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GROWING A GRITTY CULTURE: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

By
Andrea L. Meyer

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Andrea L. Meyer under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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This work is dedicated to my colleagues, friends, and family who have made me the person and, therefore, the educator I am today. It, quite sincerely and literally, would not have been possible without them. Special thanks go to my beautiful, life-affirming daughter, Mackenzie (the carrot), and my loving, supportive husband, Gary (the stick!).

Inspiration for this work was derived from my parents, William and June Schwabenbauer. At one particularly frustrating time in my undergraduate studies as an English major at The State University of New York at Fredonia, I had a nasty case of writer's block. I did what I always did (and STILL do) in times of need: I called my Mom. Her advice (as usual) was profound in its simplicity. "Write what you know," is what she told me to do. While it took me far too long to heed her sage advice for the work contained in the pages that follow, it finally struck me at my core. I know about grit. My knowledge on this topic came from observing my Father. Dad worked as a signalman on the railroad. It was his responsibility to ensure that gates, switches, signal crossings, and the like were in proper working order. Property and lives depended on my Dad doing his job expertly. It was OFTEN the case that some gate somewhere in Dad's territory would need fixing in the middle of the night ... in the winter ... in feet of snow. When those calls would come in at those wee hours in the morning, without fail, my Dad would ask where the trouble was and then go fix it. His relentless dedication to getting the job done resonates in my life. Until I see you again, rest in peace, Dad.

Finally, the fuel for the completion of this work was (repeatedly) provided by Dr. Stephen Laws, my dissertation chair. I am eternally grateful for his unyielding support and guidance throughout this process. God bless Steve Laws!

Abstract

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This study explores building level administrators' thoughts on the role grit plays in a school's culture and how building level administrators can foster a culture of grit.

Duckworth's (2016) text *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* was used as a basis for this study. This is a qualitative study using the grounded theory research method. This inquiry-based research method afforded the researcher the immediate opportunity to explore relationships among the data collected from the participant interviews. The findings are grounded in their responses. Eight building level administrators participated in this grounded theory study. The study found that grit plays a substantial role in a school's culture. The study also found that a building level administrator can foster a culture of grit in his/her school by building relationships with stakeholders, explicitly teaching what grit is, and extensively modeling grit him/herself.

Keywords: grit, culture, growing school culture, building level administrator, interview

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Schools are not adequately preparing students to enter college or the workforce. Strictly examining factors at the school level, that means teachers and administrators are not adequately preparing students to enter college or the workforce. Scrutinizing this issue from a “part-to-whole” perspective, the problem lies with individual teachers; from the “whole-to-part” perspective, the problem lies with the culture. The most effective solution addresses the problem at both ends.

Jim Abbott (2010) was a pitcher in major league baseball. Abbott had only one hand. According to his website, Abbott received numerous prestigious awards at the collegiate level including the Golden Spikes Award and the AAU Sullivan Award. He was a member of the 1988 Olympic baseball team and was drafted by the Angels in the first round in that same year. He went on to achieve successes with other teams in the league, and his notoriety grew. He currently works with the California Angels during spring training, but most of his time is spent as a successful motivational speaker.

An article based on one of Abbot’s (2010) speeches, also found on his website, references an acronym that he used to share his story and inspire listeners. He expressed that when faced with adversity, one must A.D.A.P.T. Given the magnitude of the handicap Abbott had to overcome, it is no wonder that the P in his acronym stands for perseverance.

While Abbott’s (2010) accomplishments are laudable for a *two*-handed player, let alone a one-handed one, it was one of his teachers who helped inspire Abbott; to show him that with the proper motivation (passion) and determination (perseverance), the

unthinkable can become a reality. Abbott is quoted in Aronson's (2020) blog:

Mr. Clarkson greeted me one morning with a great smile... "I've got it!" He said. "I figured it out." And I had not the slightest idea what he was talking about. "I know how you can tie your shoes," he said [H]e turned on the projector, occupying the rest of the class and dragged two chairs in the hallway. And we went out there and he had this method of tying shoes. And I know it doesn't sound like a big deal, but he had two hands. And I think of him at night ... with a clenched fist and working those laces and pulling them tight and then coming that day and pulling me out of class and saying "We can do this." And I think that attitude permeated throughout my career. (paras. 7-8)

Imagine an entire school in which the culture fostered this level of single-minded determination to student success as the rule, not the exception. Such a place exists. The Ron Clark Academy (RCA), founded in 2007, is an accredited school that has earned world-wide acclaim for educating students beyond the three Rs. The RCA website boasts that teachers at the school challenge students with rigorous academic endeavors while nurturing their creativity and passion (Clark, 2018).

In the introduction of his book, Clark (2003) expressed his thoughts about education. Clark (2003) stated that he approaches each new school year with the determination that he will make each day of that year meaningful and worthwhile for his students. Clark (2003) believed his fellow educators should do the same--make a world's worth of difference in the life of a student in a single school year. RCA was born from and runs on Clark's beliefs. While the school itself serves a small number of students in the Atlanta area, the school's website states that RCA wants to expand its range past the

students it serves. To that end, RCA regularly opens its doors to teachers as well as school and district level administrators. RCA has hosted over 38,000 visitors in the last 9 years. Those visitors witnessed new and tantalizing ways to approach the teaching and learning process. The RCA Experience showed them more meaningful ways in which they can grow a success-driven culture in their schools (Clark, 2018).

Shining stars, such as Jim Abbot's second-grade teacher, the educators at RCA, and others like them, have a profound impact on the children in their care. They, however, continue to be the exception instead of the rule. The following section explores the significant, pervasive nature of the educational problem at hand: Schools are not adequately preparing students to enter college or the workforce.

The Research Problem

Since its publication in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* has been the touchstone document referenced again and again in an effort to shame educators toward reform (Gardner, 1983). The following are some of the bullet points under the section "Indicators of the Risk" in the April 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education chaired by Gardner (1983):

- International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, revealed that on 19 academic tests, American students were never first or second; and in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
- Approximately 13% of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40%.

- Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.
- Many 17-year-olds do not possess the “higher order” intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40% cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.
- Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation. The Department of the Navy, for example, reported to the Commission that one quarter of its recent recruits cannot read at the ninth-grade level, the minimum needed simply to understand written safety instructions. Without remedial work, they cannot even begin, much less complete, the sophisticated training essential in much of the modern military.

Again, this is a partial list. Other bullet points referenced poor performance on standardized testing, lower achievement scores in science, and an increased need for remedial mathematics courses at the collegiate level (Gardner, 1983).

Affirming the 35-year-old accusations in *A Nation at Risk*, current employers do not feel that the students entering the workforce are prepared to do so. A 2015 survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) revealed that students and employers have vastly different perceptions on their level of preparedness (Jaschik, 2015). Jaschik (2015) found that in each of the 17 areas evaluated by students and employers, students ranked themselves as much more prepared than

employers did. Jaschik also found that knowledge and skills application in real-world settings were especially lacking. So, too, were critical thinking and communication skills in both oral and written form. Employers thought that fewer than three in 10 college graduates were well prepared in these areas.

Strauss (2016) elaborated on the ways in which current graduates are ill prepared for their jobs. Results from a 2016 PayScale survey showed that 44% of the 63,924 managers surveyed believed that their newly graduated employees lacked writing proficiency; 39% of the surveyed managers thought that the group also lacked public speaking skills (Strauss, 2016). The article went on to state that in addition to a lack of what Strauss labeled “hard skills,” the majority of managers (60%) reported that the new crop of college graduates lacked the requisite critical thinking skills as well as the imperative problem-solving skills that the managers felt they needed to successfully perform the job (Strauss, 2016).

The AACU study is referenced in an article from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in which Fabris (2015) echoed the sentiment in the Jaschik (2015) text. Fabris suggested that college graduates would likely state that they are prepared to enter the working world. Employers, to the contrary, would not have the same response (Fabris, 2015); however, Anthony Carnevale, as quoted in Fabris, offered the beginning of an explanation and a ray of hope:

Anthony P. Carnevale, director of Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, traces employers’ complaints about the quality of recent college graduates to 1983, when a recession ended and the economy changed rapidly.... Since then, the demands on colleges have grown at a rate that they

can't keep up with, Mr. Carnevale said. "It's not that higher education started doing a lousy job," he said. "It's that what was being asked of them was much more strenuous than it had been before." (p. 2)

Notice, Carnevale did not believe that higher education is "failing" students, *per se*. Rather, the task of educating students has become more difficult, more strenuous. Ironically, this idea was referenced 35 years earlier in *A Nation at Risk*:

Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them.... That we have compromised this commitment is, upon reflection, hardly surprising, given the multitude of often conflicting demands we have placed on our Nation's school and colleges. They are routinely called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve. (Gardner, 1983, para. 3)

Professional Significance of the Problem

Schools are not adequately preparing students to enter college or the workforce. This is the overarching theme of the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983). The risks, be they foreign or domestic, can be thwarted by a simple part-to-whole solution--better teachers. Research conducted by Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997) concluded that the single most important factor on a student's performance was the effectiveness of the teacher. Logic dictates that the obvious answer to immediate improvement in education is to increase teacher effectiveness (Wright et al., 1997).

This stance is supported by other researchers. Marzano, for example, believed that "individual teachers ... have a profound influence on student learning" (Marzano,

Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 3). Marzano et al.'s (2001) bold statement is rooted in the extensive research to refute the dismaying findings in *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, referred to as the Coleman Report, and the follow-up study by Jencks. The bleak picture of education painted by Coleman and Jencks suggested that education reform may be a fruitless endeavor; however, Marzano went on to state that the research since that of Coleman and Jencks reveals the significant impact a single teacher can have on students (Marzano et al., 2001). Luongo (2017) suggested, and others' research supports, that leaders understand the value of their people. People in an organization dictate the success or failure of that organization. Making sure the right people are on the bus is paramount for success (Collins, 2001; Luongo, 2007).

Inspecting the issue from a whole-to-part perspective, culture is the culprit. Bennett (2017) defined school culture as simply the way things are done. Culture must be the galvanizing force behind what those outstanding teachers do, and it does not happen accidentally. Rather, Bennett suggested that culture building takes intentionally, deliberate action, and maintenance. One may be tempted to intertwine the terms "culture" and "structure." This would be a grave error. Williams and Hierck (2015) illustrated how even the best people, the best teachers, can fall prey to the "this, too, shall pass" mentality.

Your school then began to implement all of the steps and strategies involved with the new initiative. In the beginning, you noticed compliance, but no investment. After a while, each initiative felt like one more chore to do, one more item on an over-flowing plate. It felt like something done *to you*. Did you watch that initiative unfold only to see it die a systematic death--a passing that you could

have predicted almost perfectly on a calendar? If you have experienced this, then you have seen what we call *culture eating structure for lunch*. (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 46)

Referring again to Bennett (2017), he asserted that culture (like structure) needs regular maintenance. Bennett suggested that without regular checkups, successful cultures can begin to decay. Likening a healthy culture to a successful diet, Bennett explained that the arduous component is the maintenance of the culture.

A study conducted by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2009) at the Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice at Stanford University pulled at the thread of the effects of how building level administrators use their time. Horng et al.'s research revealed the following:

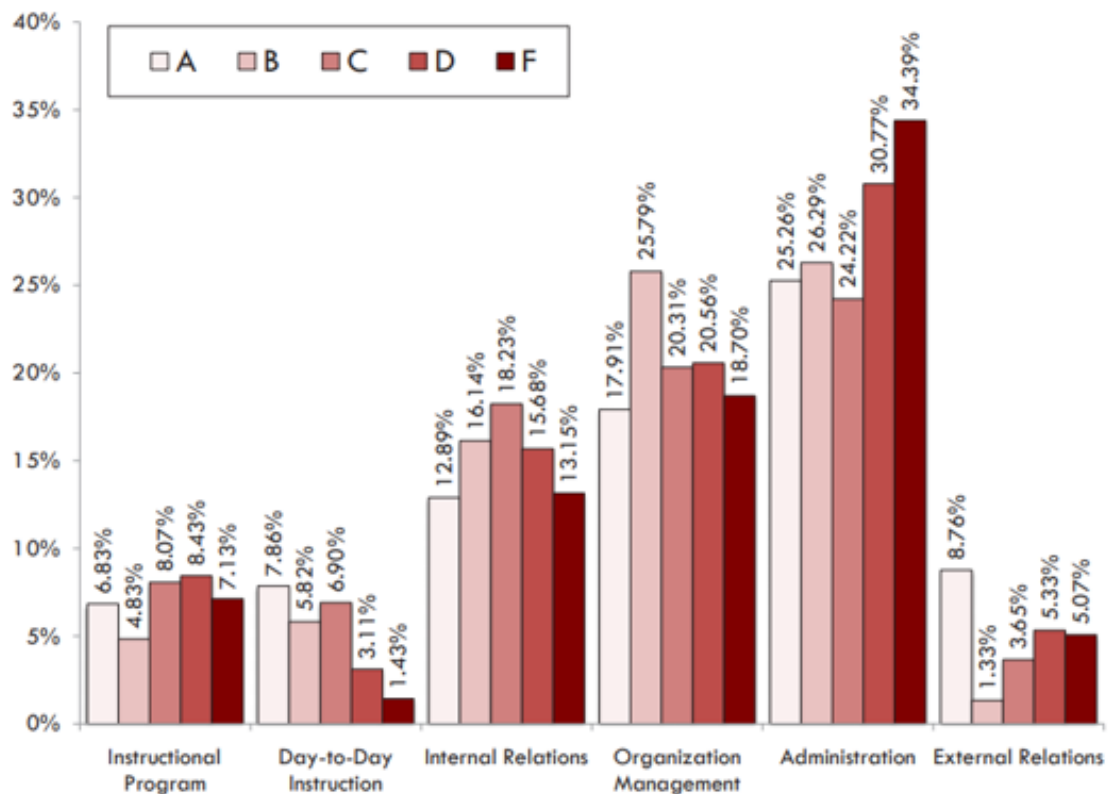


Figure 1. Principal Time Use by School Grade (Horng et al., 2009, p. 12).

Figure 1 shows the correlation between how principals spend their time and their schools' performance. Schools in which principals spent the most time on administration earned the lowest scores from the state's accountability system (Horng et al., 2009).

The tasks in the instructional program and day-to-day instruction categories included things like coaching teachers, developing and delivering learning opportunities for teachers (professional development), reviewing assessment data to shape subsequent programming, using assessment results for program evaluation, and evaluating teachers (Horng et al., 2009). Time spent on these tasks, as seen in Figure 1 was among the lowest. If Marzano and others are to be believed, these numbers need to be turned upside down. Ultimately, the researchers concluded that their findings were not conclusive (Horng et al., 2009); however, the information presented in Figure 1 remains intriguing.

Professional Significance of the Study

Whitaker has extensively researched the topic of teacher effectiveness. Whitaker (2004) clarified what school reform takes by simply stating that schools can do two things to experience significant improvement: hire better teachers and improve the existing teachers (Whitaker, 2004). An entire chapter of Whitaker's (2003) work is titled "Hire Great Teachers." Research illustrates time and again that the most important task faced by any educational leader is to hire and cultivate quality teachers.

Covey, Covey, Summers, and Hatch (2008) bridged the gap between people and culture. Habits of effective people has been Covey's extensive topic of study and area of expertise. Covey et al. transferred those seven habits from people to culture. They stated highly effective school cultures can be created by highly effective people (Covey et al., 2008).

Covey et al. (2008) went on to liken the habits of effective people to those of a highly effective culture:

Be Proactive. People exert initiative, accept responsibility for actions, control their emotions, and focus on things they can influence. They make things happen.

Begin with the End in Mind. People are in the pursuit of meaningful purposes with clear schoolwide goals and strategies. They have clear personal goals.

Put First Things First. People are focused on important priorities. They say *no* to frivolous requests. They make time for planning, preparation, and prevention.

Think Win-Win. People think win-win, are trustworthy. They balance courage with consideration, and look for ways to benefit the whole. Collaboration and sharing best practices is encouraged.

Seek First to Understand. People diagnose before they prescribe solutions. They are empathic, nonjudgmental, and feel free to express options freely.

Synergize. People seek out others' ideas and value diversity. They are humble. There is high teamwork and creativity. People feel free to think outside the box.

Sharpen the Saw. People strive for continuous improvement. They are up-to-date, energetic, and enjoy a family feeling. They keep their spirits high. (pp. 68-69)

Operating from the position that culture trumps strategy, it stands to reason that instructional leaders' prime directives should be to foster the culture they find desirable. A school's culture **will** exist. Bennett (2017) articulated that productive, effective school leaders must artfully and intentionally create the culture they desire in their schools.

Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, and Byrd (2016) affirmed that a school's

culture reflects the traditional shared beliefs and values. Culture invariably has an impact on student achievement. It was found that higher achieving schools were ones in which the culture nurtured engagement, celebrated empowerment, and fostered collaborative practices (Ohlson et al., 2016). Engagement, empowerment, and collaboration are three lofty yet attainable elements of culture. This is strenuous work. More strenuous work calls for greater persistence; it calls for grit.

Grit, as defined by Duckworth (2016), is an amalgamation of passion and perseverance that the highest of achievers possess. Duckworth (2016) shared numerous stories about these high achievers, these “paragon[s] of grit” (p. 47). In each example, Duckworth (2016) found these paragons of grit displayed two distinct traits that were integral to their success. The first trait was their unyielding resilience that fueled their hard work. Adversity and repeated failure left them undeterred. The second was their clear focus on their endgame. They knew, and were dedicated to reaching, their ultimate goal. They applied that hard work toward their goal (Duckworth, 2016).

This premise is not new. The ancient Chinese philosopher and educator Confucius stated simply, “It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop” (Pollock, 2018, para. 27). A slightly more modern proponent of the tenacious side of grit can be found in John Quincy Adams: “Courage and perseverance have a magical talisman, before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish into air” (Pollock, 2018, para. 11). Calvin Coolidge’s thoughts on the matter most closely resemble those of Duckworth:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded

genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan Press On! has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race. (Pollock, 2018, para. 3)

The prevalence of gritty attitudes appears to have deteriorated over the generations. Research conducted by Haimovitz and Dweck (2017) suggested that parents and teachers are not passing their gritty attitudes on to their children. The point at which that began, and the reasons behind that deterioration, are debatable and irrelevant. With the nation continuing to be at risk, educational leaders can no longer take a laissez-faire, superficial approach to what equates to their most important work of growing gritty cultures in schools. Duckworth (2016) wrote,

At its core, a culture is defined by the shared norms and values of a group of people. In other words, a distinct culture exists anytime a group of people are in consensus about how we do things around here and why.... The bottom line on culture and grit is: *If you want to be grittier, find a gritty culture and join it. If you're a leader, and you want the people in your organization to be grittier, create a gritty culture.* (pp. 244-245)

If anything can be learned from *A Nation at Risk*, it is that reform is necessary and needs to take place immediately (Gardner, 1983). Casas (2017) encouraged educators to start the work of creating an excellent culture today. In such a culture, Casas believed staff members will no longer feel the fear of isolation. Rather, they can flourish confidently in a positive culture that embraces the power of yes (Casas, 2017). Armed with the magic talismans, passion and purpose, work needs to start now.

The purpose of this study was to learn how leaders, specifically building level school administrators, approach the development of culture and how, if at all, the different aspects of grit are leveraged to bring about positive school change.

Research Questions

1. What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?
2. How does a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit?”

Context of the Study

Teacher and cultural development were examined chiefly through the eyes of a group of principals from a large school district in North Carolina and through the lens of the companion text to *Grit* by Angela Duckworth (2016). The principals in the study were comprised of those who had been principal of more than one school in their career in the district. This provided two or more different experiences in which the principals were faced with the task of assimilating to or changing the culture of their buildings while growing teachers.

Definition of Terms

Grit. Duckworth (2016) defined the quality of grit as a “combination of passion and perseverance” (p. 8). Tough (2012) put it another way, using Duckworth’s (2016) construct. Grit is “self-discipline wedded to a dedicated pursuit of a goal” (Tough, 2012, p. 136). The Browning School’s 1897 yearbook defined “grytte” as, ““firmness, courage determination ... which alone win the crown of genuine success in all undertakings”” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 253).

Passion. Passion is “knowing the why” behind actions, knowing purpose.

Reeves (2016) stated,

Passion--emotional engagement--and purpose are deeply intertwined. Few people will be passionate about a 5 percent increase in test scores, but nearly everyone can be passionate about saving the lives of students that are the future of our communities. (p. 14)

Perseverance. Perseverance is putting in the work--the boring, less-than-glamorous work. Perseverance is analogous to the flywheel concept outlined by Collins (2001).

