to IQ, grit is a better indicator of higher GPA and graduation rates (Duckworth et al., 2007). Having a relentless stick-to-it-iveness quality and behavior, regardless of circumstances, seems to be an influential factor in long-term success among many different areas and populations (Perkins-Gough, 2013; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014).

The counseling profession is filled with stories of resilience and grit, as demonstrated by clients overcoming stressful life situations such as deaths, illness, addiction, loss of jobs, marital and relationship issues, and various other challenges. In addition to these clients, graduate students and interns themselves must also demonstrate a certain degree of grit in order to succeed in the challenging goal of obtaining a graduate degree. Further, studies have indicated that higher resilience in university students has been linked with greater psychological well-being when compared to peers demonstrating lower resilience (DeRosier, Frank, Schwartz, & Leary, 2013; Hartley, 2012; Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar, & Lo, 2014).

Graduate students and supervisees will be exposed to many instances of failure and adversity—either directly or indirectly—through the counseling of their clients. For students and counseling professionals alike, a career in mental health requires a long-term marathon-like approach in that lasting change does not commonly happen overnight. Rather, change and accomplishment generally requires an optimistic perspective, trial and error, self-control, setbacks, frequent reaffirmations, and a long-term commitment. As such, there are several ways in which having an increased capacity for resilience and grittiness can serve a counselor-in-training well both at an internship site and in the successful obtainment of a professional counselor education.

This article introduces several approaches in which counselor educators can encourage the awareness, growth, and development of grit and resilience by incorporating these concepts into an established practicum and internship course curriculum. Exposing counseling students to these concepts can be incorporated into a single class session or adopted into an entire field site curriculum over the course of a semester.

Incorporating Grit Into a Counseling Field Site Curriculum

Introducing the concept of grittiness can occur at any time of the semester and can benefit not only the student counseling interns, but possibly their clients as well. By developing a hardier sense and awareness of grit, student counselors can demonstrate and potentially teach the concept to their clients. Counselor educators can introduce grit-

related topics simply via a brief class lecture or assigned reading, or they can adopt a more formal approach by including it throughout the curriculum on a weekly basis, or a hybrid of the two.

Assessing Student Counselor Grittiness

The Grit Scale is a free and easily accessible assessment that measures an individual's level of grit. The Grit Scale comes in a 12-item form and an 8-item form (the Short Grit Scale, or Grit-S) that students can take and self-score. In addition, an online version of the Grit Scale is also available and provides instant scoring along with access to further information on the topic (Duckworth, 2016). The Grit-S is designed to measure trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals on a 5-point Likert scale. The assessment has documented evidence of internal consistency, test-retest stability, and predictive validity and takes less than 15 minutes to complete (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely *gritty*), and the lowest score on this scale is 1 (not at all *gritty*).

As with any assessment, the Grit Scale has its limitations including reference bias and the ability to fake scores (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). In addition, these scales were “originally designed to assess individual differences rather than subtle within-individual changes in behavior over time. Thus, it is uncertain whether they are valid indicators of pre- to post-change as a consequence of interventions” (STELAR, 2016, para. 2). However, by taking this assessment and reflecting on their own personal results, counselors-in-training can have a clearer understanding of where they measure up, obtain an increased awareness of where their score falls on a continuum, and determine where there may be room for growth.

A Multimedia Approach

After assessing a counselor-in-training's initial grit score in an unbiased way, an excellent introduction on this topic can be found in a popular TED Talk given on grit by researcher Dr. Angela Duckworth, which has been viewed over 9 million times (Duckworth, 2013). In this compelling TED Talk, Duckworth describes her own personal and professional journey regarding the concept of grit. Duckworth and her research team at the University of Pennsylvania collected data from various participants including West Point cadets and teachers, rookie educators, Spelling Bee champions, and corporate salespeople, to name a few. Based on their findings, Duckworth explains how grit may be a better indicator of success than other factors such as IQ or family income (Duckworth, 2013). Introducing this TED Talk at the beginning of a field site experience is an engaging way to invite students into a conversation about developing and expressing resiliency and *grittiness*. Additionally, these conversations on the topic of grit can also serve as an example that counselors-in-training can utilize when working with clients at their internship and practicum sites as well.

Discussion Board Posts

Another multimedia approach to continuing a classroom conversation on grit and resilience is via a structured discussion board format. By posting prompts accessible by the entire group, supervisors can invite graduate students to give examples of and discuss issues around resilience and grit-related topics. (Note: It is important to remind interns of

the confidential nature of the Discussion Boards and that the same rules of confidentiality apply as in the classroom and site settings). Some prompts can include: *What professional examples of grit did you experience (or wish you had experienced) this week? Give an example of resilient behavior, thought, or action you have seen in one of your clients. Discuss the concept of grit and resilience as it relates to one of your personal or professional heroes. What specific examples or traits of grit can you identify?*

The use of non-graded Discussion Boards is another venue that provides a virtual space where students can post and discuss different resilience relevant topics with the class. Instructors can consider creating two different categories—one for resources, articles, and Web sites that reflect examples of grit and resilience, and the other specific for links to videos or clips that demonstrate these concepts. This informal student-driven community Discussion Board serves as an online depository and resource base for grit-related postings throughout the semester.