There was no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, [but] ... a cumulative process--step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel--that adds up to sustained and spectacular results. (Collins, 2001, p. 165)

Culture. Culture is, at its core, “the way we do things around here” (Bennett, 2017, p. 6). More concretely, Rudella (2015) wrote,

School culture is “the shared ideas-assumptions, values, and beliefs--that give an organization its identity and standard for expected behavior” (Best Practice Beliefs, 2004, p. 1). In other words, school culture influences everything that happens; the way teachers, students, and administration think, feel, and act.” (p. 29)

School leadership. Whitaker, Zoul, and Casas (2017) believed, “the very best leaders never forget that the core of business of their schools is learning” (p. 13). While this is an elemental truth, school leadership involves complex aspects that extend well beyond student learning. Fullan (2001) outlined five components necessary for effective

leadership. They are moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. Fullan (2001) suggested that leaders need to tap into their stores of energy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness throughout the leadership process.

Summary

Chapter 1 explored the definition and significance of grit. As *A Nation at Risk* warned some 35 years ago, students are ill prepared as they enter the workforce. A better education for those students is the logical solution for this problem. Researchers such as Marzano et al. (2001) and Whitaker (2003) pointed to teachers as being the X-Factor when it comes to student success in a classroom. Covey et al. (2008) then broadened the scope from “teacher” to “culture.”

Duckworth’s (2016) research on individuals and organizations (read as “teachers” and “culture”) illuminated two undergirding factors integral to success in each individual or collective case study. Those factors are passion and perseverance. These are the components of grit.

A grittier culture in schools yields more confident and robust learners. These are the students who will be able to keep our nation safe from risk.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Grit

“Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work. Stephen King” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

Smilie and Smilie (2017) attested that from Plato to the Middle Ages, the main goal of education was to nurture character. Smilie and Smilie went on to say that the medieval concept of grit was more elaborate. The medieval definition of grit had a broader scope than the contemporary one (Smilie & Smilie, 2017). Their medieval reference illuminated the possibility that grit can be somewhat of a double-edged sword. In medieval times, Thomas Aquinas included *studiositas* (or *studiousness*) as an aspect of grit. *Studiositas*, defined as the precise application of the mind, was viewed as virtuous. However, taken to an extreme, that precise application may morph into a vice. This vice was termed *curiositas*. While similar to the contemporary term *curiosity*, *curiositas*, as defined by Aquinas, is a more extreme condition. It is an extreme desire for knowledge. The magnitude excess of that desire flies in the face of temperance, and is therefore deemed sinful, a vice (Smilie & Smilie, 2017).

These extremes are explored by Smilie and Smilie (2017) utilizing *The Canterbury Tales* as a context. In his tale, the Yeoman and his compatriots perpetually clamor for knowledge related to the alchemical arts. Their relentless pursuit existed even though becoming proficient in alchemy, viewed as a demonic art, would render them unto a hellish fate (Smilie & Smilie, 2017). In contrast, Chaucer extols the virtues of the schoolboy, also called the Clergeon, in the *Prioress' Tale*. The Clergeon exhibits grittiness towards pious pursuits. As such, his efforts were viewed more favorably. In

the *Tale*, the Clergeon devotes countless hours to learning a hymn far beyond his capacity in lieu of working in his primer. He does this in the face of being physically reprimanded for his poor performance on the required text. Efforts were recognized at both extremes; however, Smilie and Smilie suggested that while the Yeoman was intellectually superior to the Clergeon, his impure pursuits, however gritty, were secondary to those of the Clergeon. Smilie and Smilie claimed that grit applied to more pure avocations (*studiositas*) were more likely to yield the desired results, even should those results be nearly out of one's grasp.

Certainly, the possibility to move from "productive" to "obsessive" still exists; however, the modern connotations of grit are viewed as positive, desirable, as Teddy Roosevelt (1910) declared:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasm, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. (para. 1)

The purpose of adding Smilie and Smilie's (2017) work here is to demonstrate that the concept of grit, the need to TEACH how to be gritty, is not new. Such practices have been in place for quite some time. For centuries, philosophers, authors,

evangelicals, and teachers have been extoling the virtues of hard work. Duckworth and her contemporaries continue their crusade.

Stoltz is one such contemporary. Stoltz (2015a) suggested that GRIT is the X-Factor, the galvanizing ingredient necessary for success. Stoltz (2015a) stated that GRIT is what students and educators are hungry for as it powers other desirable aspirations such as gainful employment, task completion, and retention.

In his efforts to help the grit movement evolve, Stoltz (2015a) has taken the word “grit,” and trade-marked his corresponding acronym. Likewise, he created and trade-marked a “GRIT Gauge,” his means by which GRIT is assessed. The letters in Stoltz’s (2015a) acronym stand for the following; G--growth, R--resilience, I--instinct, and T--tenacity. These components are, for the most part, congruent with the elements of Duckworth’s (2016) grit--passion and perseverance.

There is an apparent lack of “passion” in Stoltz’s (2015a) definition; however, passion may be addressed in the deeper explanation of the “instinct” component. Stoltz (2015a) suggested that instinct is a primal, “gut-level” inclination to do that which is best and right in the most productive ways (p. 3). Stoltz (2015a) went on to state (but did not expand on the notion) that “this dimension of GRIT is both humbling and inspiring” (p. 3).

In a different article in the same year, Stoltz (2015b) explored GRIT through the lens of leadership. He defined leadership GRIT (also trade-marked) as a leader’s ability to inspire those in his or her charge to achieve the loftiest of goals even when that requires a degree of intestinal fortitude, requiring them to encounter struggles and endure sacrifices (Stoltz, 2015b). In this work, Stoltz (2015b) added an element to his acronym.

While the components of Growth, Resilience, Instinct, and Tenacity are the primary elements of GRIT, Stoltz (2015b) suggested that an element of robustness, the wear-and-tear factor, rounds out the more complete picture of what GRIT entails. Robustness suggests a degree of hearty vigorousness which, Stoltz (2015b) suggested, is an essential component to successful pursuits.

Stoltz (2015b) was adamant that GRIT is the defining factor when it comes to success. Stoltz (2015b) maintained, and studies corroborate his claim, that GRIT plays a part in both the significance of a particular goal that one sets and the sheer volume of goals that one completes. Stoltz (2015b) stated, and again, studies support the claim, that people with more GRIT set and complete loftier goals than those of low to moderate levels of GRIT.

While commonly known for her work in the area of mindsets, Dweck's (2006) construct of a *growth* mindset closely mirrors the tenets of grit. Dweck published findings in 2006 from a poll conducted among creativity researchers. Dweck reported that the researchers believed that the key to achievement is a growth mindset born from perseverance and resilience. Dweck claimed that as a growth mindset develops, the definitions of success and failure change. Successes are measured in smaller components. Failures are authentic opportunities to learn. Additionally, effort cannot be underestimated in a growth mindset. Effort, the striving toward better, is key in a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). A growth mindset, perhaps then, may serve as a more clinical pseudonym for grit. Regardless of the chosen nomenclature, those elemental components--perseverance, goal orientation, outlook on failure--are essential to one's success.

Pink (2009) outlined the concept of big versus small questions. While the big question (the ultimate goal or objective) is important, it is incomplete. The small questions (incremental progress toward that goal) scaffold thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that lead the big question. This progress toward answering the big question, Pink warned, is a slow process. This is the essence of Duckworth's (2016) idea of grit. Pink used the analogy of training for a marathon to illustrate his point. While the big question is necessary, the successful completion of a marathon, it is not sufficient. Much more time is dedicated to the minute steps building up to that ultimate goal attainment--the marathon itself (Pink, 2009).

Pink's (2009) description and examples are synonyms with those Duckworth (2016) mentioned throughout her entire text. A key parallel point is the fact that the larger task, the big question, has little chance of being completed or answered without first mastering the smaller components. "Educators interested in systemic reform need not and should not choose between long-term goals and short-term action steps. They must address both" (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 67). This theme appears in the work of researcher after researcher. Pink encouraged that perfection is not the end goal. Rather, incremental progress *toward* the end goal is the desired outcome. This, Pink suggested, will maintain motivation.

Without using the word outright, Colvin (2008) discussed elements of grit when describing the success of Olympic figure skater Shizuka Arakawa and others of her *tribe*. Colvin explained the determination exhibited by world-class ice skaters, in graphic, painful fashion. His conservative estimate supposed that Arakawa's efforts yielded roughly 20,000 less-than-graceful falls on the ice prior to yielding Olympic gold. Skaters

spend countless hours on the ice practicing, and failing, performing moves and jumps that are technically beyond their current performance level, *stretching*. However, these efforts, as Colvin stated, *eventually* pay off after repeated failures.

Colvin (2008) also detailed the gritty, self-inflicted practices that Hall of Fame wide receiver Jerry Rice endured. Uphill wind sprints, weight training, and off-season workouts 6 days a week were just a few of the practices that made Rice the player he was (Colvin, 2008). What allowed Rice to play until the age of 42 in a record setting 303 career football games (Colvin, 2008) was his relentless dedication to his craft. Colvin reported just a few of the things that contributed to Rice's success. Rather than going out and playing football, Rice dutifully practiced aspects of the game that he lacked. He worked on improving his deficient areas, and perhaps most importantly or at least most impressive is the fact that he did all these things even though he found no joy in it. Rice knew his efforts were a means to a larger end (Colvin, 2008).

Tough is another of Duckworth's contemporaries who regularly collaborates with educators and writes extensively on the subject of student success. The following is a portion of a conversation about student success that Tough (2012) had with Dominic Randolph, headmaster of the prestigious Riverdale Country School:

The most critical missing piece, Randolph explained, is character. "Whether it's the pioneer in the Conestoga wagon or someone coming here in the 1920s from southern Italy, there was always this idea in America that if you worked hard and you showed real grit, that you could be successful," he said,

Strangely, we've now forgotten that. People who have an easy time of things, who get eight hundreds on their SATs, I worry that those people

get feedback that everything they're doing is great. And I think as a result, we are actually setting them up for long-term failure. When that person suddenly has to face up to a difficult moment, then I think they're screwed, to be honest. I don't think they've grown the capacities to be able to handle that. (pp. 56-57)

In other words, Randolph believed and, as stated in Chapter 1, business leaders agree, there is a lack of “stick-to-it-iveness” that exists in a pervasive way among students today.

Randolph believed so deeply in the importance of building student character that he founded the Character Lab with Duckworth and Levin. Levin, coincidentally a Riverdale graduate, started the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) charter schools in conjunction with Duckworth and Randolph (Riverdale Country School, 2018).

According to the KIPP Schools (2018), KIPP schools “help students foster character strengths that are essential for their own success and well-being” (para. 1). KIPP champions seven integral elements of character. The first among them is grit (passion and perseverance) applied toward long-term goals. The other elements of character explicitly taught at KIPP schools include zest, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity (KIPP Schools, 2018). It could be argued that each of the traits enhance a richer, more complete form of grit.

Educators at the Riverdale Country School and the 224 KIPP schools across the nation work diligently to grow these elements of character in their students. Such practices are the very fabric of those schools' cultures.

Passion

“A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle. James Keller” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

In the prologue of his book *Teach Like Your Hair's on Fire*, Esquith (2007) went to the extreme in his dogged pursuit to help a child in his class succeed. Esquith was conducting a chemistry experiment that utilized alcohol lamps. He noticed that a young lady's lamp was not working properly through no fault of her own. Esquith saw tears in her eyes and resolved to intervene.

Esquith (2007) recalled his intense, single-minded yearning to help that student succeed with her experiment. It was his only goal in that moment. He likened his experience to those of athletes when they are performing at the top of their game or being “in the zone.” Esquith detailed his actions in a play-by-play fashion, explaining why the lamp was not functioning properly and the steps he took to fix it. He triumphantly got the stubborn piece of equipment to work and expected a hero's smile from the young lady; however, the expected adoration was replaced with horror. As a result of his efforts, Esquith's hair had accidentally caught on fire.

This extreme example is the epitome of passion for the teaching craft. A few weeks prior, Esquith (2007) had been questioning his worth as an educator. After this incident, Esquith reported a renewed euphoria for his chosen profession as a result of the spark that accompanied helping his student. Esquith's flame (*literal* flame) reignited his passion for teaching.

Robinson and Aronica (2009) posed sobering questions:

What will our children do if we continue to prepare them for life using the old

models of education?... Isn't it therefore our obligation to encourage them to explore as many avenues as possible with an eye toward discovering their true talents and their true passions? (pp. 20-21)

Robinson and Aronica suggested that today's students will not only have more than a single job but, rather, numerous careers; some of which do not currently exist and are yet unknown.

The action Robinson and Aronica (2009) suggested here is that people should encourage children to find what he called the Element. The Element is where innate ability and personalized passion intersect (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Personal passion (that which inspires a person) and their natural aptitude (an inherent ability) are organic to one's pursuits.

Incidentally, Robinson and Aronica (2009) believed that adults should also pursue their Element. Robinson and Aronica suggested that several people have not stumbled upon their Element as they fail to see their ability for perpetual renewal. *The Element* contains example after example, citing the same uncontested message (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Individuals achieved at high levels while experiencing a great deal of satisfaction when engaging in activities (avocations, tasks) at which they were naturally proficient and about which they were passionate (Robinson & Aronica, 2009).

Meier, as quoted in Schmoker (2006), asked, "The question is not, Is it possible to educate all children well? But rather Do we want to do it badly enough?" (p. 55).

Schmoker took a logical, albeit stingingly candid approach to motivation, as if goading his audiences into purposeful action.

I have asked numerous audiences in dozens of states the following question: What

two activities are least apt to occur during a typical English or language arts class?

In every case, after a quiet moment, come the answers, one then the other:

“Reading.”

“Writing.”

Heads nod; there is some nervous laughter. I always ask the audience if something so counterintuitive could really be true. I get lots of uncomfortable acknowledgments. I then ask if this lack of reading and writing could possibly be good for kids. Lots of scattered responses: “no.” (Schmoker, 2006, pp. 76-77)

Schmoker (2006) recognized that his passion by outrage approach to school improvement by rocking the proverbial boat known as the status quo will be unpopular and met with opposition. Undeterred, Schmoker’s crusade will continue. Schmoker insisted that he will continue to forge a righteous path through schools in which basic, attainable objectives are not achieved.

Pink (2009), bestselling author and lecturer on motivation, wrote, Words matter. And if you listen carefully, you might begin to hear a slightly different--slightly more purpose-oriented--dialect. Gary Hamel ... says, “The goals of management are usually described in words like ‘efficiency,’

‘advantage,’ ‘value,’ ‘superiority,’ ‘focus,’ and ‘differentiation.’ Important as these objectives are, they lack the power to rouse human hearts.” Business leaders, he says, “must find ways to infuse mundane business activities with deeper, soul-stirring ideals, such as honor, truth, love, justice, and beauty.”

Humanize what people say and you may well humanize what they do. (pp. 138-139)

Pink (2009) illustrated this point with an example--TOMS Shoes. TOMS Shoes is unique. TOMS Shoes donates a pair of new shoes to a child in a developing country for each pair of shoes TOMS sells (Pink, 2009). TOMS Shoes offers up, literally, half of their profits for the betterment of others. While this seems counterintuitive for a for-profit business, the organization carries on with their humanitarian effort, as it is their passion. The company has explained their operation by stating that TOMS Shoes is a for-profit company, with a center for giving (Pink, 2009). The humanity and the passion TOMS Shoes has overrides the traditional business model.

As Hamel (as quoted in Pink, 2009) suggested, there needs to be more fervency, a deeper sense of purpose in day-to-day activities. Pink (2009) agreed. People working in service toward a higher goal, one beyond themselves, achieve more. Highly motivated and productive people work in service to a goal or objective bigger than themselves (Pink, 2009). *These* are people who are drawn to service in fields such as medicine, the clergy, and education. *These* are the people *called* to serve.

Sergiovanni (1992) addressed educators, educators in leadership especially, to lead through purposing. Sergiovanni suggested that there has recently been a renewed interest in purposing as it fortifies productivity in individuals and organizations, while it elevates the essential meaning of the given work. Sergiovanni continued, quoting Goldman, “we must be able to see the connection between why we do what we do and some larger purpose. If we can’t see the connection, then maybe we’re doing something wrong” (p. 73).

At the heart of Sergiovanni’s (1992) work is the dichotomous concept of servant leadership. The notion of servant leadership illustrates the necessity of a leader to

provide not only direction to the organization as a whole, but support to each individual in the leader's care. Duckworth (2016) echoed this sentiment. Duckworth (2016) believed that you can perform as THE BOSS, while still working in the service of others.

Fullan is typically known for his work in the field of culture. Fullan (2008), while still utilizing the framework of growing culture, flirted with other components that closely pertain to grit. Fullan (2008) agreed that connecting peers with purpose is an effective technique to involve stakeholders in meaningful ways where high-quality interactions are required for their work. This drips with truth for educators. Pink (2009) shared another elemental truth: "It's in our nature to seek purpose" (p. 144). Purpose and passion are inextricably entwined. In her conversations with various paragons of grit, Duckworth (2016) learned that the nature of their pursuits was special, it had purpose. Duckworth (2016) noted that each of her paragons of grit expressed the message. Their efforts, failures, sacrifices, and disappointments were ultimately worth it. Because those efforts were in service to others in some way, it was worth it (Duckworth, 2016).

Duckworth (2016) shared the parable of the bricklayers to continue to emphasize the importance of one's own perception of their work and purpose. The third bricklayer's response to the simple question of, "What are you doing?" is "Building the house of God." This clearly illustrates the importance he places on his seemingly menial task at hand. His outlook on his work and purpose is clear and of great importance. Such a purpose provides great motivation. Motivation fuels perseverance.

Perseverance

"It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer. Albert Einstein" (Pollock, 2018, p. 3).

Often, psychological methods are regularly appropriated for use in the educational field. In psychology, there is a behavior modification method known as shaping. Shaping is a technique in which successive approximations are reinforced to incrementally achieve the desired behavior (Kellerman, 2009). This method relies on perseverance. Like a world-class swimmer, spelling bee champion, or good-to-great company utilizing the Hedgehog Concept, there is a degree of perseverance required to continue pushing the flywheel. The psychological concepts of shaping through successive approximations are applicable in each component studied in this work.

Similarly, business models can be applied to the educational field. Two such models are the Hedgehog Concept, as illustrated in Collins (2001), and the Baldrige Criteria.

The Hedgehog Concept revolves around the answers to three simple questions: What can your company do better than anyone else in the world? How does your company make its money? What do you care deeply about (Collins, 2001)? For educational purposes, the answer to question 2 would equate to student performance. Collins (2001) noted that good-to-great companies that utilized the Hedgehog Concept were able to create a clear, simple model that drove their subsequent action. The intentionality of their behaviors, focusing on just those most important, highest-yield activities allowed for other less important, even unnecessary behaviors, to fall by the wayside. Collins (2001) highlighted a variety of companies for which the Hedgehog Concept yielded impressive results measured by an impressive increase in profits. In elementary terms, the Hedgehog Concept stresses the value in and success that an organization can experience by doing one *meaningful* thing the stakeholders are

passionate about better than anyone else and letting everything else go.

Collins (2005) addressed the need to revise the components of the Hedgehog Concept to better accommodate those in the social sector. The components in the social sector are as follows: First, what is your organization's mission? What is its purpose? What is it passionate about? More directly, why does your organization exist? Next, what unique contribution can your organization make to enhance the lives of those it touches? Finally, how does your organization effectively utilize its resource engine—brand, money, and time (Collins, 2005)? A sustainable resource engine, in conjunction with the complete application of passion and doing what an organization does best, will move an organization toward greatness. Collins, like Whitaker (2003), still maintains that the right people are essential, more so than money. “Money is a commodity; talent is not. Time and talent can often compensate for a lack of money, but money cannot ever compensate for lack of the right people” (Collins, 2005, p. 17).

“The Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence are a framework that any organization can use to improve overall performance” (Granite State Quality Council, n.d., p. 2). This is a simplistic definition for the intricate yet accessible model displayed in Figure 2.

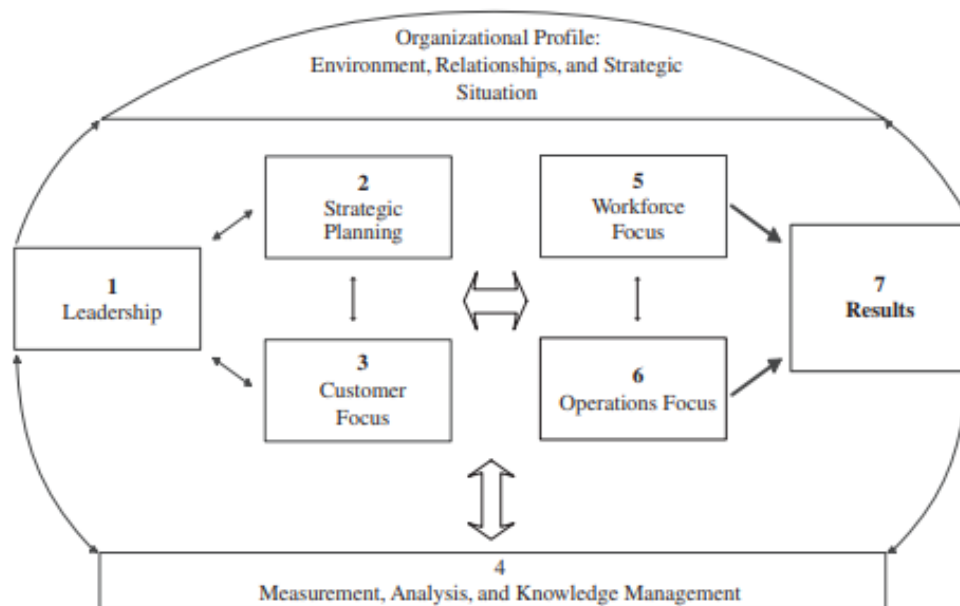


Figure 2. Baldrige Criteria (Peng & Prybutok, 2015, p. 629).

Figure 2 shows there are seven key, interrelated components to the criteria that address various aspects of an organization. Each category is linked to each other (some more directly than others) and, therefore, has an impact on the end result. The criteria systemically and systematically “do the right things, at the right time, in the right way” (Granite State Quality Council, n.d., p. 4). In an organization utilizing the criteria, the mechanisms are in place for the organization (system) to yield successful results in a routine, ongoing fashion (systematic).

While a business model, the core values and concepts the Baldrige Criteria espouses transcend organizational type. Schools, paper companies, tire shops, and any other organization can experience success when engaging the core values and concepts that are integrated into each component of the model. They include leadership with vision; a focus on an exemplary customer experience; ongoing learning for individuals

and the organization as a whole; an emphasis on fluidity and mutability; and a future-oriented, results-oriented, and value-added systems outlook (Granite State Quality Council, n.d.).

Both the Hedgehog Concept and the Baldrige Criteria share a preeminent notion--organizations must have focused growth. Collins, as quoted in Schmoker (2006)'s work, insisted that the keys to success are diligence and simplicity. Greatness is a result of the removal of all that is extemporaneous, leaving a clear focus on that which is integral to the cause at hand (Schmoker, 2006). Collins was referring to the flywheel effect. Collins (2001) explained the flywheel effect as the painstaking process of moving, ever-so-incrementally, toward the next level or stage. This is done for the sole purpose of continued improvement. In this model, there is no "end game," just a perpetual growth-regrouping at each higher level. Collins (2001) warned that this action is slow. There is no instantaneous "ah-ha" moment. "Rather, the process resembled relentlessly pushing a giant heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond" (Collins, 2001, p. 14).

The flywheel is a perfect analogy for the continuum of continuous improvement and the integral part persistence plays in the success of an organization. Collins (2001) quoted Wayne Sanders of Kimberly-Clark: "We're just never satisfied. We can be delighted, but never satisfied" (p. 160). Sanders's words typify the essence of continuous improvement--acknowledge success while striving for more. George Harvey of Pitney Bowes explained why "there is always so much more to create for greatness in an ever-changing world" (Collins, 2001, p. 160). The evolving world perpetually presents more and different issues to face, more opportunities to leverage. Applying constant force on

the flywheel builds momentum for each new successive approximation.

The real beauty and power of the flywheel effect is in the principle of coherence. Peterson, a physics professor, shared his thoughts with Collins (2001). Coherence is when one factor amplifies another. Peterson drew the parallel between coherence and the flywheel effect. One component of a system enhances the next and so on. Under these conditions, the entire, collective system is stronger than the sum of its parts. Over time, this continued, consistent amplification of part-to-part makes the entire system stronger (Collins, 2001).

“The underdog” is arguably one of the favorite archetypal characters in literature and popular culture; underdog stories are Hollywood’s bread and butter. Movies like *GI Jane*, *Rudy*, and essentially all the movies in the *Rocky* franchise illustrate the powerful, positive impact perseverance can have on the life of a typically marginalized character, an unlikely hero; however, those underdogs exude the intestinal fortitude it takes to see things through. They possess a certain kind of hope that Duckworth (2016) described as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. It is their own understanding, a conviction, that their actions and effort will create an improved circumstance in the future (Duckworth, 2016).

Dolph Lundgren’s character in *Rocky IV* was the obvious favorite to win the fight with the Italian Stallion. Physically, he stood at a staggering 6’5¼” against Rocky’s mere 5’9½” (IMDb, 2018). He was clearly better trained and more talented. Duckworth (2016) addressed the mystique of talent. Duckworth (2016) acknowledged that obviously, a degree of talent is a contributing factor to success but not the only, exclusive factor. Duckworth’s (2016) caveat continued by warning that highlighting talent may cast other factors into the shadows. By doing so, other factors, such as grit, may not

seem as important as they actually are (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth (2016) postulated in Chapter 3 that “Effort Counts Twice” (p. 35). In a graphic, Duckworth (2016) expressed that talent multiplied by effort will yield skill. Skill multiplied by effort will yield achievement (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth (2016) went on to explain, “Talent is how quickly your skills improve when you invest effort. Achievement is what happens when you take your acquired skills and use them” (p. 42). Talent and knowledge only contribute to a person’s success when actionable. Talent in isolation will not necessarily yield results. One needs to put in effort; that takes grit. Hollywood projects and Duckworth’s (2016) research supported that grit made it possible for “the little guy” to reign victorious.

Gladwell (2013) weighed in on the concept of the underdog archetype through the parable of David and Goliath. Gladwell suggested that it is wrong to instantly presume that the diminutive opponent will fail. He suggested that the appeal of an underdog’s unlikely victory is what people find intriguing about the genre, yet Gladwell contended it happens all the time, particularly when the underdog fights like David. Gladwell continued, David fought “with courage and faith” (p. 15). Courage and faith are powerful motivating factors in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Aesop, Greek fabulist, wrote about the power of perseverance since time before Christ. Arguably one of the most famous and widely referenced of Aesop’s fables is that of *The Hare and the Tortoise*. The classic tale warns readers about the potential dangers of being boastful and, more germane to the topic here, lauds the trait of persistence. After bragging about his speed, the hare ends up losing a race because he fell asleep, while

the Tortoise plodded on and plodded, and when the Hare awoke from his nap, he saw the Tortoise just near the winning-post and could not run up in time to save the race. Then said the Tortoise: “Plodding wins the race.” (Planet PDF, n.d., p. 73).

In both the David and Goliath story and the fable of *The Hare and the Tortoise*, the winning underdog had what his opponent lacked: the right mindset to win. Collins (2005) believed the Stockdale Paradox presents itself in situations such as these. The underdog must hang on to the hope that they will be victorious in the end. This hope provides the underdog with the faith to forge on while faced with seemingly insurmountable odds (Collins, 2005).

Carol Dweck is a leading researcher and author on the importance of the right mindset. Specifically, Dweck champions a growth mindset. With a growth mindset, students, even those with challenges, are more likely to achieve higher levels of academic performance (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Adults play an important role in fostering or limiting a child’s growth mindset. An experiment conducted by Kamins and Dweck, as referenced by Haimovitz and Dweck (2017), illustrated the impact adult responses have on a child’s mindset. Children in the experiment were given a doll that represented them. During the course of the interaction, their character made a mistake and was provided feedback from a teacher doll. Children demonstrated a lower degree of resilience on tasks after receiving person-focused criticism. They displayed a fixed mindset toward the subsequent tasks, and their performance reflected that mindset. On the contrary, children demonstrated a greater degree of resilience when they received feedback that was focused on the process. This fostered more of a growth mindset. These children displayed a

higher degree of persistence on subsequent tasks as well a more positive affect and positive self-assessment (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017).

Moving from the individual to the classroom, recent studies referenced in Haimovitz and Dweck (2017) explored, through an open-ended question format, how teachers responded to different types of students, studying and excelling, in their classrooms. In growth mindset classrooms, teachers displayed a greater sense of accountability for student success. The teachers worked *with* students to achieve results. The teachers also shared that effort, productive struggles, and even frustration are indispensable components of the learning process in a growth-mindset, success-oriented classroom (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017).

From the classroom to the school level, a growth mindset culture, Haimovitz and Dweck (2107) reviewed the expeditionary learning (EL) model. Learners at each level, from students to school leaders, check for understanding on a daily basis. This process allows all learners to students, teachers, and administration to observe the fruits of their efforts each day. All learners observe their incremental progress. Feedback from teachers and peers, designed to focus on the learning process and progress toward goal attainment, also fosters a sense of a greater learning community among the students (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017).

The repetitive, successive approximations approach taken in the 150 EL schools are echoes of the flywheel effect. MacKenzie, a prominent potter, stated the following about his craft: “The first 10,000 pots are difficult ... and then it gets a bit easier” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 43). Such an approach has been concluded to be successful in study after study in business as well as social sector organizations.

DuFour and Fullan (2013) suggested that in order to maintain unrelenting attention to movement on the continuous improvement continuum, leaders must be vigilant while attending to the following questions: What is standing in the way of progress? What resources and supports are available/necessary to make advances? How do we capitalize on progress (celebrate successes to build confidence in individuals as well as the group as a whole) to stimulate momentum for the challenges that follow?

“Basketball coach John Wooden was fond of saying, ‘Success is never final; failure is never fatal. It’s courage that counts’” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 264). Perseverant efforts, the constant plodding despite the repeated failures, are the necessary efforts to turn the flywheel.

Kaizen is Japanese for resisting the plateau of arrested development. Its literal translation is: ‘continuous improvement’... but it’s a *positive* state of mind, not a negative one. It’s not looking backward with dissatisfaction. It’s looking *forward* and wanting to grow. (Duckworth, 2016, p. 118)

Culture

If everyone in a school is treated with respect and dignity, you may still have nothing special. However, if everyone in a school is not treated with respect and dignity, you will never have anything special. Of that, I am sure. (Whitaker, 2003, p. 26)

A 2017 study of a Shanghai primary school, similar to this study, explored the impact of a positive learning culture. The researchers claimed that school leaders must intentionally and carefully nurture a positive, learning-oriented culture (Haiyan, Walker, & Xiaowei, 2017). The first research question in the study asked, “How do school

leaders build a positive teacher learning culture” (Haiyan et al., 2017, p. 102)? The study suggested that there is reciprocal influence between and among the culture and the individuals who comprise the membership in that culture. That culture, in turn, affects its members--students included. The study also suggested that there are three key elements that exist in a positive learning culture: structure, values, and relationships (Haiyan et al., 2017).

The study concluded that school leaders must serve as the architects of their school’s culture. A learning culture does not emerge by happenstance; rather, the desired conditions need to be carefully constructed and nurtured (Haiyan et al., 2017). The findings in this study are evidenced in American schools like KIPP schools and the RCA.

Returning to the KIPP framework, the website shares what makes the difference at one of their schools. A KIPP school places importance on educating the whole student by focusing on character development in addition to providing a rigorous foundation in academics. KIPP schools hold students to higher expectations through a supportive culture and personalized learning--capitalizing on student interests, needs, and skills. The KIPP schools invest in their teachers and leaders by providing professional development. They boast that their teachers and school leaders are, as a result, highly effective. The website shares that KIPP schools are highly structured, nurturing, and safe environments in which students can reach their highest potential through this optimized learning setting. Finally, KIPP school counselors assist with a variety of financial and social aspects as students negotiate their path towards college or the workforce (KIPP Schools, 2018). These elements create the culture at KIPP schools.

As stated earlier, the notion of teaching character is not a new one. While

Chaucer's lessons were actual texts, the method of character tutelage through the oral tradition, or storytelling, is older still. Williams and Hierck (2015) maintained that storytelling is one of the most vital steps toward nourishing and strengthening a school's culture. Storytelling is an important tool to use in the change process. Storytelling is a means by which the cherished elements of a culture can be conveyed. Utilizing effective stories can assist in behavior change (Williams & Hierck, 2015).

The challenge is being strategic about selecting your stories. Williams and Hierck (2015) provided guidelines about how to select appropriate stories. Williams and Hierck suggested that the story must make a memorable, meaningful point that will reveal or create emotions. This emotional link will serve as a way to build connections between and among the stakeholders (Williams & Hierck, 2015). Williams and Hierck suggested that storytelling helps link the staff to school goals in a manner that is attractive to their intellect as well as their emotion. This connection of head and heart refers back to the importance of being passionate about the work being done in an organization.

Leveraging a school's network of professional learning communities (PLCs) is another means by which culture can be cultivated. PLC juggernaut Williams maintained that "working in a collaborative culture represents a shift from making excuses to being empowered" (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 98). Williams and Hierck (2015) also suggested that teacher empowerment and confidence soars when they work in a collaborative culture in which their individual and collective expertise is recognized, celebrated, and leveraged. The collective interdependence that so clearly exists in schools can find real traction in the collaborative culture suggested by Williams and Hierck.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) agreed. Hargreaves and Fullan believed that PLCs are more than just a group of teams. Rather, the best, most productive PLCs are thriving, organic communities and evolving cultures whose purpose is to support the ongoing learning of both students and teachers through the utilization of data. In this ideal culture, data are utilized for their purest purpose—informed, improved practice; not mechanism for passing judgement on one's practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). PLCs, when implemented with fidelity, provide schools with a catalyst for change, a mechanism through which both students and staff grow. PLCs hone collaborative cultures. They provide clarity and focus to the work of teachers through the use of data as a springboard for reflective, collective conversations around student performance and next steps toward continued improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). PLCs can function as the transformative vehicle for lifting all ships.

Fullan, renowned researcher on school culture, and DuFour, the foremost authority on PLCs, believed that leaders at each level from the classroom to the executive leadership in a district need to view PLCs as a strategy capable of transforming the culture of an entire system, as opposed to simply another program du jour to implement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). With invested stakeholders at every level, PLCs have the ability to shape the culture of the system as a whole (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

Covey et al. (2008) likened culture to a habitat: People have habits; the culture is the habitat. The authors claimed that miraculous things are possible when students join a habitat operating at highly effective levels (Covey et al., 2008). Covey et al. shared the story of a young lady who experienced the impact habits and a habitat can have:

My first day at school was not an easy one as I brought my old school side with

me. Everyone was nice to me, telling me I was their friend. I was not used to that ... I learned the 7 Habits from my teacher and class. I was changed by the habits because I saw other people living the habits and I wanted to be like them, a leader. (pp. 66-67)

As is often the case, what is best and right for children is also best and right for adults.

Adults placed in highly effective habitats perform at higher levels than adults placed in highly “defective” habits. So there exists a reciprocal relationship between habits and habitats. Positive habits produce better habitats, and positive habitats produce better habits. (Covey et al., 2008, p. 67)

Robinson and Aronica (2009) agreed. Robinson and Aronica wrote about the powerful phenomena that occurs when one finds their tribe. A tribe is a group of like-minded people who share talents and interests. Members of a tribe act in both a competitive and collaborative capacity. What ties the members of the tribe together is their commitment to the pursuit of the same goal—that thing they are drawn to do. Robinson and Aronica described the experience as liberating when one becomes part of a tribe. This is particularly true after pursuing goals in isolation (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Casas (2017) quipped, “your vibe attracts your tribe” (p. 99); others echoed his sentiment. In her conversations with Chambliss, a sociologist who studied world-class swimmers, Duckworth (2016) found that Covey et al. (2008) and Robinson and Aronica’s (2009) theories panned out. Duckworth (2016) quoted Chambliss: “The real way to become a great swimmer is to join a great team” (p. 246). The following is an interesting aside on the idea of competitors and competition. Looking at the Latin root, “compete” actually means *striving together*. The additional connotation of winning and losing does

not exist in its purest form (Duckworth, 2016). This exemplifies the adage, “a rising tide lifts all ships.” Therein lies the power of culture.

In stark contrast, the impact a poor culture can have is equally powerful and pervasive. Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) compiled writings from different researchers studying various types of school reform. Elmore, one such author included in their work, wrote about a study of the lowest of the low-performing schools. Elmore found that the lowest performing schools shared certain characteristics. Chief among them was the fact that teachers worked mainly in isolation. Isolation contributed to relationships between and among teachers and students that lacked trust, which ultimately yielded an entire organization steeped in dysfunctionality. In the worst cases, that lack of trust manifested as blatant hostility (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009).

Research shows that teachers working in isolation have nothing but negative outcomes, yet teacher perspectives vary on the topic. While one teacher left to his or her own devices may feel isolated, another may feel as if they have autonomy or a certain sense of protection from others, outsiders (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Nonetheless, Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikhahmadi (2016) found that when teachers expressed feelings of isolation, there was also a negative effect on his or her energy level and behavior. The researchers concluded that isolation among teachers is at the root of teacher burnout and helplessness (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016).

Looking part-to-whole, Elmore, as referenced in Hargreaves and Fullan (2009), explored the “pathologies of ‘nested’ systems” (p. 229). “Nestedness” is a term that has come to mean the structure of a system. “Classrooms are nested within schools, which are in turn nested within local systems, which are in turn nested within a broader policy

and governance system” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 229). While theoretically nestedness has the potential for positivity and growth, the truth of the matter, as Elmore found, is far less optimistic. In nested systems, teachers and students at the lowest performing schools, typically urban schools, are “unchosen.” Circumstances, district policies regarding student assignment being one example, result in an inequitable distribution of students across the nested district. The same, Elmore found, can be said for the assignment of personnel. Over time, the lower performing teachers end up in the lower performing schools with the lower performing students. To compound the issue, these students and teachers have the fewest resources and options to improve their station. It should be no wonder to find that the cultures in these low-performing schools typically characterized with more of an external locus of control. The stakeholders feel as if they are at the mercy of their circumstances and have little impact on their fate (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). In other words, Hargreaves and Fullan suggested a system in which teachers and students in poorly performing schools are *seemingly* doomed to exist in an unending loop of dysfunction and failure.

However, DuFour and Fullan (2013) offered solutions to combat the pathology of nestedness. They maintained that “changing culture in systemic ways is at the heart of any large-scale education reform” (DuFour & Fullan, 2013, p. 4). DuFour and Fullan maintained that they have seen districts change and grow time and again in their research and in working with school systems. They maintained that the systemic change is achievable in cases where executive district leaders are committed to growing capacities, on an individual as well as collective levels, for all educators throughout their district. That is to say, a part-to-whole *in conjunction with* a whole-to-part response has been

proven successful in district-wide reform. A working “both ends against the middle” approach yields results. In numerous cases, DuFour and Fullan observed that improvement was successful when district level leadership provided support and clarification to building level personnel regarding the different tasks at hand.

Collective responsibility, more accurately collective interdependency, is an effective means to bring about large-scale, systemic change. Collective responsibility compels groups at each nested level to become more transparent and collaborative in all aspects of the work at hand. Practices are deprivatized as evidenced by collaborative planning and sharing of instructional materials and strategies. There is a concerted effort to learn from others in the group and build shared knowledge. There is also a collective feeling of responsibility for student learning. In this collective responsibility model, the group is changed by the intentional, collective efforts of the group (DuFour & Fullan, 2013); that is to say that members of the collective group were each an integral part to the effective functioning of the whole.

Schaeffner et al. (2015) explored the concept of collective interdependence and Deutsch’s “swim or sink together” notion. The premise postulates that when the successful goal achievement of each individual group member is linked to that of the group as a whole, each member will have a greater impetus to meet their individual goal. When the condition of collective interdependence exists, conflict is negotiated in a more constructive manner (Schaeffner et al., 2015). Moreover, this condition also leads to “amplif[ed] decision quality and productivity” (Schaeffner et al., 2015, p. 472). Schaeffner et al. went on to explain the psychology behind this phenomenon. The sense of belonging, the sense of commitment to the team’s goals and fellow members, affords

each individual team member with a higher degree of investment. This unification results in increased effort toward that collective goal achievement (Schaeffner et al., 2015).

Haiyan et al. (2017) synthesized collective interdependence through the lens of culture.

“Schools with positive teacher learning cultures value school-wide learning and

44ecognize that overall success is dependent on each group member” (Haiyan et al., 2017, p. 103).

The condition of collective interdependence dovetails nicely with Hargreaves and Fullan’s (2009) theory of action. The following outlines the criteria necessary:

There are three conditions a theory must meet to be called a theory of action:

First, it must meet the systemness criterion. Do the ideas stand a chance of addressing the whole system, not just a few hundred schools here and there?

Second, the theory must make a compelling case that using the ideas will result in positive movement. We are, after all, talking about improvement—transitioning from one state of being to another. Third, such a theory must demonstrably tap into and stimulate people’s motivation. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 275)

Capacity building is at the heart of any theory of action. Capacity building is constructive and productive, moving *individuals* along the continuous improvement continuum, thereby doing the same with the organization. Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) recognized there are both direct and indirect means by which an individual’s capacity can be built. Direct capacity building includes activities such as in-services, professional development training, providing resources, and the like. Hargreaves and Fullan suggested that indirect capacity building is more powerful. Indirect capacity building includes activities specifically designed to be peer-to-peer experiences in each school,

from school to school, and district to district (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009).