The Hero's Journey and the Movies

Movies offer countless examples of characters that struggle along the hero's journey and resiliently come out on the other side. According to anthropologist and epic storyteller Joseph Campbell's monomyth model, literature's most interesting heroes are often ordinary people who encounter (and overcome) a series of predictable and grit-inducing stages that include: The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid/Meeting the Mentor, Crossing the Threshold, Tests, Approach to the Inmost Cave, Ordeal, Reward (Seizing the Sword), The Road Back, Resurrection, and the Return with Elixir (Campbell, 2008; Vogler, 1992). These stages comprise a character arc that effectively demonstrates what grit in action can look like in great stories. For a visual representation of this arc, counselor educators can offer the TED-Ed Original short, "What Makes A Hero?" which effectively illustrates and synthesizes Campbell's stages of the hero's journey (Winkler, 2012).

Movies that reflect the hero's journey and the concept of grit are plentiful. A few classic films might include: *Star Wars*, *The Princess Bride*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. As an academic exercise, students can find evidence of grit from characters in a favorite film and write a paper that reflects the film character's examples, behaviors, and actions to further crystalize the concept.

Building Grit

Once counselors-in-training have a common vernacular on what the concepts and characteristics of resilience and grittiness entail, it is important to reinforce theory with practical examples on a consistent basis. Supervising professors can do this in various ways. For example, weekly "Grit-Related Topics" at the beginning of each class meeting can prime student interns to become more aware of resilience focused insights. Interns can offer and describe an incident of the week where they either witnessed or personally experienced grittiness in their internship experience. By focusing on and sharing specific examples of grit in their clients' or personal lives, the concept becomes reinforced and more readily recognized.

Aside from weekly internship conversations and prompted discussion topics, supervisors can further deepen learning by incorporating creative reading assignments and projects. For instance, the creation of a book club that focuses on the theme of grit

could be followed by an academic assignment challenging counselors-in-training to choose a book that exemplifies the concept. Interns can present a project or paper based on such outside readings, and in doing so, further reinforce the concept of grit and resilience during the course of the semester.

Experiential Approach—A Deeper Dive Into Reflections

During a practicum or internship experience, there are various ways for students to process and reflect upon their experiences and insights. Journals, self-report, and classroom discussions are typical methods. However, educators can take learning even deeper by implementing a more formalized reflective process such as through Kiser's Integrative Processing Model (Kiser, 1998). By implementing this method, students' journaling exercises become more significant and vastly more reflective than the mere report of accomplishments from field site settings.

The Integrative Processing Model is a six-stage cyclical learning process that encourages students to take a deeper and more reflective look at fieldwork experience through a series of intentional lenses, which include: (1) gathering objective data from the concrete experience, (2) reflecting, (3) identifying relevant theory and knowledge, (4) examining dissonance, (5) articulating learning, and (6) developing a plan (Kiser, 2015). By providing such a framework for formal reflection in a supervision course, supervisees can achieve a greater depth of understanding and perhaps a stronger sense of meaning when reviewing their field site experiences. Further, supervisees can uncover more clear and amplified examples of resilience and grit within their clinical experiences as a result.

Bibliotherapeutic Approach

A less formal yet engaging approach in building grittiness into a course is the creation of a Resilience Library. This bibliotherapeutic approach should incorporate more than just a list of relevant books or peer-reviewed journal articles. Instead, educators should consider expanding a Resilience Library to include both academic and non-academic resources. By hosting a growing and evolving reference list of resilience-based books, podcasts, online learning courses, and movies, students can have easy access to a variety of sources that can inspire, instruct, and evoke the concepts of resilience and grit. In addition, this list can assist supervisees with academic assignments and can also serve as a wealth of resources to share with clients and fellow clinicians.

When creating a bibliotherapeutic resilience library or online reference list, include electronic resources that millennial graduate students might find particularly useful such as sites for audiobooks (Audible.com, Soundstrue.com, Audiobooks.com), podcasts, online courses (Udemy.com, Coursera.org, Greatergood.berkeley.edu, online-learning.harvard.edu/courses), Web sites, and resilience-related online communities. Graduate students can choose to contribute to this reference list informally or formally and perhaps earn points toward a class participation grade.

Implications for Counseling Practice and Research

Research in a wide variety of fields has indicated that grit is a vital contributing factor and characteristic to success and that cultivating grit has wide-reaching positive implications for individuals in the areas education, business, and leadership.

Nevertheless, there have not yet been any extensive studies investigating how the cultivation and teaching of grit can be utilized and beneficial in the education and training of counselor educators.

Through the exposure, discussion, and reflection of grit-related concepts in a counselor education field site and supervision course, counselors-in-training can be encouraged to develop and model more resilient coping resources, strategies, and behaviors. The development and cultivation of grit-related concepts and behaviors can serve graduate students not only in the academic setting, but also in their careers as future professional counselors, and can be translated to their work with their clients as well.

As evidenced by the growing body of psychological and educational research around the concept of grit, more research on developing, teaching, and cultivating grit is needed, as it specifically relates to counselor education and the counseling profession as a whole. In the meantime, counselor educators can promote this vetted concept of grit by building it into the conversation via a curriculum or simply intentionally discussing it in a supervision class meeting. Integrating the concept of grit into an established field site curriculum can be done in various practical and creative ways, both formally and informally. Regardless of how it is incorporated, however, the intentional inclusion and promotion of the concept of grit in counselor education has the potential to have a positive, lasting, and far-reaching impact on supervisees, their clients, and perhaps counselor educators themselves.

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