Fullan maintained, “New capacities *cause* results. Moreover, capacity enhancement is motivational. There is nothing like getting better at something important to want to do more of it” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 284). This is the more eloquent version of the commonplace expression, “nothing succeeds like success.”

Dweck (2006) referred to this phenomenon as *stretching*. Dweck’s research revealed that people with a growth mindset thrive on challenges. Moreover, they actually *pursue* challenging opportunities. The greater the challenge the opportunity presents, the more individuals with that growth mindset stretch. Dweck likened a mindset to a different world. In the world of a fixed mindset, success is measured solely by evaluating talent or intelligence. In the world of a growth mindset, success is more about new learning, new developments, and stretching one’s existing talents or abilities (Dweck, 2006). In other words, with the right frame of mind, lofty goals, even goals that may seem unattainable, are achievable. Moreover, they lead to the next, higher goal. This is the notion of shaping through successive approximations. Shaping through successive approximations is taking “incremental steps” (Kellerman, 2009, p. 242) toward that next higher goal. With this mindset, growth is ongoing.

Returning to the problem of teacher isolation, Ostovar-Nameghi and Sheikahmadi (2016) offered solutions to encourage a more collegial and collaborative culture. They suggested peer coaching, peer observation, pair mentoring, and teacher study groups are important steps toward creating a friendly environment, which the researchers claimed set the stage for development and growth for students and teachers alike (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikahmadi, 2016). A friendly environment is a precursor

to an excellent culture.

Williams and Hierck (2015) stated, “leaders strike the match for schoolwide cultural change; staff fan the flames” (p. 17). Cultural leadership is manifested through certain attitudes and behaviors of “culture changemasters” (Pater, 2012, p. 28). Those behaviors include being action-oriented, noticing and leveraging opportunities, working from all angles (top down, bottom up, from the middle), and working to generate energy and momentum (Pater, 2012).

Casas (2017), author, speaker, educator, and cultural warrior, said, “An excellent culture is critical to the success of any organization” (p. 12). Casas encouraged leaders (students, teachers, administrators, and district level executives) to “culturize” in their organizations. “Culturize: to cultivate a community of learners by behaving in a kind, caring, honest, and compassionate manner in order to challenge and inspire each member of the school community to become more than they ever thought possible” (Casas, 2017, p. 3). Casas outlined four core principles of a positive school culture. Casas wrote,

To start, we must expect all staff to ***champion for all students***. I think we must always begin with the belief that kids *can*. Period. Teachers and leaders who have transformed their belief systems to acquire such a mindset are never deterred by failure or the unknown.... Next, every staff member must ***expect excellence*** of one another and, most importantly, of their students.... All staff members must ***carry the banner*** for their school in a positive light at all times ... [and] Finally, every educator, administrator, and support staff member must strive to be ***a merchant of hope***. We may not get to decide which kids to serve, but we do get to decide the kind of climate in which we want to serve them. (pp. 14-15)

Being a champion for all students starts by fervently building relationships. Casas (2017) placed the utmost importance in the cultivation of relationships as a means by which a culture of excellence can be attained. Casas maintained that intentionally investing time in crafting activities that allow for students to interact will yield a culture in which students have greater compassion, appreciation, understanding, and respect for each other. Casas believed that when these conditions are met, student expectations for the adults increase. What students expect from *themselves* does the same (Casas, 2017). In other words, Casas believed that for teachers to get the most from their students, there must first be authentic construction of a culture in which relationships between and among the people in the classroom feel respected and heard.

Casas (2017) explained that nothing short of expecting excellence can be accepted when forging a school's culture. Everyone must see him or herself as a leader in the school, and the only standard is one's best effort (Casas, 2017). In education today, the concept of striving for excellence borders on the cliché; however, until that level is met, "the cancer of mediocrity begins to grow interest" (Collins, 2001, p. 121). Casas warned his readers about the negative impact "awfulizers," those who verbally harangue about the evils of their institution, can have. Rather, Casas encouraged school employees at all levels to "carry the banner for their schools and harbor a deep adulation, sense of honor, and great regard for the schools and districts in which they serve—and it shows in their words and actions" (p. 98). Casas echoed Sergiovanni's (1992) approach to leadership as more of a service to the greater, collective good. Casas maintained that leaders such as these understand that there is a broader scope to their work. The work is not about the leader but the community they serve. It is about those in their care—colleagues and

students—not themselves (Casas, 2017).

This sense of “deep adulation [and]... honor” (Casas, 2017, p. 98) is reminiscent of the aspect of passion. Clearly, Casas (2017) believed that work of this caliber is futile without this aspect. The following paragraph further illustrates this point.

The final principle Casas (2017) espoused is one of hope. Casas believed it is necessary for educators to become “merchants of hope” (p. 133). Casas described these “merchants of hope” as educators (reminiscent of Esquith) who embrace the responsibility to light a spark. That spark is the belief that staff and students alike belong to a great organization; the belief that their great organization is the home of a healthy culture in which each member feels supported and empowered to achieve even the loftiest of goals (Casas, 2017). Without hope, without that spark, indifference rules the day.

Casas (2017) ended his work with three simple yet powerful directives: “lead with passion, live with purpose, love with pride” (p. 173).

Summary

Chapter 2 defined and explored grit, the chief components of grit, and how the culture of an organization built upon these components can yield impressive results.

Grit, through its chief components of passion and perseverance, has been explicitly taught in tales and fables throughout the centuries. “Cultivating character has been a primary focus of education from Plato through the Middle Ages” (Smilie & Smilie, 2017, p. 350). In modern times, Duckworth has taken up the mantle of the continuation of this work. Duckworth’s (2016) exhaustive research on the topic affirmed that performers at the top of their respective fields display both passion and perseverance.

Passion is the fuel of grit. Robinson and Aronica (2009) referred to this as being in one's element. Sergioivanni (1992) called it, "the power of purposing" (p. 72).

Whatever the label, there must be some driving force that gives individuals the strength to continue on their crusade.

It takes perseverance to face the crusade itself. The Hedgehog Concept and the Baldrige Criteria are two models typically found in the business sector that hold perseverance at their cores. Perseverance is the single-minded determination to see a task through to the end, to practice those scales on the piano for hours, or to get up (for the hundredth time after another failed attempt at the same double axel) for one more attempt.

Culture is "the shared norms and values of a group of people" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 244). Organizational cultures, when healthy and flourishing, elevate both the individual members and the organization as a whole. Researchers suggest that "nested" organizations, such as a school system, must rely on systemic change to build capacity and yield results. Casas (2017) identified four elements required for a positive school culture. They are championing all students, expecting excellence, carrying the banner of positivity at all times, and being merchants of hope for students (Casas, 2017).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine what part, if any, the elements of grit factor into the development of a school's culture. Grit, as defined by Duckworth (2016), has two components: passion and perseverance. The researcher also explored how a building level administrator can foster a "culture of grit" in his or her school.

The researcher interviewed principals in the district who have held the title of principal at two or more schools. Prior to the interviews, the principals read the companion text to *Grit* by Duckworth (2016) and found where they fall on the "grit scale" by taking the assessment Duckworth created.

Setting

The district has enjoyed successes in indicators such as safety and student performance. It is ranked among the safest schools with the lowest crime rates in the state, with 87.8% of schools in the district having "met" or "exceeded growth" on assessment measures. The most recent dropout data show that the district has a rate lower than that of the state of North Carolina. The district has seen the graduation rate improve from 72.3% in 2008 to 85.6% 10 years later. Graduates in 2018 were offered \$58.6 million in scholarships, a record for the system.

The district website states that the district is among the 10 largest in North Carolina, serving roughly 31,500 students from pre-k through 12th grade. The website also states that the district is the second largest employer in the county with over 3,700 full-time employees. Fifty-five of those employees are building level administrators who hold the title of principal.

Research Method

“My thought is me: that is why I cannot stop thinking. I exist because I think I cannot keep from thinking. Jean-Paul Sartre” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

Permission to conduct the study was requested and granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Gardner-Webb University. Participating principals granted their consent as well. A sample consent form is included in Appendix A.

In the interest of studying the creation of a gritty culture from a “boots on the ground” approach, the grounded theory research method was employed. Grounded theory is an approach rooted on sociology, first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. Grounded theory enables the researcher to develop a theory grounded in data collected and analyzed through participant observation, interviewing, and collection of artifacts and texts (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Participants

“It takes collaboration across a community to develop better skills for better lives. Jose Angel Gurria” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

Information obtained from the district’s Human Resources Department showed that 18 of the 55 principals, or 32.7%, have, to date, served only one school, leaving 37 of the principals, or 67.2%, having served two or more schools as instructional leader. For the purposes of this study, these 37 principals fit the criteria. A sample of these principals was interviewed. The interviews were recorded, and the findings are presented, analyzed, and discussed in Chapter 4. The researcher narrowed the potential subjects to principals who have served more than a single school as they would have had more than one experience upon which to reflect on their actions in experiencing and

shaping their schools' cultures. The researcher solicited the assistance from the 37 principals who fit the criteria outlined in the study. Twelve responded to the request; however, eight were able to participate fully in the study.

Data Collection

“Data is a tool for enhancing intuition. Hilary Mason” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

Data in this qualitative research study were collected through principal interviews. The researcher conducted and recorded interviews with the randomized selection of the eligible principals. Principals were asked to read the companion text to *Grit* by Duckworth (2016). The interview sessions began with the participants taking the online 10-question grit scale questionnaire (Appendix B). The researcher recorded participants' answers and their overall grit scores. The participating principals were then asked some general questions related to the topic of grit and their responses to the reading. The researcher then asked the participants to respond to the two main research questions associated with this study. The questions are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Interview Questions

Prompts	Research Questions
Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's concept of grit prior to reading the text?	What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?
What did you think of <i>Grit</i> ?	
Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?	
Is one aspect more valuable than the other?	
What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?	How does a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit?”
What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?	

Following each interview, the researcher transcribed the conversation.

Display of Data

“A picture is worth a thousand words. Unknown” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

The coded data were organized and displayed in tables. To answer each of the research questions, the researcher examined the tables and identified the themes that emerged from the data. Chiefly, the researcher scrutinized the responses for the frequency and relative strength with which themes emerged. The researcher explored common threads in the participants’ responses to the reading, opinions regarding the different components of grit, any shared experiences regarding their work in shaping school culture, and their thoughts on what makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor.

The researcher included a table that displays the participants’ responses to the questions on the grit scale and their overall grit scores, their years of service in the principalship, and the number of schools in which they have held the title of principal.

Chapter 4 contains the tables of coded information from participant interviews. It also contains the responses, in the form of participant quotes, from different interviews that reflect any unifying themes and shared experiences that emerged from the questions posed.

Analysis of Data

“Get the habit of analysis—analysis will in time enable synthesis to become your habit of mind. Frank Lloyd Wright” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the data collected. The researcher identified common themes from the participants’ responses. Those themes were then aligned to the

essential components of grit—passion and perseverance. The researcher evaluated the relative strength of the correlated themes to determine if the participants involved found one component more valuable than another based on their experiences. Chapter 4 includes quotes from the interviews to support the correlations between and among the components of grit and their impact on a school's culture.

“In grounded theory, the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 6). The researcher, as dictated by the canon of the research method, analyzed data as part of the ongoing process of data collection. Grounded theory is one of discovery (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

The researcher utilized the technique of different levels of coding to analyze and evaluate data. These levels include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. At each level, the researcher evaluated and grouped data to identify themes and ultimately form “a coherent understanding or theory of the phenomenon of the study” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para. 17).

Summary

Chapter 3 defined the research methodology that was utilized in the qualitative action research portion of this work. The grounded theory method was applied as the researcher explored the responses provided by a randomized group of principals as they discussed the extent to which components of grit (passion and perseverance) apply in shaping school culture.

The researcher conducted interviews with a randomized sampling of principals who have served two or more schools in the capacity of instructional leader. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. The coded data have been displayed in

table form. Thematic data analysis and conclusions are shared in narrative form in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The Study

“A single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years mere study of books. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance of grit (passion and perseverance) in a school culture and how a building level administrator can foster a culture of grit.

The researcher conducted interviews with eight building level administrators in a North Carolina school district. Each participant was asked to read a companion text to *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Duckworth, 2016). Following the reading of the required text, the researcher conducted interviews with each of the eight participants.

The interview began with the participants completing the 10-question grit scale (Appendix B) to determine their grit score. The participants' responses and scores were recorded by the researcher. Once the participants' grit scores were determined, the researcher posed a series of interview questions to answer the research questions of this study. The interview questions are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Interview Questions

Prompts	Research Questions
Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's concept of grit prior to reading the text?	What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?
What did you think of <u>Grit</u> ?	
Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?	
Is one aspect more valuable than the other?	
What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?	How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"
What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?	

The researcher applied the grounded theory method as the interviews were conducted. Following each interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings. Data were coded and categorized throughout the transcription process.

Participant Demographics

"Tell me who your friends are, I'll tell you who you are." Unknown

Eight principals participated in the study. Table 3 displays some information about the participants.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Level of Education	Years as Principal	Number of Schools Served	School Level	Grit Score (Online)	Grit Score (Short)
A	Enrolled in EDLS Program	6	2	Elem.	4.09	4.0
B	Ed.D.	11	2	High	4.09	4.0
C	Ed.D.	8	3	Middle	4.09	4.125
D	Enrolled in EDLS Program	9	3	Elem.	4.5	4.5
E	Enrolled in EDLS Program	9	3	High	3.6	3.625
F	Ed.D.	9	2	Middle	3.8	3.75
G	Masters	4	2	Elem.	4.09	4.125
H	Ed.D.	11	2	High	4.59	4.625

There was an equal number of male and female participants. Among the participants, the distribution among the levels was equitable. A disproportionate number of the participants, seven of the eight, have either earned terminal degrees in Educational Leadership or are enrolled in such programs.

The participants in this study took the 10-question online grit scale. The researcher, however, transcribed their responses to correspond with the 8-item grit scale for scoring purposes. (The questions are the same from one scale to the other, but the order of the questions differs slightly. Also, items 7 and 10 are omitted from the 8-

question short grit scale.) The grit scale rates individuals based on their responses to the questions and generates a score from 1.0 to 5.0. A score of 1 would be considered not at all gritty, while on the other end of the scale, a score of 5 would be extremely gritty. Responses for each question are assigned a point value. Questions 2, 4, 7, and 8 are assigned descending points. For example, a response of “Very much like me,” on one of these questions would be assigned 5 points. “Mostly like me” earns 4 points, and so on to “Not like me at all,” earning a single point. Conversely, questions 1, 3, 5, and 6 on the short grit scale award ascending points. “Very much like me” on question 1, for example, earns 1 point, whereas “Not like me at all” earns 5 points. Points are added together, then divided by 8 to calculate one’s grit score. Table 3 showed the minor variations between the online scores and those recalculated based on the 8-item scale.

The range of online grit scores for the participants in this study goes from 3.6 to 4.59. Fifty percent of the participants scored a 4.09 on the grit scale representing the mode of the data. A score of 4.09 demonstrates that the participant “scored higher than about 70% of American adults in a recent study” (Duckworth, 2019, para. 1). Participant data revealed that this is a gritty group of leaders.

Themes in Participant Responses

“I don’t like talking about ‘solutions.’ I prefer talking about intelligent responses. James Howard Kunstler” (Brainy Quote, 2018).

Research Question 1

What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture? Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth’s concept of grit prior to reading the text? What did you think of *Grit*? Was there a passage that

resonated with you personally? Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant responses to the question, “Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth’s concept of grit prior to reading the text,” revealed that five of the eight participants had zero experience with Duckworth’s work, while three participants had a level of awareness via her Ted Talk.

Their overall impressions of the text were positive. Three participants stated that they were going to purchase or already had purchased Duckworth’s (2016) book so they could read it in its entirety. Participant B stated, “I went and bought her book—the actual *Grit* book.... I’m very interested in it; it made a whole lot of sense.” Others immediately began thinking about grit in new ways. Participant E shared, “I would say ... I had not, honestly, thought about it much in terms of adults. Most of what I had seen has been about kids and grit.” Participant D, one of the grittier participants with a grit score of 4.5, immediately saw some possible practical applications.

When I read the text, it opened my eyes to a lot of things that sometimes we don’t think about especially when you’re trying to hire people and you’re trying to hire talented people. It’s kind of hard to understand what their grit is, because you really haven’t seen them work yet. And, so to really know their work ethic and what it took them to get where they were. So, it helped give me a different perspective on, you know, when we talk about highly qualified people and people who may be almost there and really we’re trying to get them there but also it lets me understand that sometimes it’s more or less how people—the grit and the passion that they have to do a job how they will outshine those who are very talented sometimes.

When participants were asked, “Was there a passage that resonated with you personally,” half referenced Duckworth’s section on The Beast—the training program at West Point Academy. These respondents highlighted the fact that it was grit, not simply the cadets’ Iqs or fitness levels that saw them through to the end. Some participants discussed broad themes such as goal setting, capitalizing on one’s “calling,” and the importance of hope in all endeavors. Still other participants cited personal instances in their own lives in which they had to apply the principles of grit in order to succeed. Participant A shared the following from his personal experience as a learner:

I will share something with you ... when I was in high school, the guidance counselor met with me when I was a senior and they met with me and asked me what I was going to do when I get finished. I said, “Well, I’m going to go to college. Don’t know where yet, but I’m going to go to college somewhere.” They said, “Oh, oh, no. You won’t be able to make it in college. You’ll need to go find a trade school.” So, I’m the dissertation away from my doctorate degree. Bachelor’s degree and a master’s level degree and they said I wasn’t going to make it so, whatever they saw ... probably didn’t take the grit into account. Wasn’t quite the case.

According to Duckworth (2016), the combination of passion and perseverance yield grit. Duckworth (2016) described gritty people as, “unusually resilient and hardworking” (p. 8). Duckworth (2016) also found they “knew in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted.... It was this combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special” (p. 8). Curious, the researcher wondered if the participants felt the same. The question, “Is one aspect (passion or perseverance) more valuable than

the other,” yielded the responses in Table 4.

Table 4

Responses to the Prompt, “Is one aspect more valuable than the other?”

Passion	Perseverance	Both
Participant B	Participant E	Participant A
Participant D	Participant G	Participant C
		Participant F
		Participant H

Participants B and D believed passion was a more powerful factor, while Participants E and G chose perseverance. The remaining participants believed that both passion and perseverance are equally important factors.

Participant B stated the following while making her case for passion:

I think if I had to go out and run a mile, I think I could persevere through it, but I don’t have a passion for running. So, I think to do something for a long haul, or over a longer period of time, more than just going out and running a mile, you’d have to have that passion for it. And then you’ll be able to persevere [through] it. I don’t like green beans, but if I have to eat them, I can persevere through that and choke them down, but I wouldn’t continue to order them. So, I think passion is a little more important, especially when you’re doing something more than once or you’re looking at a career, or if you’re looking at, like, accomplishing a goal.

Participant G had this to say to advocate for perseverance:

You must have perseverance to see something through. And I think if you don’t have the perseverance then no matter how much passion you have for something, you’re never going to actually see it come to fruition if you don’t really work to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

Participant H stated,

I think they go hand-in-hand. I think you've got to have the passion to persevere, because it's hard to persevere through something if you're not passionate about it, if you don't care about it. I think you've got to have both.

The preceding questions led up to the first of the research questions associated with this study, "What role does grit play in a school culture?" Participants responded in the following ways.

"I think it plays a key role" (Participant A). "I think that it is everything!.... I think we don't give it enough attention in a lot of ways" (Participant B). Participant C stated, "I don't think that everybody has to have the same passion to make school culture work. But I think everybody in the building has to be passionate about something."

Participant E referenced that grit, particularly passion, plays a role in maintaining motivation for the adults in the building. "The traditional motivations for many professions are not as prevalent in education like high pay and lots of room for advancement. People have to be passionate about it."

Participant F responded to the question through the student lens, saying, "you've got to try to have them find ... what they are interested in, their passion, and then learn to persevere to achieve that goal."

Participant G also responded from the aspect of applying grit to the students in the building: "You can have students who have all the capabilities in the world, but they might not have the passion or perseverance to carry something out."

Finally, Participant H responded to the question by saying,

You can tell whenever you talk to people, whenever you're in their school, I think

it influences the culture, it influences buy in from the staff, it influences buy in from the stakeholders, the students, and the parents. If they can tell you really care about the place and you want things to go well, they can tell a difference.

Participants agreed that grit plays a significant role in the culture of a school. Grit is a key factor to success whether examining culture through the student or adult lens.

Research Question 2

How does a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit?” What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools? What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor? Responses to the question, “What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools,” yielded a wide variety of responses. Some shared that they had to change community perceptions. Participant A stated, “The barrier wasn’t so much the school itself, but the community. So many parents were like, ‘Oh, I don’t want my child to go there.’”

Some shared that they had to change teacher perceptions and morale. Participant H had this to share about some of her staff:

[They] didn’t want to be held accountable ... they don’t want anybody coming in, and they don’t want anybody watching what they’re doing. They want to do it their way. That was a real problem for some people to adjust to ... people who want to do things their own way—they don’t want to be part of the team, they don’t buy into the vision, they don’t buy into what you’re trying to do, and they resist.

Others had to grapple with history in the face of changing demographics.

Participant D shared the following:

The school I'm currently at right now, [has] a past history of always doing very well and being very well known in the county, I think some of the things that have changed is, you know, the county has changed. You know, we've had ... the jobs that people had—they don't have anymore. Some of the socio-dynamics parts of our county has changed so some of our clients that come in and our children that come in, they come in from more different backgrounds now, and you hear sometimes people will say, "Well, they're not like what they used to be," so, we just, you know.... My thing is you can't have that mindset. That was one of the barriers we had to overcome was no matter which child comes through that door, it is our job to teach them.

Participant C shared that she felt that she had to prove herself to her stakeholders: "They knew coming—I'd never been in an elementary school before since I left one as a child." Participant C went on to say that when she was named principal at her third school, she had to "once again, prove myself here." Ultimately, she concluded,

Once they saw that about me, that I was committed that, you know, I cheered hard for [Named School 2] when I was their principal, but now that I'm here, I'm all in [Named School 3]. You know, if they move me tomorrow to [Named School 4], I'd be all in to [Named School 4]. So, I think sometimes just removing those barriers and being true to the people you're working with.

Participant E made the following observation: "This is my ... third new school, and it takes time, and so I think you're trying to figure the culture out while you're also having to be part of it."

Ultimately, most of these factors can be synthesized into a single key element—

trust. Participant E stated, “Trust would be the other thing—knowing who to trust and getting other people to trust you.” Trust is what was missing on the part of the parents in Participant A’s community, the teachers in Participant H’s and Participant C’s schools, and both community and school-based stakeholders in Participant D’s example. Trust, or at least a leap of faith, is an integral component of culture building.

When asked, “What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor,” two themes emerged—sustainability, the notion of grit having a far-reaching impact for the students as well as the organization itself, and optimism.

Every participant referenced sustainability in one way or another. Sustainability was the first word Participant F said when the question was posed. Participant F went on to add, “When you build that culture of grit, it’s not just the way we do business here as new people come in, but as they leave, they’re left with a skillset that can carry them forward.”

Participant D’s thoughts were equally as explicit on the matter: “Even after I am gone off the scene, if the culture of grit is here with the teachers, and the others who are here, it will continue to move forward.”

“I think one of the things [that makes building a culture of grit worthwhile] is because it has life-long, or at least long-lasting positive consequences,” said Participant E, continuing, “I think that the staff having grit enables them to be able to handle whatever happens, so they’re focused on kids and learning.”

While not explicitly in each participant’s response, there was a clear, pervasive tone of hope that was manifest in every conversation. Participant C took a more somber tone on the subject, saying, “When school gets hard, you need to be surrounded by people

who are willing to dig deep ... I just need you to try. I need you to dig in.” The underlying belief, or hope, being that when that happens with a staff, hard times will be replaced by easier, happier ones.

Hope expressed in Participant B’s response took a personal and triumphant tone:

Having a culture of grit in a building would help those students like me. Those students who have a passion, who know what they want to do with their lives, but maybe they have a setback ... having that culture of grit ... helps everybody try to accomplish whatever goal they want to accomplish and accepting them for maybe not having the highest aptitude, but, man if they’re a hard worker, let’s go!

Participant A expressed the hopeful power of grit as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. In addition to using a variation of the word “optimistic” three times in the response, Participant A shared the following thoughts:

I think that if you build a culture of grit, you build a culture that no matter what’s thrown your way, you’re going to be able to overcome it ... if you believe that you can make it happen and you believe that you can get it done, then, you know, you get the teachers believing, and it’s not an automatic thing. You have to work, but if they start to believe and go, “Oh, you know what, he said that he was going to do this—he did it. He said we could do this—we did it. What else can we do?” You know, they start building that confidence within themselves.

The second research question was, “How does a building level administrator foster a culture of grit?” The answers from the participating administrators illustrated their strength as the teachers they were earlier in their careers. The responses echoed what master teachers say about how to teach content. Such learning takes building

relationships, explicit teaching, and extensive modeling. In the context of this study, “extensive modeling” is the equivalent of “leading by example.” Table 5 shows these themes and the categories in which each participant fell. Notice, there is overlap for most participants.

Table 5

Thematic Responses to “How does a building level administrator foster a culture of grit?”

Relationships	Explicit Teaching	Modeling Leading by Example
Participant B	Participant B	Participant A
Participant C	Participant E	Participant D
Participant F	Participant G	Participant E
		Participant F
		Participant H

Relationships are the foundations upon which all things are built. Positive relationships result in increased trust. The absence of trust was at the root of the barriers the participating administrators faced in each of their schools. Participant C flatly stated, “You have to have good relationships with people.” Looking at relationships in a slightly different way, Participant F shared the following belief: “You have to be able to empower [the teachers].”

Explicit teaching was the method by which participating administrators believed a culture of grit can be developed. Participant E stated,

I think part of it is understanding it ... talk about the importance of it and be pretty transparent.... I think building that idea among the staff is part of what you’ve got to do. So, I think that’s part of what you do, is being open about it, talking about it.

Participant B's thoughts echoed those of Participant E and raised the stakes.

Participant B shared,

I think you have to bring awareness to what grit is, and try to have conversations with the people in your building ... I know that the first thought I had was I'm going to read the book and this may be something our leadership team is going to look at, or maybe we need to put together a little committee to read the book and see how that can fit into our culture.

The lion's share of the participants, five of the eight, or 62.5%, believed that in order for a building level administrator to foster a culture of grit, he or she must model that grit. The building level administrator must lead by example. Participant A said exactly that: "I think it goes back to just leading by example. Do what you say you're going to do."

"I think first it needs to start with us," said Participant D, continuing, "In order to get someone to do it, you have to be willing to do it yourself."

Participant E succinctly shared, "I think you also have to model it." Participant E went on to say, "Building that idea among the staff is part of what you've got to do." That idea in this context is the belief that stick-to-itiveness will ultimately pay dividends. Participant E shared a saying that the superintendent of the district is fond of: "It's not going to be easy, but it's going to be worth it."

Participant F, who also believes that relationships are vital in fostering culture, stated that she models behaviors for her teachers that she wants her teachers to display towards their students. Participant F gave an example of how she empowers teachers by highlighting their strengths. Teachers at Participant F's school are invited to showcase

their talents during PLC or staff meetings.

Participant H, the participant with the highest grit score, had the following to say about the power of modeling, or leading by example:

You've got to show that good face, and that perseverance, and show them that you work just as hard as they do—or harder. You come to work early, you stay late—you get the job done.... You don't quit. You keep going. Even when you're discouraged, you keep going.... And you have to show them. They have to see it. They have to see you walk the talk ... I think you create that culture by the way you act, what you say, and what you do.

The researcher found it compelling that two of the participants (C and F) referenced the time element when undertaking the mammoth project of building (more accurately *shaping*) a school's culture. Participant C stated, "I don't think it happens on day one." Participant F began her response with simply, "Baby steps."

The researcher was also intrigued that two other participants (B and D) used the term "mindset" in their responses. Chiefly, they both referenced the need for a change of mindset. The change, according to Participant B, related to how teachers view students in light of certain circumstances, while the mindset change to which Participant D was referring was far more introspective:

I think that we have to first change our mindset and understand what [grit] truly means, and apply it to ourselves. Then we will be able to go out and talk to our teachers about [grit] and start building a culture about [grit].

In the interest of soliciting additional pearls of wisdom, a final, open-ended question was posed to each participating administrator. Each was asked if they had any

key takeaways or if they wanted to share any other thoughts. This final question provided some rich connections to the text in the context of intriguing parallels and other possible research, while others were more personal connections and conclusions.

Two participants referenced growth mindset; one referenced Carol Dweck by name in the response. Both Participants B and H saw a kinship between a growth mindset and being gritty. “I think that that [a growth mindset] and grit can absolutely work hand-in-hand,” said Participant B.

Participant H offered the following:

I really liked in the book whenever Duckworth talked about Carol Dweck and the growth mindset—the difference between having a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. She talked about people who possessed a growth mindset are grittier than those who do not. I think that is so true—a growth mindset leads to optimistic explanations of suffering and, thus, leads to perseverance. I think that’s important—you’ve got to have a growth mindset. If you’ve got grit, you’re always—we can do better, we can do this, we can move on. You don’t settle for where you are.

Participant G, the only participant not pursuing or already holding a terminal degree, shared the following very personal reflection:

I think I want to get the book because I want to read more about what it really takes to have that passion and perseverance ... not necessarily in school because I’m happy with what I do ... I’ve made some great gains, but just to see, maybe in some other aspects of my life how that could help.

Participant A cited Duckworth’s numerous examples of athletes displaying grit

and offered his own: “It made me think about Michael Jordan, and the shots that he would make and the things that he would do in a game.... He practiced those things over and over again.” Participant A referenced Jordan as more than a self-proclaimed “sports nut.” Participant A bridged the gap between athletics and his own work as an educator and as a father:

One of the things that we’ve always done with [my son] is that we’ve never said, “Oh, you’ve done a good job because you’re smart.” We’ve always said, “Okay, you’ve done well because you’ve worked hard....” It all goes back to working hard and the grit. You’re up at 6 o’clock, well, somebody’s up at 5. You’ve got a master’s, somebody else has an EDS. You got an EDS, somebody else has a doctorate. It’s all about putting in that hard work.... If you teach them it’s not about how smart you are, it’s about how hard you work, and how much you’ve prepared.... You know, when they get to that thing, that situation, they’re not going to falter. They’re going to be like, “Okay, I’m not quite sure, but I’m going to work through this thing, and I’m going to do the best I can.”

Summary

Chapter 4 was a compilation of the participant responses organized in a thematic fashion. The researcher included several quotes from the transcribed interviews to strengthen the themes. The addition of the participants’ voices lends credence and a deeper, authentic meaning to each question posed.

Those who participated in the study had been principal in two or more schools. Each participant found their grit score by taking Duckworth’s online grit scale assessment. The mode of the grit scores was 4.09% with 50% of the participants earning

that score. They then read the companion piece to *Grit* prior to engaging in a question-answer interview with the researcher.

The participating building level administrators shared the belief that grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), plays a vital role in a school's culture. While some participants explored the question from a staff perspective and others through the lens of the students, all concluded that the goals and objectives, and ultimately student performance, can only be enhanced when grit is applied.

The participating building level administrators believed that a culture of grit can be fostered by building positive, trusting relationships; explicitly educating stakeholders about grit; and predominately modeling grit and leading by example. While those seem like three rather simple, elementary steps, consider Participant E's final thoughts:

When you read the text, you're like, "Well, that's so obvious," to a point, but then you're also thinking, "well, gosh, if someone's writing books about it, it must not be happening as much as it ought to for it to be something so obvious."

Chapter 5: Analysis, Implications, Recommendations, Limitations, and Conclusion

“If you want to be grittier, find a gritty culture and join it. If you’re a leader, and you want the people in your organization to be grittier, create a gritty culture”

(Duckworth, 2016, p. 245).

The purpose of this study was to learn the role grit plays in a school culture and how a building level administrator can foster a culture of grit. Eight administrators from a North Carolina district participated in this study. Their involvement required three tasks: reading the companion text to *Grit*, completing the online grit scale, and participating in an interview during which the researcher asked a series of questions designed to answer the following questions:

1. What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?
2. How does a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit?”

Duckworth’s (2016) research was utilized as the foundational basis for this study. Duckworth has researched numerous paragons of grit and gritty cultures to find that the individuals and organizations had some key elements in common. Regardless of their chosen field, Duckworth (2016) found that outstanding performers are “unusually resilient and hardworking ... [and they have] *direction*” (p. 8). This grounded theory study sought to determine how a building level administrator could foster such a culture in his or her school.

Analysis of Research Question 1

What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in a school culture? While there were variations on the theme, each participant

believed that grit plays an essential part in a school's culture.

Stoltz (2015a) defined GRIT, in an acronym, as the amalgamation of growth, resilience, instinct, and tenacity. As stated in Chapter 2, Stoltz, as compared to Duckworth, seemed to downplay the aspect of passion. Participant B's analogies about running a mile and green bean eating illustrate the subtleties between passion and tenacity. In both, Participant B suggested that one could apply tenacity and persevere through the task; however, without passion, the likelihood of the behavior continuing diminishes. Participant B stated, "I don't like green beans, but if I have to eat them, I can persevere through that and choke them down, but I wouldn't continue to order them."

Table 6 shows that based on their interview responses, half of the participants believed that both passion and perseverance are necessary elements to success; one aspect did not outweigh the other.

Table 6

Responses to the Prompt, "Is one aspect more valuable than the other?"

Passion	Perseverance	Both
Participant B	Participant E	Participant A
Participant D	Participant G	Participant C
		Participant F
		Participant H

Based on the results of the grit scale, Participant H was found to be the grittiest among the participants with a score of 4.59 with 5.0 being the highest possible score. Participant H stated, "I think you've got to have the passion to persevere, because it's hard to persevere through something if you're not passionate about it."

Half of the participants referenced Duckworth's (2016) research at West Point, more specifically, Beast Barracks and characteristics of the cadets who succeed. One in

five talented, exceedingly capable students who are admitted into West Point drop out prior to graduation (Duckworth, 2016, p. 3). Robinson and Aronica (2009) may have argued that those students were not in their Element. Robinson and Aronica defined the Element as the point at which a person's innate ability and passion intersect. Participant G echoed this in his interview based on his experience as a building level administrator. Participant G addressed the aspect of talent while highlighting the importance of grit, saying, "You can have students who have all the capabilities in the world, but they might not have the passion or perseverance to carry something out." As Duckworth (2016) said, "Effort counts twice" (p. 35). This is also demonstrated in the example of the Clergeon in *The Canterbury Tales*. Smilie and Smilie (2017) explained that the Clergeon applied grit toward pious pursuits. Despite the fact that the hymn the Clergeon was studying was beyond his grasp, he plodded on and achieved success. Grit applied to more pure avocations is more likely to yield the desired results. This is an example of Dweck's (2006) concept of growth mindset and stretching or growing through successive approximations. Dweck stated that success is more about learning, new developments, and stretching one's existing talents or abilities. Lofty goals are attainable.

It is no wonder that a gritty group of individuals, the participants in the study, would recognize the grit in others. High achievers are drawn to other high achievers. The old adage, "nothing succeeds like success," holds true according to Chambliss who studied Olympic swimmers. Chambliss stated, "The real way to become a great swimmer is to join a great team" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 246). Great teams have great cultures.

Analysis of Research Question 2

How does a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit?” According to the research, building level administrators can foster a culture of grit the same way effective teachers (coaches) achieve success with their students (athletes). The required elements are meaningful, trusting relationships; a shared vocabulary; and demonstration with ample practice.

Trusting relationships are a must. Covey (2006) attested that high trust yields “high levels of synergy, effortless communication, and transparent relationships with all stakeholders” (p. 21). Participants B, F, and C agreed. Participant B believed that one must tap into the students and “recognize what’s important to them” when cultivating relationships. That connection with the student clears the way for “that quiet kid” or the student for whom one “can never get in touch with their parent.”

Participant F agreed and stated, “Build that relationship with the kid.” Participant F suggested the same is necessary with the teachers as well. Participant F leveraged opportunities to empower teachers in the building and added, “By doing that—that builds their confidence.” This approach is supported by Hargreaves and Fullan (2009), who maintained that such activities aimed at building capacity are constructive and productive, moving individuals as well as the organization along the continuous improvement continuum.

Participant C had to build trusting relationships in each of the three schools in which she has served as principal. While each instance was different, the outcome for Participant C was the same. Participant C had no elementary experience when named as principal of an elementary school for the first time. Participant C recognized the need to

build understanding and trust immediately and took measures to do so. The second school had a different dynamic. “There were folks that had been there for a long time at [Named School 2] that were very proud of their school, and I think, once again, once they saw I was committed to their school.” Participant C garnered more trust and support from the stakeholders at [Named School 2]. Participant C’s challenge at [Named School 3] was learning how to “play the community game.” In every scenario, Participant C built trusting relationships and experienced successes. Participant C stated, “You have to have good relationships with people. I think you have to let people know that you care about them and their circumstances.” Participant C went on to say, “You know, if they move me tomorrow to [Named School 4], I’d be all in to [Named School 4]. So, I think sometimes just removing those barriers and being true to the people you’re working with.”

The next requisite component to growing a gritty culture is to build a shared, common vocabulary. There must be explicit communication (and teaching) about what grit is. In an interview with Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, Duckworth (2016) learned that growing culture depends on “relentless—absolutely relentless—communication” (p. 253). Participant G stated, “As administrator [I have] to have a vision of what our end-game and end-goal is ... I have to relay that to my staff in order for them to understand really what the expectation is for me and my students.” Relentlessly communicating the vision and mission serves to alleviate confusion and ambiguity.

Participant E agreed, saying,

I think part of [building a culture of grit] is understanding [grit], and whether it’s understanding in an academic sense of this person’s research or just

understanding it inherently as a person. I think you have to be honest and address it head-on ... I think that's part of what you do, is being open about [grit], talking about [grit].

Building that common vocabulary requires that ongoing dialogue and relentless communication. This is supported by Williams and Hierck (2015), who postulated that strategic storytelling is an integral component of the change process when it comes to shaping a school's culture. Going further, Pink (2009) suggested, "humanize what people say and you may well humanize what they do" (p. 139).

When asked, "How does a building level administrator foster a culture of grit,"

Participant B made the following action-oriented statement:

I think you have to have to bring awareness to what grit is ... have conversations with the people in your building that interact with students or make decisions for students about encouraging those that may be hard workers to continue working. I know that the first thought was, I'm going to read the book and this may be something our leadership team is going to look at, or maybe we need to put together a little committee to read the book and see how that can fit into our school culture.

Participant B starts with explicit communication and teaching, then suggests moving into more concrete work. Such work could be facilitated, as Hargreaves and Fullan (2009) suggested, through PLCs. PLCs, when implemented with fidelity, provide schools with the catalyst for change, a mechanism through which both students and staff grow. Their view is supported by Williams and Hierck (2015), who maintained, "Working in a collaborative culture represents a shift from making excuses to being

empowered” (p. 98).

The concrete work for a building level administrator who is fostering a culture of grit is to model passion and perseverance and provide ample opportunities for practice. Five of the eight participants (A, D, E, F, and H) believed this is how a gritty culture is grown. “I think it goes back to just leading by example,” stated Participant A. Participant H agreed, saying, “They have to see you walk the talk.” “I think first it needs to start with us ... in order to get someone to do it, you have to be willing to do it yourself,” said Participant D. Participant F offered, “I have to do the same thing, model some of that with the teachers.” Participant E shared,

I think you also have to model it. You know, as the leader, all kinds of terrible things happen, and if we just give up, or fall apart, or say, “This is too hard, let’s do something easier,” I think you’re creating a culture where people say, “That’s what we’ll do,” as opposed to saying, “Oh, we’re going to keep going—this is worth it.”

The participating administrators in this study believed that the modeling and leading by example will cause those in their charge to do the same and FOLLOW their example. If this behavior is coupled with the tribe mentality described by Robinson and Aronica (2009), the pursuit of the same goal, that thing they are drawn to do, schools can begin to move the flywheel and begin to make meaningful progress.

The participating administrators in this study recognized that this is not, however, and instantaneous event; it is a process. Going further, it is a process that is continually evolving. Duckworth (2016) wrote, “The most dazzling human achievements are, in fact, the aggregate of countless individual elements, each of which is, in a sense, ordinary” (p.

36). This process, this evolution of culture, takes time.

Participant F succinctly stated, “Baby steps,” when initially asked the question about how a building level administrator fosters a culture of grit. Participant C said, “I don’t think it happens on day one ... you go after it and you chase it day after day.” This is reminiscent of an old sports mantra that Duckworth (2016) quoted, “Race your strengths and train your weaknesses” (p. 182), as well as Pink’s (2009) notion of “small questions” (p. 155). These are scaffolded thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that lead the “big question” and yield incremental progress. Progress toward the big question, Pink warned, is a slow process.

These references to the ongoing nature of shaping culture by making it incrementally better each day is reminiscent of the flywheel effect from Chapter 2. The flywheel effect, as Collins (2001) explained, is the process of moving, ever so slightly, along the continuum. This process perpetually yields continued improvement. There is no finish line, just continual growth—regrouping at each higher level (Collins, 2001). Participant H espoused this flywheel effect, saying, “We can do better, we can do this, we can move on. You don’t settle for where you are. You keep trying to achieve higher and better.”

Implications for Practice

Build trust. Inspiring trust is essential. According to the Covey (2006), “Trust is the core imperative of great leaders. It affects your ability to do everything else” (p. 14). Responses from the participants support this declaration. In each of their responses to the question about barriers, trust, or a lack thereof, was at the heart of the issue. Teachers were leery of Participant C not having any experience at the elementary level. Participant

B and Participant H faced teachers fearful of change, waving the “This is the way we’ve always done it” banner, according to Participant B, and “Want[ing] to do it their way,” in Participant H’s situation.

Participant E had some evocative insights on the topic of trust:

Trust—knowing who to trust, and getting other people to trust you. If you’re following someone that people trusted a lot, it’s harder to win them over. If you’re following somebody people distrusted, I think they’re very willing to trust you, but you don’t get to pick.

Regardless of the conditions under which a principal assumes a principalship, establishing trust, research shows, must be a high priority. High trust situations enjoy the luxury of enhanced communication and clear a path for effective teamwork (Covey, 2006).

Explicitly teach and foster grit with staff and students. At the onset of this research, the researcher’s focus was unwittingly one-sided. Growing a gritty culture was intended to target the *teachers* in a school building. Despite the fact that Duckworth’s (2016) work is riddled with examples of gritty young people and the fact that there is documentation in the literature review that explores the benefits of teaching grit to young people, it was not until the participant interviews that the researcher began looking at the notion of growing a gritty culture among the *students* in a school building. The idea of working from both sides is supported by the principle of coherence. Coherence is when one factor amplifies another. Collins (2001) examined the power of coherence through the lens of the flywheel. One component of the system enhances the other; the entire system is stronger than the sum of its parts (Collins, 2001).

As stated in Chapter 2, teaching grit is not a new concept. Since Plato's time, the purpose of education has been to nurture character (Smilie & Smilie, 2017). More current examples of instances where grit is taught include Duckworth's own Character Lab, and the hundreds of KIPP charter schools. On the Character Lab website, grit is encouraged through active modeling, celebrating displays of grit, and enabling grit. "The paradox of grit is that the steely determination of individuals is made possible by the warmth and support of friends, families, teachers, and mentors" (Character Lab, 2018). The Character Lab houses 12 different "Playbooks," grit being one such Playbook, that provide educators with classroom lessons and supporting materials on how to teach the different aspects of character (Character Lab, 2018).

At KIPP schools, character education is a key component in a student's experience. Grit is one of seven "Character Strengths" included in the school's curriculum. These Character Strengths are taught through discussion, social and emotional learning, and the utilization of tools from, ironically, the Character Lab (KIPP Schools, 2018).

Initially, Participant E viewed grit (and fostering grit) exclusively through the student lens. When asked, "What did you think of the text," Participant E stated, "I had not, honestly, thought about it much in terms of adults. Most of what I had seen has been about kids and grit."

Participant F was also dialed in to the student aspect but in a profoundly different way:

They [the students] have grit because they're living in it, you know. They know what it's like to do whatever they need to do to get to school so they can have a

breakfast and lunch. So, they've got that inner focus, but it's not toward education, it's toward just survival.

Participant F followed up with, "Having them find that for themselves, in education, the educational process, is something that I would like to transfer to my teachers so they can kind of build on that for the students."

It stands to reason, based on participant responses, that building level administrators should exert their influence in such a way to foster grit on both levels-- administrators cultivating grit among their teachers and the teachers cultivating grit with their students. Doing so would create a coherent effect, thereby one group amplifying the other (Collins, 2001). If done long enough with fidelity, such practices could work to negate the pathology of nestedness, described by Hargreaves and Fullan (2009), in lower performing schools. Nestedness is a term that has come to mean the structure of a system. "Classrooms are nested within schools, which are in turn nested within local systems, which are in turn nested within a broader policy and governance system" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009, p. 229). In these nested systems, both teachers and students in lower performing schools are "unchosen." Over time, the lower performing teachers teach the lower performing students in the lower performing schools.

Teach short and long-term goal setting. A third implication for practice is the importance of goal setting. Covey et al.'s (2008) first three habits, "Be proactive, begin with the end in mind, [and] put first things first" (p. 68), revolve around self-governance and goal setting. Examined through a lens of grit, self-governance can be viewed as perseverance, and goal setting could be seen as the application of one's passion. The real beauty in this model is that there is no "end game"; rather, perpetual growth--regrouping

at each higher level (Collins, 2001).

In a 2015 study, the psychology behind collective goal setting found that the sense of commitment to the team's goals and fellow members affords each individual team member with a higher degree of investment (Schaeffner et al., 2015). This is the principle of collective interdependence, or “sink or swim together.”

The section on goal setting and goal prioritization spoke to Participant D:

I think that one of the things that resonated with me was when they asked about how gritty are you, and they asked about the three different goals, and how that when you are prioritizing your goals, how that top level goal needs to be the one that really doesn't need to change--how the other two levels kind of help with that.... It's amazing at how they said that top level goal really doesn't need to change. You really need to make sure that the other goals are helping you achieve that goal.

Figure 3 is similar to a graphic representation of the hierarchy of goals in Duckworth's (2016) text on page 70; it demonstrates the concept to which Participant D was referring.



Figure 3. Hierarchy of Goals.

“It’s as if the highest-level goal gets written in ink [while the lower-level goals] get written in pencil so you can revise them and sometimes erase them altogether, and then figure out new ones to take their place” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 69). Goals at the secondary and low levels are designed to support the highest level goal.

Evaluating objectives and goals like teachers (and parents) do all the time, such as, “What do you want to be when you grow up,” is also supported by the thinking behind this graphic. Teaching students to explore and set goals with this guiding framework would, undoubtedly, support goal *attainment*. This statement is supported by Covey et al.’s (2008) research on WIGs (Wildly Important Goals).

Grit has sustainable, positive implications. When asked, “What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor,” participants responded with the following:

Participant F said, “Sustainability. So, when you build that culture of grit, it’s not just the way we do business here as new people come in, but as they leave, they’re left with a skillset that can carry them forward.” Participant D believed,

I think building a culture of grit--even after I am gone off the scene, if the culture of grit is here with the teachers, and the other people who are here, it will continue to move forward. You know, helping people have that culture of grit not only will help our children, it will help our teachers as well.

Participant E stated,

I think one of the things is because it has life-long, or at least long-lasting positive consequences. I mean, if you build that culture, and especially if you can build that among students, and teachers, too, but especially among students, then that’s going to help them in life. While we, obviously, spend time in education trying to

prepare them for life, some of that non-academic skill is what they're lacking more than anything, or will need more than the academic skills. [Education] ebbs and flows--there are good times and bad times, there's good programs and bad programs, there's good leaders and bad leaders, there's lots of money, and no money, and your community can be shifted traumatically when they change attendance lines or the economy tanks. I think that having that staff grit enables them to be able to handle whatever happens so they're focused on kids and learning,

These statements speak volumes about the power and positive implications of a gritty school culture. According to Participant F, a culture of grit teaches skills that are carried over to the next phase. Participant D suggests that a culture of grit can be perpetuated among those IN the culture without needing a single, galvanizing figure to feed the fire. As Participant E articulated, a culture of grit can transcend issues that may otherwise derail forward momentum. Building a culture of grit leads to positive results for students over the long haul.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study, particularly undergirded by Duckworth's (2016) research as well as those researchers who had an impact on Duckworth's research, has several implications for future studies.

Coaches as teachers. The researcher was taken aback by the number of sports references in Duckworth's (2016) work. All at once, this made perfect sense. Athletes, at least the successful ones, pay strict attention to their coaches. Coaching can easily be analogized with teaching. Teachers, at least the successful ones, meet their students

where they are. They work with them, train them, and push them ever so slightly outside of their comfort zones each and every day. By doing these things, successful coaches and teachers move their athletes and students along the continuum to greater levels of performance. An area for future research could be designing a study to compare the impact of teachers with coaching experience as compared to their counterparts without coaching experience in terms student outcomes.

Gritty teachers or gritty students. Another possibility for future research could be to hone in on examining grit in schools through one lens or another--either student grit or teacher grit. The researcher did not want to place any limitations on the participants' responses, so there were no parameters like, "Think about this from a student perspective." For a subsequent researcher to place those parameters onto a study could prove interesting. It is the opinion of the researcher that it may be more practical to apply and examine through a staff filter as opposed to a student one. Chiefly, it is more feasible to manipulate the circumstances and variables when dealing with a staff, such as a series of professional development and follow-up coaching opportunities for teachers to enhance their grit.

Optimism, grit, and success. One final and thoroughly intriguing suggestion for future study is a deeper exploration of the power of passion *combined with optimism* and how those factors relate to success. Participants in this study used positive, optimistic words quite often in their responses to the various questions they were asked to answer, even the one that was more sinister in nature regarding barriers. When asked about the barriers that they encountered when addressing the culture in their schools, the participants were unwaveringly purpose driven and addressed the issues from an action-

oriented, solution-based mindset. For instance, Participant A joined the Rotary Club and leveraged relationships with the Chamber of Commerce to address community concerns. Participant D taught the staff how to utilize data to better serve the students from their changing demographic base. Participant C educated herself on all things elementary to demonstrate her dedication and increase her credibility as an elementary principal. None of these principals allowed their negative circumstances to distract them from their job at hand.

These very gritty people also seemed to have a decent amount of optimism about them. Duckworth (2016) displayed the following diagram: “growth mindset → optimistic self-talk → perseverance over adversity” (p. 192). Duckworth (2016) wrote, “There’s much more to say about cognitive behavioral therapy and resilience training” (p. 193). Duckworth (2016) referenced the life’s work of Seligman (1990), author of *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. This book is in the “Recommended Reading” section of *Grit*. Seligman spent years studying learned helplessness and depression before shifting his focus to the opposite side of the equation: optimism. Seligman wrote,

When failure occurs, it is because either talent or desire is missing. But failure also can occur when talent and desire are present in abundance, but optimism is missing.... But what if the traditional view of the components of success is wrong? But what if there is a third factor--optimism or pessimism--that matters as much as talent or desire? (p. 13)

The researcher definitely saw parallels between passion and optimism throughout the study. It would be interesting to specifically study the correlation between optimism

(and pessimism) and grit in a school setting. Table 4 has been modified (see Table 7) to illustrate a different slant that a future study may take.

Table 7

Table 4 with Modified Headings

Passion--Optimists (?)	Perseverance--Pessimists (?)	Both--Realists (?)
Participant B	Participant E	Participant A
Participant D	Participant G	Participant C
		Participant F
		Participant H

An option for future study could be to select a target group of leaders and replicate the study done in this work with the addition of Seligman's (1990) questionnaire designed to test optimism. This study would yield some compelling data.

Limitations

The most egregious limitations in this study revolve around the sample size. Only eight of the 37 eligible principals (21%) who met the research criteria actually participated. Had the number of participants been higher, the data may have provided even stronger correlations, yielding more robust and conclusive findings.

Among the participants, the distribution among the levels was equitable; three participants who served as elementary principals (37.5%), two middle school principals (25%), and three high school principals (37.5%). This is not, however, proportionate to the distribution to the number of schools at each level in the county studied. For a proportionate sample, 60% of the participants should have been from the elementary school level. The remaining 40% would need to have been split equally between middle and high school level administrators. For future studies, a more proportionate sampling

of participants may provide data that can be more adequately and more convincingly stratified at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

A second limitation was the caliber of the participants themselves. Seven of the eight participants, or 87.5%, are enrolled in doctoral programs or have already earned their terminal degrees. It safely can be assumed that this is far from an average sampling of the administrators in the system that was studied. Again, a more proportionate sample may provide a more accurate representation of the district as a whole.

There was a clear personal bias and therefore limitation in the study. The researcher “took sides” with different grit researchers. Clearly, given the degree to which the researcher referenced and utilized her work as the entire focal point of this work, the researcher is a Duckworth disciple. Duckworth’s (2016) work examining grit was so richly explored. Duckworth (2016) followed question after question, consulting researcher after researcher--paragon of grit after paragon of grit. It is the researcher’s belief that she did so for the love of the hunt. Duckworth (2016) *wanted to know* what made the difference between good swimmers and great ones. In stark contrast, the researcher found Stoltz’s (2015a) work to be akin to that of a snake-oil salesman. Stoltz’s (2015a) trademarked acronym screams, “I’m jumping on this bandwagon for the cash.” While his ideas are research based and valid, he just seemed distasteful in his pursuits. Duckworth (2016) seemed to be more invested in the process, and Stoltz (2015a) in the product.

The limitation by design certainly impacted the results of the study. Only principals who served two or more schools were invited to participate in the study. It may not have been wise to dismiss “novice” administrators out of hand in such a way;

however, upon reflection, this was the right decision. As Participant E pointed out, a new administrator is “trying to figure the culture out while ... also having to be part of it.” A fresh, perhaps raw, perspective may have added an interesting flavor to the various themes. Certainly, comparing responses from seasoned principals and from fledgling ones would have been interesting and, perhaps, melancholic.

Conclusion

“Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance. Will Durant”
(Brainy Quote, 2018).

In writing Chapter 2, the researcher was compelled to add the Parable of the Bricklayers. The beautiful and simple translation into “education-ese” is as follows:

Three teachers are asked: “What are you doing?”

The first says, “I am teaching math.”

The second says, “I am teaching children.”

And the third says, “I am teaching the future leaders of the world.”

It was difficult to research and discuss the elements of grit independently. Passion, motivation, purpose, determination, perseverance, grit--they all seem to blend together; however, that certainly makes sense as those different components work in concert with each other in a seamless, fluid manner. Over the course of conducting this study, there were many evenings when passion for the topic had taken a back seat, but determination saw the project through--plodding, after all, wins the race.

The researcher was a bit reluctant to add Sergiovanni’s (1992) work. With a copyright date in the early 1990s, the researcher was concerned that his “antiquated” content may not jive with the newer, flashier Daniel Pinks and Angela Duckworths of the

world. In the end, however, the addition of his work (from the text titled *Moral Leadership*, after all) is irrefutably warranted. Sergiovanni expressed the iconic notion of how and why passion is so desperately important in education. It is an educator's *moral obligation* to put their hearts and souls into the work they do; THAT is the essence of purpose.

While reading about the aspect of culture, the researcher had one of those rare and divine illuminating moments. The most powerful piece of learning that the researcher is taking away from this study is that the *type* or *flavor* of culture one is endeavoring to build is irrelevant. If one is interested in building a learning culture, a collaborative culture, a culture of reading, a data-driven culture, and so on, one is still going to be better served if he/she employs the elements of grit. Grit is the fire in the furnace that fuels one's endeavors. Duckworth (2016) showed through her numerous examples that this is true for people who want to be better swimmers, more successful spelling bee contestants, etc. The same principles apply. Do what you love, practice infinitesimal components of your tasks even though it can be mind-numbingly boring and tedious, learn from your mistakes, and "*resolve to make tomorrow better*" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 169).

The researcher was initially astounded at the number of athletic analogies Duckworth (2016), Colvin (2008), and countless other researchers cited in their work either directly or indirectly related to grit. All at once, it made perfect sense. The essence of coaching is taking that athlete where they are with their raw (sometimes overrated) talent and, through successive approximations, grow the athlete into the best that he or she can be. Here is where classroom teachers sometimes miss the mark. Their

focus is on the end game (high-stakes test) and nothing else. What they often fail to do--that which coaches **MUST** do--is meet the students where they are, at their ability level. As an aside, teachers in the arts, particularly band and chorus, seem, out of sheer necessity, to have a better understanding of this coaching approach to instruction. They are not going to put Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* (akin to the End-of-Grade/Course test) in the hands of their students without an exhaustive amount of modeling and practicing (literally) measure-by-measure. As referenced earlier for further study, it may be interesting to compare student performance in classrooms in which teachers have coaching experience versus those who do not. All coaches know, to be at the top of one's game, one simply **MUST** practice and put in the work.

For the purposes of this study, the participant sample was cut by choosing to include only principals who have served in more than one school. The primary rationale for this decision was so that they would have some comparative data of their own. The principals included in the study had (at least) two experiences with learning and shaping a school's culture. The *secondary* rationale was a shade more cynical. Data from the district showed that of the principals who have only served a single school, the most experienced principals had only been "in the chair" for 5 years. That accounts for three of the 18 in that group. Those first few (generally speaking, 3-5) years in the principalship are spent learning the job. Too often, it seems, the mundane tasks of the principalship consume a principal's day in the early years. The overarching, "big picture" aspects, sadly, take a backseat to that looming deadline or angry parent phone call. Many more experienced principals, some with as many as 15 years in the role, have learned to artfully navigate those day-to-day components of the job so they are free to

launch headlong into the fray of more meaningful dynamics of running a school building; namely, shaping its culture. Referring back to the 2009 Stanford University study of how principals spend their time, however, this may still be too optimistic. The results of the study revealed that the bulk of the principal's time was spent on administrative or organizational management tasks.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet, no magic elixir that brings about grittiness in someone's character or an organization's culture; however, after data collection and analysis were complete, the researcher was interested in including a more practical, actionable element to the conclusion of this study.

More on the aspect of culture building can be learned from Williams and Hierck (2015)'s text that outlined a 4-stage process by which schools (organizations) can achieve authentic alignment in the organization's culture. "Authentic alignment helps connect *what* we do in schools with the *why*" (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 44).

Stage one is one of exploration, finding the why. At this stage, schools identify their mission by exploring questions like, "What do we believe? What do we want to achieve? Why do we go to work each day? Why does our school exist?" (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 47). It is imperative to keep the why at the heart of the decision-making process.

Stage two is envisioning. This involves painting a picture of what the school must "look like" in order to meet the mission in the why. "Vision, when directed well, becomes the driver of change" (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 78). A school's vision provides that ideal, the optimal, eventual "look" of the school; "[it] should challenge you at the same time it describes your destination" (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 80).

Stage three is the how--connecting values to purpose and action. The goal of this stage is to “connect with the moral imperative of their collective commitment to the essential work” (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 45). This stage involves clearly defining the work that is to be done, while “constantly measuring effectiveness” (Williams & Hierck, 2015, p. 94).

Stage four is integration. Williams and Hierck (2015) defined this stage as, “a process for embedding your shared mission ... your vision ... and your collective commitments for best practice ... into existing school structures” (p. 125). This is the stage that brings all others together in a complete and practical manner. Williams and Hierck provided several action-oriented questions to utilize as a guide as well as a rubric that can be used to evaluate the organization’s progress.

Moving an *organization* along the continuous improvement continuum relies on the work of individuals.

New findings on how an *individual* can become grittier ultimately led the researcher to the work of Clear (2018). Clear (2018) overcame a near fatal injury. During his sophomore year in high school, Clear was struck in the face with a baseball bat that caused a broken nose, broken eye sockets, and numerous skull fractures. After multiple seizures from the swelling on his brain, a medically induced coma, and several surgeries, Clear began his slow road to recovery and the baseball diamond. By the end of his senior year in college, Clear had earned a number of honors including being a starting pitcher, team captain, all-conference, and being named to the ESPN Academic All-American Team. Clear equated all of these accomplishments to the habits he had cultivated throughout his recovery and college years, like going to bed early and keeping

a neat dorm room.

These improvements were minor, but they gave me a sense of control over my life. I started to feel confident again.... Changes that seem small and unimportant at first will compound into remarkable results ... the quality of our lives often depends on the quality of our habits. (Clear, 2018, pp. 6-7)

Clear's (2018) advocacy for the importance of habits obviously echoes Covey et al.'s (2008) work.

Clear's (2019) website houses a section on grit. Here, Clear (2019) embedded Duckworth's (2016) Ted Talk on grit along with some highlights from Duckworth's (2016) research. Clear (2019) used the phrase "mentally tough" interchangeably with grit. Clear (2019) gave three steps on how to become mentally tough.

Step one is to define what it means in one's particular case. Clear (2019) provided examples from a variety of vantage points--athletic (not missing a single workout for an entire month), business-oriented (turning in work ahead of schedule for 2 consecutive days), and social (reaching out to touch base with one friend each week). The point is to provide a meaningful definition for one's individual given situation that s/he is interested in improving.

Step two is to "Build grit with small physical wins.... Mental toughness is like a muscle. It needs to be worked to grow and develop" (Clear, 2019, para. 5). "Physical" here means actual, tangible activity.

The third step is to build strong habits without relying on motivation. Clear (2019) wrote,

Grit isn't about getting an incredible dose of inspiration or courage. It's about

building the daily habits that allow you to stick to a schedule and overcome challenges and distractions over and over and over again. Mentally tough people don't have to be more courageous, more talented, or more intelligent--just more consistent.

These steps outlined by Clear (2019) strongly correspond with Duckworth's (2016) "how-to" chapter--"Grit Grows." Duckworth's (2016) steps are as follows: "First comes *interest*... Next comes the capacity to *practice*. Third is *purpose*... And, finally, *hope*... but hope does *not* define the last stage of grit. It defines *every* stage" (pp. 91-92).

In closing, the researcher is encouraged and uplifted by the *real* beauty of "the glass." It is not that the glass is half full *or* half empty--it is refillable. The researcher believes deeply that passionate optimism wields great power as related to the success or failure of any endeavor. Hope is a renewable resource that fuels the daily grind of the small behaviors that culminate in triumphant accomplishments. "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself. Rumi" (Good Reads, 2019).

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study

Growing a Gritty Culture: A Grounded Theory Study

Researcher

Andrea L. Meyer- Researcher/School of Education

Purpose

The purpose of the research study is...

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role of grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), in a school culture. The study will also explore how a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit.”

Procedure

What you will do in the study:

The researcher will solicit the assistance of eight to twelve principals who have served as building level administrator in two or more schools to participate in a survey (Angela Duckworth’s Grit Scale) and an interview following their reading of the companion text to Grit by Angela Duckworth. The participants will be informed that they may end their interview session at any time.

Time Required

It is anticipated that the study will require about four hours of your time. Approximately three hours to read the text, and an hour-long interview session.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

Participants will be identified by pseudonym to protect their identities throughout the study. Interviews will be recorded using an encrypted recording application. Any hard copies of interview notes and/or survey responses will be kept in a safe in the researcher’s home. Upon completion of the study, the encrypted recordings will be deleted, and the documents shredded.

For common scenarios concerning confidentiality, the following text can be used.

Data Linked with Identifying Information

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a *code number*. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a *locked file*. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

All files associated with the study will be deleted or shredded upon publication of this study.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand the benefits associated with fostering a culture of grit in a school setting. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your recording will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw From the Study

- If you want to withdraw from the study, inform the researcher and the session will be ended. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Andrea Meyer at 704-674-2335

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.

Andrea Meyer
School of Education
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
XXXXXX

Dr. Stephen Laws
School of Education
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
slaws@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact:

Dr. Sydney Brown
 IRB Administrator
 Gardner-Webb University
 Boiling Springs, NC 28017
 Telephone: 704-406-3019
 Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

- _____ I agree to participate in the confidential survey.
 _____ I do not agree to participate in the confidential survey.
- _____ I agree to participate in the focus group.
 _____ I do not agree to participate in the focus group.
- _____ I agree to participate in the interview session(s). I understand that this interview may be audio recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed.
 _____ I do not agree to participate in the interview session(s).

 Participant Printed Name

 Participant Signature

Date: _____

Date: _____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix B

Grit Scale

Here are a number of statements that may or may not apply to you. There are no right or wrong answers, so just answer honestly, considering how you compare to most people. At the end, you'll get a score that reflects how passionate and persevering you see yourself to be.

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

2. Setbacks don't discourage me. I don't give up easily.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

3. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

4. I am a hard worker.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

5. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

6. I finish whatever I begin.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

7. My interests change from year to year.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me

- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

8. I am diligent. I never give up.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

9. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me
- ☐ Not like me at all

10. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.

- ☐ Very much like me
- ☐ Mostly like me
- ☐ Somewhat like me
- ☐ Not much like me



Not like me at all

Appendix C
Participant Responses

Participant A

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: No, not really. I had heard of it but have not had any experience with it.

Researcher: What was your response in general to the text?

Participant: Well, I felt that it was very much spot on I think a lot of times it takes someone to have the grit as they talked about to be able to persevere in certain situations. A lot of times, that will determine which direction you go. Are you going to continue to strive toward your goal or back off and say, "Well, I just can't do it."

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: Well, the whole thing really resonated with me on a personal level. I think a lot of things with the Grit Scale. The West Point cadets, how it talked about The Beast that they had to go through, the trainings they had to go through. It talked about how an individual's persevered through that regardless of their scale score, their IQ, their fitness level, whatever- it's that underlying factor that they weren't going to give up. They were going to get it done. I think that happens a lot with me. I will share something with you, when I was in college, no, I'm sorry, when I was in high school, the guidance counselor met with me when I was a senior and they met with me and asked me what I was going to do when I get finished. I said, "Well, I'm going to go to college. Don't know where yet, but I'm going to go to college somewhere." They said, "Oh, oh, no. You won't be able to make it in college. You'll need to go find a trade school." So, I'm the dissertation away from my doctorate degree. Bachelor's degree and a master's level degree and they said I wasn't going to make it so, whatever they saw... probably didn't take into the grit.

Wasn't quite the case.

Researcher: Given the two main components of grit, passion and perseverance, which do you think, in your experience, in your opinion is there one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: I would say that there is not one that's more valuable than the other. I think you have to have the passion to start out with to go towards your goal, but then you have to have the perseverance to you really can't have one without the other. I mean, you can persevere over different things, but if you relate it to your professional life, you have to have the passion for what you do to be able to persevere in the area. If you don't have the passion, you're not going to want to persevere. You're just going to like, "Ah well, it's to going to make any difference. You know, it's just one of those things."

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: I think that... it will... it plays a positive role in the way that... The administration has to set the precedent, they have to set the standard. And if there's not a lot of grit there, the school itself is not going to have a lot of grit. So, you have to transform the culture to represent how you want it to go. So, if you are someone who believes that, hey, we can do this, no matter what. They say we can't, they say we're low performing, they say we can't get off the low-performing list. They say our students can't perform- we know they can. We're going to make this happen. If that doesn't start at the top, and the administrator doesn't make everybody feel like they can get on board with what needs to be done. If the administrator doesn't give them the power, the autonomy to make it happen, then it's not going to happen. So, it really... to change the

culture of the school, it has to be a shift towards getting focused on where you want to go and having the grit to make that happen so I think it plays a key role in my professional opinion.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your different schools?

Participant: My first school that I went to, the culture of the school was good, it was the perception of the school in the community that I had to change. Coming into the school, when I came into my first school as a principal. The barrier wasn't so much the school itself, but the community. So many parents were like, "Oh I don't want my child to go there," and I was fortunate in the fact that I had transitioned from a feeder school to that school. So, all the parents were like, "Oh it's so bad over there- we're glad you're going there to change it," and when I got there it wasn't bad at all it was just that nobody knew the good things that were going on. Part of it was because the school was relatively new to the community it was only, roughly ten years old. So, many of the people in that community did not go through that school. So, they didn't have the investment that they had at the other schools in that community. So, we had to build that up we had to get involved with community things. I joined the Rotary Club, I got involved with the Chamber of Commerce, and just really digging in to get the word out. A lot of communication with my teachers and with me from my office and with them. So changing the culture of the school was not necessarily a bad thing I mean not necessarily something I had to do it was changing the culture of the community, the way the community looked at the school so, we were able to do that and that was successful, and now it's looked upon as a school in the community not just... it receives donations from

businesses it receives stuff in the paper, you know, things of that nature. And this year, at the new school, in my new school, the school that I'm at now, it's been a little bit different because it's been a cultural change in the school. It's been somewhat difficult. Even when people want change, change is difficult. So, when you come into a situation everybody's, "Oh, they're excited," but then if you don't exactly line up with the way they want things done, and the way they think things ought to be done, or they have become accustomed to running things the way they want it ran, you know, and you come in and change it to make it more uniform and they may not have had as much influence as they have in the past, it becomes difficult for them. So, you know it's been a cultural change. It's been very, um, it's not been bad, it's just been very different than I've experienced before, coming into my school before. But coming into this school, one of the things we were able to do is build the morale up, you know. But I've received so many calls from parents and so many calls from the district level this year that I've received before, and it was all because of the culture, and I just kept constantly reminding my assistant principal- we just have to change the culture. We have to change the climate, which we've changed the climate, it's much more positive now- still a little way to go, still some negativity but trying to work through that, but that all goes into the grit of are you going to do what you need to do to continue down this path to try to build things, to make it a better situation for everyone and if you don't have the passion for change, and you don't have, going back to what you talked about, those two, the passion and perseverance, if you don't have the passion to change that then you're not going to want to persevere through the negatives and some of the things that you have to deal with. So, that's definitely been a challenge this year.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: I think that if you build a culture of grit, you build a culture that no matter what's thrown your way, you're going to be able to overcome it. And if you build a culture that the teachers believe that they can do it, then they're going to do it. I want to make sure I give credit to who said it, I think it was Henry Ford that said it, "If you think you can, you can, but if you think you can't, you can, too," or something like that. So, you know, lot of people say that the body will go where the mind leads. So, if you believe that you can make it happen and you believe that you can get it done, then, you know, you get the teachers believing, and it's not an automatic thing. You have to work, but if they start to believe and go, "Oh, you know what, he said he was going to do this- he did it. He said we could do this- we did it. What else can we do?" You know they start building that confidence level with in themselves, and working through the grit. The book talked about, you know, optimism and it talked about those who are optimistic looked at things as if, "Okay, I didn't work hard enough." The pessimist is like, "Oh, I'm a loser and I can't get it done." So, you're going to... just because you've worked through and you're an optimist- you're optimistic and you work through it, and you work through the grit and do the grit doesn't mean that you're going to not fail. That's going to happen. But it's just- are you going to get back up?

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: I think it goes back to just leading by example. Do what you say you're going to do. Be visible. When there's a situation, how do you handle that situation? There's an angry parent, are you going to be angry back? Are you going to get into an argument with them? Are you going to work to get them to calm down, to see what's

going on? Representing what you want done starts at the top, again, you have to foster that throughout what you do. If you believe, then they'll eventually believe, you just have to get them started believing. That can be hard, but, you know, you have to keep trying. I think that that's how you would foster it to start with. You would definitely have to lead by example.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: Um, well one of the things, and I don't want to go down a rabbit hole here, but this may be beneficial. One of the things with my son, he's going in the 8th grade. One of the things that we've always done with him is that we've never said, "Oh, you've done a good job because you're smart." We've always said, "Okay, you've done well because you've worked hard." He's an athlete, and he wants to be an athlete. He played four sports this year, and one of the things that I always tell him is, there's someone out there just as good as you are. But, you have to work harder than them. Like the book says, there's not much difference between people and their talents, it's what you do with them and how hard you work. And reading that, I'm a sports nut, so forgive me, but it made me think about Michael Jordan, and the shots that he would make and the things that he would do in a game, but it seemed, oh, man, it's just unbelievable that he would make those kind of shots, but he practiced those things over and over again. Worked hard. It all goes back to working hard and the grit. You're up at 6 o'clock, well, somebody up at 5. You got a masters, somebody else has an EDS. You got an EDS, somebody else has a doctorate. It's always about putting in that hard work in. I try to instill; my wife and I are always trying to instill that in my son. Because I'm sure you're familiar that there's a lot of research that shows that when you constantly tell a student

they're smart, when they get into a situation and don't know, and that's going to happen, there's always going to be some time that they're not able to just master right off the bat. That if you teach them it's not about how smart you are, it's about how hard you work, and how much you've prepared for that. You know, when they get to that thing that situation, they're not going to falter. They're going to be like, "Okay, I'm not quite sure, but I'm going to work through this thing and I'm going to do the best I can."

Participant B

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: No. I heard of it, but I had no experience with it.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: I went and bought her book- the actual Grit book. I don't know if that helps any. I'm very interested in it; it made a whole lot of sense. I think I always considered grit just hard work, especially in education. You know, you have those kids that you know their IQ and they are outperforming- I think I always would call those over-achievers. But... it answered a whole lot of things that were out there that I couldn't but a good answer to- it gave a name, it gave an understanding behind it.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: The one about the Academy, the military academy. When it talked about Beast and how even though they have a rating scale for them to be accepted that has to do with aptitude and physical fitness, and that sort of thing- that that had no correlation with how they accomplished something that was difficult for them. The other section that kind of resonated with me was... the part that talked about how you have to have, like,

building relationships and you have to show your importance and it has to mean something in your life for you to be able to put your grit towards it.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: I think if I had to go out and run a mile, I think I could persevere through it, but I don't have a passion for running. So, I think to do something for a long haul, or over a longer period of time, than just going out and running a mile, you'd have to have that passion for it. And then you'll be able to persevere it. I don't like green beans, but if I have to eat them, I can persevere through that and choke them down, but I wouldn't continue to order them. So, I think passion is a little more important, especially when you're doing something more than once or you're looking at a career, or if you're looking at, like, accomplishing a goal.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: Oh my gosh! I think that it is everything! I think a lot of times in a school culture, the staff can look just at aptitude and not look at willingness and where the students' goals are in life and so then we don't necessarily give them the opportunities that they may want or need, and I think having that grit, having that, "I'm going to stick with this, I'm not backing away from it," that perseverance, and that passion, I think we don't give it enough attention in a lot of ways. Especially at the high school level. You know, we have to schedule based on a lot of numbers, not on hard work. And, so I think that when we base everything on the skill development, sometimes that passion and perseverance goes away. But I also have seen students who have shown that passion and perseverance and then their aptitude level goes up, you know, their performance in

classes goes up. To where if we look just at IQ or just some standardized scores, we wouldn't necessarily think that they were an honors or AP level student. But if you look at actually how they performed, they very much may be a higher-level of a student than what their IQ may be saying.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: The first barrier is, "this is the way we've always done it," the tradition type barrier. Heaven forbid we try to change things. I think the changing of student demographics is a barrier that some people think that they don't need to approach students when student demographics have changed or even when society's interests have changed. You know, I think about technology. You have those old-school people that are like, "I don't need a computer." When that's the way that society has changed. That's the way kids learning has kind of changed. Those are two big barriers that I have encountered in changing, trying to change the culture. I would also say one of the barriers is people having pity rather than empathy, and not having high enough rigor because they feel sorry for a kid, or feel sorry for a group of students and not trying to meet them where they are and support them, to have them grow.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: I think it's a worthwhile endeavor... It helps those kids that just are hard workers that... to me, it helps a kid like me. I was the type of student that I knew what I wanted to do, I knew I needed to have a college education, but I had a reading problem. And a lot of people wanted to make excuses for me with having my reading problem, "Oh, it's okay..." No. It wasn't okay to me, because I knew if I did not accomplish X,

Y, or Z, I was not going to be able to go to college to be a teacher. That's what I wanted to do. So, having a culture of grit in a building would help those students like me. Those students who have a passion, who know what they want to do with their lives, but maybe they have a setback. I think it also helps, I don't want to say "level the playing field" but, we have those kids that have the intelligence, but just have no urgency for anything.

Then you have those kids that really work hard when maybe they shouldn't. So, I sort of feel that having that culture of grit, and why it's important, it helps everybody try to accomplish whatever goal they want to accomplish and accepting them for maybe not having the highest aptitude, but, man, if they're a hard worker, let's go! We'll keep challenging you. I don't know if I expressed that well, but...

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: I think you have to have to bring awareness to what grit is, and try to have conversations with the people in your building that interact with students or make decisions for students about encouraging those that may be hard workers to continue working. I know that the first thought I was I'm going to read the book and this may be something our leadership team is going to look at, or maybe we need to put together a little committee to read the book and see how that can fit into our school culture because we have, you know, everybody talks about those quiet kids who come to school, do what they're supposed to do. They're not the high-flyers, they're not the ones that are making straight As, and all these high level classes, but they're not the ones in the remedial classes that are, maybe, discipline problems or anything like that- just your run-of-the-mill. To me, having a culture of grit would also help those kids, and help push that middle-of-the-road group. Or to recognize what's important to them. I think that's what

would be important about having that culture of grit. Also, to change mindsets of people.

If you can never get in touch with their parent, or if the child is having some stability issues in their home that doesn't mean that that kid's going to be bad. That means that that kid... if you have a culture of grit, that kid has a chance.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: Okay, the thing that came to my mind when I was reading that was a fixed mindset versus a growth mindset. I think that that and grit can absolutely work hand-in-hand, and I know it was mentioned in her book a little bit toward the end. About how those things can work hand-in-hand, and, I think too much these days everybody judges, and unfortunately, we judge based on their parents. Just because that mama may be cussing you out doesn't mean that their kid is a bad kid. So, you know, it definitely resonated with me will all the places that I've worked, because I've always worked with those lower socio-economic type kids that, you know, there is a fighting chance if you want it, you can achieve anything in the world, and that's just what I kept thinking.

Participant C

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's Concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: I think I saw that Ted talk once, but no research or anything.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: I thought it was... there was a lot about it that I thought was right, and there were some things that I found myself really digging into, things that I really thought were interesting. And then there were some parts that I found myself, like, reading, but not paying attention to, but I felt like overall it was an accurate... synopsis of... if I think of

grit, I think the text well defined in my mind what I think it is.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: Yes, but hang on... can I look at it and find it?

Researcher: Sure! Absolutely!

Participant: Okay, I just want to follow the rules... Um, I really like where it talked about the talent part- that we overcompensate and we group a lot of things into talent, and gifted, but we don't pay a lot of attention to the effort that goes into developing what I guess becomes skill or achievement. I thought the part about... and it was the intro, so of course it's going to hit you, but where it talked about all those folks at West Point, just that information that what really separated those who made it and those who didn't was their grit- nothing about academics nothing about awards or backgrounds, but just their ability just to dig deep when it got hard.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: So, I think... can I just use a personal experience as an example?

Researcher: Absolutely!

Participant: So, when I think about us starting the choice school this year, my passion is not STEAM. There is nothing about me that is wired that way. So, it has become... I have found a way to make it more passionate to me, like, I had to dig and persevere to find a way to make it make sense in my brain that's not wired for that, but I also think that making a program come together when it's not your passion, you have to rely on perseverance. So, sometimes I think to make something sustainably successful, you have to have both. You can't just rely on perseverance and not care about the matter at hand. You can't be just so crazy about the matter at hand that you don't feel something that's

not sustainable. So, it's not that I'm not passionate about Disney, I can appreciate it and enjoy it. So, once I could resonate in my head STEAM, at it's best, is what happens at Disney so seamlessly that it just inner connects with each other. I could wrap my head around that. I could not wrap my head around a skyscraper to save my life and we think of engineering and technology, but once I found something that I was at least interested in, then my ability to persevere, I think, became even more exciting. It was never a question of not persevering through this, but there definitely more joy in what you do when there is a connection.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: I think in a school culture, not everybody has passion for the same thing. Some people are passionate about middle school aged kids. Some people are passionate about the content they teach. Some people are passionate about where they are, the community they're in. So, I don't think that everybody has to have the same passion to make school culture work. But I think everybody in the building has to be passionate about something. Because I do need... I mean, I need everybody to like children, but I need somebody to be passionate about math. I need somebody to be passionate about the arts. But then when I think when it comes to grit, I think you have to have people that are willing to work hard, that are willing to go the distance... And, so I think all of that is in a school culture because what you start to see is when there's an outlier that doesn't fit the culture, everybody knows it. And nobody has patience when 95% of your people are working hard or digging in when it gets hard or trying to figure out how to make this better, care about the kids, and then when people who don't, they do stick out, and they

can hinder culture. So, I do think that for some folks that, yeah, I do think it has to do with culture.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: So, I've been in three schools, and I think the first time... the first school that I went to was [Named School 1]. It's just a high poverty, high needs school. They knew coming in- I'd never been in an elementary school before since I left one as a child, but I knew the community. I knew poverty, I knew the demographics of the community because of where I'd been as an assistant principal. So, I think that sometimes in developing a culture, the barrier there was that everybody there knew I didn't know the content, the pedagogy, the age of the children that I was asked to lead. But, I think what they saw was my perseverance to learn those things was significant. I mean, I ordered the Lucy Calkins- how to do that, the Fountas and Pinnell became like a Bible in a sense, so I think in that situation my perseverance had to kick in because it was a barrier to teachers that I didn't know what they did every day, I didn't know, again, the children. So, I had to work through that, but once they saw I was very willing to learn and wanting to learn and recognized them as the master of content and of knowing little people, that became successful. When I went to [Named School 2] I had to hire 25 people when I got there. So, it was different in a sense of I kind of got to at least build a little bit of community as I hired people. They felt I had chosen them. It wasn't me versus all of these people. But there were folks that had been there for a long time at [Named School 2] that were very proud of their school, and I think, once again, once they say I was committed to their school, I showed up at events, again, I knew some families because of

where I'd been assistant principal, in an elementary school, I think that perseverant... when it comes to school people, perseverance can trump initial intelligence or knowledge at any time. And then when I got to [Named School 3], I was the only new person to [Named School 3]. There's not a lot of turn-over here, and, so, I had to, once again, prove myself here very differently, because this dynamic is very different than the dynamics where I had previously been an administrator. And, so, learning how to play the community game was very different. I've spent years making good decisions as I knew how to make them- what I needed to do, certainly not the involvement of parents, and community members, and board members that I had over here. So, I think that sometimes, those kinds of barriers... people just want to see that you'll work through them, that you'll stand by them when you can, and that you're just willing to dig your feet in and make... your school has to become ... their school has to become your passion. And that's... they want me, whether I was at [Named School 1], [Named School 2], or whether I was here, I had to be sold out, all about [Named School 3], I had to be sold out about [Named School 2]. They... once they saw that about me, too, that I was committed that, you know, I cheered hard for [Named School 2] when I was their principal, but now that I'm here, I'm all in [Named School 3]. You know, if they move me tomorrow to [Named School 4], I'd be all in to [Named School 4]. So, I think sometimes just removing those barriers and being true to the people you're working with.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: Well, I think when school gets hard, you need to be surrounded by people who are willing to dig deep. When you lose a student, if you had a faculty member pass away, when you have to move a school building in the middle of the school year, when

you have to, you know, bring in a program that people know enough about to be dangerous but don't know anything about... I think that you need people to dig in and be gritty, and nobody has to do it more than the principal. I had to take the biggest risk, and I remember telling everybody, "Look, nobody around here gonna get fired but me." So, I just... I don't need you to be scared, I just need you to try. I need you to dig in, I'm gonna dig in, and I think all that has to play a part in the culture.

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: I don't think it happens on day one, and I think it happens, um, first of all, I think you have to have good relationships with people. I think you have to let people know that you care about them and their circumstances, and I think you have to understand that everybody's grit level isn't the same. My ability to dig deep, and your ability to dig deep- we might put in the same effort, but I might go farther down than you, but it's not meaning that you're not digging deep. I think you have to know that about people. I think that people have to see that you're willing to just withstand whatever comes your way. You're able to hold true to what you believe when nobody else believes what you believe. Um, and I think that you just... you go after it and you chase it day after day. But I think that it's not just, um, I think it's a whole part of an attitude as well. It's recognizing in people and acknowledging when you see people working hard, not just talking about test scores all the time, I mean, we can't help but not talk about it, but when you see teachers even with their kids move up in the ranks, or they did better this time than they did last time- I think- honoring that, rewarding that... rewarding it by acknowledgment, I'm not saying anything else. But I just think that- that's how you do it. I think you make working hard and digging deep and... part of what you do. But I

also think that you have to have some setbacks. If it's always easy, then you don't get grit. So, I think that you have to find things in ways where you have to have something to build from. If that makes sense.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: No, I think I'm good...

Participant D

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's Concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: Yes, in one of my doctoral classes I saw the Ted Talk with Ms. Duckworth's talk on grit, but that was it.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: When I read the text, it opened my eyes to a lot of things that sometimes we don't think about especially when you're trying to hire people and you're trying to hire talented people. It's kind of hard to understand what their grit is, because you really haven't seen them work yet. And, so to really know their work ethic and what it took them to get where they were. So, it helped give me a different perspective on, you know, when we talk about highly qualified people and people who may be almost there and really we're trying to get them there but also it lets me understand that sometimes it's more or less how people- the grit and the passion that they have to do a job how they will outshine those who are very talented sometimes.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: Personally, I think that one of the things that resonated with me was when they asked about how gritty are you, and they asked about the three different goals, and

how that when you are prioritizing your goals, how that top level goal needs to be the one that really doesn't need to change- how the other two levels kind of help with that. You know, they gave the example they gave about showing up to work on time. The reason why you show up on time because you want to do a good job and then the top goal is to show, you know, how when you do show up on time or how you can be punctual, you can be a better leader. I think that kind of stood out to me because there are different goals that you have, and it's amazing at how they said that top level goal really doesn't need to change. You really need to make sure that the other goals are helping you achieve that goal.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: The book talked about if you're passionate about the job you're doing, you'll be more likely to like it, and like the job you do. I think sometimes, like they say, a lot of people in jobs that they don't like, so you're not as passionate about it. So, I think that by having that passion for your job and the passion for that thing you're trying to achieve, I think it will help you persevere as you go through that because there will be challenges in any job that we have, but I think that if it's something that we're really passionate about we'll stick to it, and we'll make it through.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: I think in a school culture, our number one goal is to help our children learn. I think in our schools today we have children coming from all different types of backgrounds and coming with all different types of learning levels, so I truly believe that that perseverance, and you know, really trying to make it through is really helping our

children achieve. By doing that, we may have to teach different ways and do different things to help them get to that level of learning that we want them to be. So, I think true grit will come in whenever you have children of all different levels and even on those low children with those low levels, you're not going to give up on them. You're still going to help them learn and grow. True grit will not be getting, even if something doesn't work, you don't give up on it, you don't give up on the children, and you still help them get to where they need to be.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: I think that some of the barriers, especially like, uh... the school I'm currently at right now, they have had a past history of always doing very well and being very well known in the county, I think some of the things that have changed is, you know, the county has changed. You know, we've had... the jobs that people had- they don't have anymore. Some of the socio-dynamics parts of our county has changed so some of our clients that come in and our children that come in, they come in from more different backgrounds now, and you hear sometimes people will say, "Well, they're not like what they used to be," so, we just, you know... My thing is you can't have that mindset. That was one of the barriers we had to overcome was no matter which child comes through that door, it is our job to teach them. So, I think another barrier we had was with looking at data. We started looking at data, and they had to, you know, they had to learn how to use their data to help children who were struggling and help improve their teaching. That was a barrier because they never used to look at that. They said, "We never looked at our data to understand what it means." So, that was another hurdle, but,

going through that and growing together, we were able to overcome that.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: I think building a culture of grit- even after I am gone off the scene, if the culture of grit is here with the teachers, and the other people who are here, it will continue to move forward. You know, helping people have that culture of grit not only will help our children, it will help our teachers as well. It will help them not to give up even if things change sometimes. No matter what type of things that come down from the county or from the state, you know, they won't complain about it, we'll just... in our mind, we'll be like, this is something else we have to do, but we still, with grit, you still have that common goal of, I'm going to help these children learn. So, my thing is, no matter what we have to do, we still have that one common goal that's a non-negotiable, and that's helping our children learn and get better. So, with a grit attitude, you still press toward that even though you may have to overcome some barriers and do some things differently to get there.

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: I think first it needs to start with us. In order to foster it... it's almost as in anything in order to get someone to do it, you have to be willing to do it yourself. So, we really have to take, like you said, the grit test ourselves and see where we fall in there, and see what we need to do, as the book says, to get grittier... to be able to change some of our mindsets. I think that we have to first change our mindset and understand what it truly means, and apply it to ourselves. Then we will be able to go out and talk to our teachers about it, and start building a culture about it. But it's hard to build a culture on something that either you don't believe in, or even you haven't done. And, so, my thing

is, if we don't have neither one of those things, then it will be a hard task to do that with our staff.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: Well, the one thing about Ms. Duckworth's book that I do like is the fact of that it's what inside of you and how hard you're going to try to make it. I have seen people who people felt were not able to do a certain task, but because of their stick-to-it-iveness, their grittiness, they stayed with it and they did better than people who had the natural talent to do it. I do believe... it is a part of our culture to not think about things that way. We always try to find the best people, the most talented people to do things, but, honestly, we need to be using that grit scale more to find who's going to have the heart to stay with you. Even then times are hard they're still going to work with it and overcome it- versus somebody who once it gets hard, they leave. Because right now in our school system, that's what we're facing. We have schools that have children in real need, and have children who are really hurting, and we have teachers who are coming in, and they're not able to hang with that because they just cannot teach. They're having a hard time staying with teaching because they feel like, "Well, this is not what I was called in to do." But then we have other people who may come in lateral entry, who come and they're like, "Hey, I'ma stick with it and I'ma make it through this and I'ma help our children learn." Those are the ones who make it. So, it's just not talent all the time. I do believe in that concept of how, you know, where's your heart at and how willing are you to stick with it and make it through.

Participant E

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's Concept of grit prior

to reading the text?

Participant: I am aware of the concept, I did not know it was her concept, if it's hers. I had seen articles about it in reading educational stuff, but I had not spent much time on it.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: It's interesting. I would say I see, in terms of thinking about it- in terms of students especially, I would say, I have seen that over the years, um, I had not, honestly, thought about it much in terms of adults. Most of what I had seen has been about kids and grit.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: Um, the thing, I guess that I'm thinking about it, that stands out the most was just about passion, I guess, the passion for what you're doing, and... because I feel like in education that's what adults feel a lot- that they're passionate about what they do.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: I would say perseverance because you can be passionate all day long, but if you don't follow through then your passion is simply an emotion rather than resulting in an outcome. And if you're the only person with that passion, and you're not willing to work through that, then sometimes, you won't get anything accomplished.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: Um, I certainly think passion... because the traditional motivations for many professions are not as prevalent in education like high pay and lots of room for advancement. People have to be passionate about it, I think, to motivate them to be in it in the first place. Perseverance, I think, for the adults especially... there are so many

things that can become setbacks or obstacles or hinderances to accomplishing what we're ultimately trying to do that if you lack perseverance, you're going to give up pretty quickly because there's lots of opportunities, lots of legitimately good reasons to do that. And I think that the perseverance is the key that keeps people moving and modeling that for kids is important as well.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: Um, I think one of the things if figuring it out, understanding what it is. This is my third... as a principal, third new school, and it takes time, and so I think you're trying to figure the culture out while you're also having to be part of it, and that you can easily get off on the wrong foot if you trust the wrong people or don't trust the right people, or don't figure out important components of the culture before you need to know them. Trust would be the other thing- knowing who to trust, and getting other people to trust you. If you're following someone that people trusted a lot, it's harder to win them over. If you're following somebody people distrusted, I think they're very willing to trust you, but you don't get to pick. You don't get to pick your circumstance as the new principal. And then I would say... history and tradition is part of the culture, but that one of the things I encountered between... especially, I'd say at [named school- participant's first principalship] is you're also dealing with the culture of the community has a large impact, in some schools, on the culture of the school. I've seen some of that here, I did not really at [named school- participant's second principalship], but at [named school- participant's first principalship] and here, I would say the culture's community, I'm sorry, the community's culture... you have to understand it, too, I guess is my point

because it has a serious impact on the school culture.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: Um, I think one of the things is because it has life-long, or at least long-lasting positive consequences. I mean, if you build that culture, and especially if you can build that among students, and teachers, too, but especially among students, then that's going to help them in life. While we, obviously, spend time in education trying to prepare them for life, some of that non-academic skill is what they're lacking more than anything, or will need more than the academic skills. I think with a staff, building that culture, I mean education, it ebbs and flows- there are good times and bad times, there's good programs and bad programs, there's good leaders and bad leaders, there's lots of money, and no money, and your community can be shifted traumatically when change attendance lines or change- the economy tanks, I think that having that staff grit enables them to be able to handle whatever happens so they're focused on kids and learning, and not having to focus on themselves- adjusting to changes that may take place that make it harder to do their job.

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: Um... I think part of it is understanding it, and whether it's understanding in an academic sense of this person's research or just understanding it inherently as a person. I think you have to be honest and address it head-on and when people are not exhibiting that, talk about the importance of it and be pretty transparent. I think you also have to model it. You know, as the leader, all kinds of terrible things happen, and if we just give up, or fall apart, or say, "This is too hard, let's do something easier," I think you're creating a culture where people say, "That's what we'll do," as opposed to saying,

“Oh, we’re going to keep going- this is worth it...” [named superintendent] says, “It’s not going to be easy, but it’s going to be worth it.” I think building that idea among the staff is part of what you’ve got to do. So, I think that’s part of what you do, is being open about it, talking about it, and probably, to some degree, trying to point out times when people have done it or the successes that have come from people doing that, too.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you’d like to share?

Participant: Um, you know, when you read it, when you read the text, you’re like, “Well, that’s so obvious,” to a point, but then, you’re also thinking, “Well, gosh, if someone’s writing books about it, it must not be happening as much as it ought to for it to be something so obvious.” I think you... it’s one of those, you learn those lessons in life in a very theoretical sense, but actually learning them to engage in them and remembering it’s not just a “kid” concept. Like I said, most of the stuff I’ve read is how to teach kids grit, or raising gritty kids. I think sometimes, and maybe this is part of your study, is if the adults have more of that it’s easier to get the kids to have it, too.

Participant F

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth’s Concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: No, I did not.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: Um, it was very interesting and I could see myself in the text. I can resonate with some of the concepts she was trying to portray.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: Um, there were a couple of them that I did write down... I like the fact

that... I didn't realize that you had to have hope at all those different levels. You know, when you've got, what was it, that interest to practice to purpose- hope is in all of those and that's what keeps you going. Also, there was... with your passion, like, I could see my professional growth at the early stages, the middle stages, and, like, now, you know, four years and I can retire, so, I'm kind of... but I don't want to retire and stop, I want to go, and, you know, teach teachers, so that's another facet of my passion that I'm still developing, I guess you'd say. In talking about students, when you... we have a lot of low-income schools, Title I schools, you've got kids that are, like, uh, just not interested in anything because they don't see anybody model that. And, so, finding a way to help them get that intrinsic motivation. They have grit because they're living in it, you know. They know what it's like to do whatever they need to do to get to school so they can have a breakfast and lunch. So, they've got that inner focus, but it's not toward education, it's toward just survival, and so, having them find that for themselves, in education, the educational process, is something that I would like to transfer to my teachers so they can kind of build on that for the students.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: I don't know if one is more valuable than the other. If you don't have your passion, if you don't have the carrot dangling in front of you, you're not going to persevere to achieve that goal so, they're kind of, you can't have one without the other. I don't think there's one more overbearing than the other one.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: I think I maybe spoke on that a little bit with the teachers. Teachers finding

their own kind of niche, and then persevering through that productive struggle whether it's a new teacher with her lesson plans, and just, the whole... everything to deal with new teachers having to deal with. That's very consuming on them, and weighs on them a lot, so they get through that first year, and then they can make it a little bit better. Then on the flip side, you've got the students, the new students that come in every day and you've got, like I said, you've got try to have them find their... what they are interested in, their passion, and then learn to persevere to achieve that goal. So, it fits in the school culture, but I think they're in different elements, they fit different styles. Even here, I have to kind of teach parents on how to be, I guess, parents that support the educational process of each child. So, some of them don't realize that it's important to read twenty minutes a day, and it's important for you to check your kid's grades in Powerschool. You know, yeah, the kid checks it all the time, but it's good for you to kind of check up on that, and help them build that... those qualities after they leave here... to become, I guess better human beings.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: I would say some barriers would be just the, um, one barrier that I face a lot is we have a very transient population, and so, you start working with kids, and [sound effect] they're gone next door to another school, and another school, and then they come back. That, and then the barriers of, uh... just the lack of importance for education. That is a huge hurdle I've had to, since this being my fifth year here, when I first started, kids came to school just, one- to get fed, and a safe place to be, and then they came just to have fun with their kids, and they just didn't care. And now we're making that shift to,

“You know, it’s okay to be smart, I do want to learn something. This is still a safe place to be... Quit goofing off, because I want to learn this.” That’s starting to happen now, where it didn’t before. That was a barrier that I had to kind of go through, and it has to be a gradual shift; it can’t be all at one time. Really another barrier was just changing the culture of this building from, “Oh, bless your heart, you’re at [named school] and y’all have been an F school forever,” and now, “You know, that’s a great place to be!” And to make people enjoy coming to work, too, the teachers. That’s something that I pride myself on is this is... I want them to enjoy working. This needs to be a good place to be. It doesn’t have to be fun all the time, but a happy place, and I’m comfortable. For the staff and for adults to want to come in here and this is a good place to be; that’s what I want.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: Sustainability. So, when you build that culture of grit, it’s not just the way we do business here as new people come in, but as they leave, they’re left with a skillset that can carry them forward. Especially at this age, middle school, with kids and even with young teachers- when they move on, then they have something to work with and can propel and reach their goals, and do whatever they need to do- find their own little niche. So, I think that’s... it’s important to have that, and I like this age group for that purpose. You’re molding them, and they... you’re still able to do that. If it was an older group of kids, I think it would be harder.

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a “culture of grit?”

Participant: Baby steps. By fostering a culture of grit, with kids, you have to go through your teachers. So, you have to be able to empower them to... I guess... build that culture

in that they don't really need to know that's what they're doing. Let me give you an example. Small group direct instruction is how you move the needle with test scores in my opinion, and research says that, too. So, through that small group direct instruction you have that, build that relationship with the kid, they reach their little goals, they start to build their confidence, and once they build their confidence, then they start to find things- different things that they like and are passionate about and then they can persevere to reach that goal. So, by building that small group direct instruction, and then you have that conference with them and they've got that little sticky note with this is what I want to achieve on whatever assessment it is, and they achieve that goal, woo hoo, we get to reward them, alright, then through that process, I'm also, I have to do that through the teachers, I can't do that for every one. So, I have to do the same thing, model some of that with the teachers so they get to present on certain, during our PLCs they get to present on certain topics that they're good at or whatever to increase student engagement, whatever to increase, you know, whatever tool that they like, anyway, we have different categories. They present on that to their PLC, and then they build up and present in, um, a staff meeting they may present to all the different PLCs if it's something that's worthy for everybody to hear, so once they become comfortable in that, we empower them to seek other opportunities- they're getting their Master's, they're getting their national boards, they're seeking out other opportunities within the district to maybe work on... district lesson planning stuff, or curriculum planning, they're presenting... I've got two math teachers, quiet, reserved, that we've built up and empowered, now they're presenting to the other math teachers that are little experts, you know, that's what they're... by doing that, that builds their confidence. Daniel Pink talks about some of

that and within... keeping... maintaining some of your staff, you know, teacher retention, you have to do that to change that culture. So, if you build them up and you have strategies within their lessons or within your practices or procedures to help build the kids up, that culture starts to shift.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: I thought it was... it was very informative, I could relate with it, I could see a lot of myself in it, kind of the stuff I do. I might use some of this terminology with the staff, so, yeah, I liked it!

Participant G

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's Concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: No.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: I thought it was very good. It was very informative, it got me thinking about my own life as well as trying to inspire students to learn, too, as well.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: Probably the part on failure where, you know, it takes... it can take you up to ten thousand hours to really learn how to do a skill. That really resonated with me because I think a lot of times, you know, people don't realize you have to invest a lot to get a lot, and I think sometimes we don't... we have these goals and aspirations but we don't necessarily work to set them, you know, put in the time and effort you need to be successful.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: Well, I think you can have... I think you can have... you must have perseverance to see something through. And I think if you don't have the perseverance then no matter how much passion you have for something, you're never going to actually see it come to fruition if you don't really work to do whatever it takes to make it happen. I do agree, you have to have perseverance over passion.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: Um, well, I think at first in the role of the student because you can have students who have all the capabilities in the world but they might not have the passion or perseverance to carry something out. So, you can have students who are highly intellectual, but don't have passion and perseverance and are not any more successful than students who are maybe lower in the scale, but do have the passion and perseverance to carry it through. So, in the school setting, that's what I've really looked at and focused on the most was, um, you know, the role it really played with students and how they interact to goals or things they have set for themselves.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: Um, the biggest that I've run into as far as what I can see at the school setting has been barriers for perseverance or passion is... perseverance or passion by some staff members. Sometimes I think they're in positions, um, not because they want to make a difference with students' lives or because they want to help to carry a student to reach a goal, um, the biggest problems I've seen is people who are in the profession for the wrong reasons, and they don't have a passion or perseverance and that carries over into

instruction in the classroom. And I think sometimes that's why there's a disconnect with the students in certain subject areas at certain times in their lives because that perseverance and that passion is not relayed to the student.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: I think with anything, especially in education, you have to look at the long term or the goal- what do I want, where do I want to be- and I think that grit helps you to see what is it going to take to get me where to want to be, you know, what kind of passion and perseverance do I need to have, what are my goals, what is my end-game, where do I need to be between the first and the end to get to, you know, the end result that I'm looking for, and I think that's why it's so important.

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: I think as an administrator, my goal is to help, again, the staff see the importance of what we're doing- the work where we're at. For example, this week, we're doing a readings foundation training here at school to better prepare our students with interventions for reading skills. I think it's important for us to, um... me as administrator to have a vision of what our end-game and end goal is and, of course, that is to improve student learning and achievement. So, I have to relay that to my staff in order for them to understand really what the expectation is for me and my students.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: I think I want to get the book because I want to read more about what it really takes to, um, have that passion and perseverance. I think in... not necessarily in school because I'm happy with what I do, and I feel like, you know, I've made some great gains, but just to see, maybe, in some other aspects of my life of how that could help or, you

know, add some passion and perseverance in that direction.

Participant H

Researcher: Did you have any experience with Angela Duckworth's Concept of grit prior to reading the text?

Participant: No.

Researcher: What did you think of the text?

Participant: I would like to read the whole book. I'm an English teacher, so, reading just the short, condensed version- there were times I would say, "Okay, I want to know more about this." I want to... I think I could understand this better if I could read the whole chapter. But I do agree with... I really like the first chapter talking about the United States Military Academy at West Point and how grit seemed to be more important than their talents and their abilities; I agree with that.

Researcher: Was there a passage that resonated with you personally?

Participant: In fact, it was the never give up attitude that helped them make it through Beast- the mere act of never giving up. What mattered more than talent was the mere act of never giving up. That speaks volumes to me about anybody in life.

Researcher: Is one aspect more valuable than the other?

Participant: I think they go hand-in-hand. I think you've got to have the passion to persevere, because it's hard to persevere through something if you're not passionate about it, if you don't care about it. I think you've got to have both.

Researcher: What role does grit, as defined by Duckworth (passion and perseverance), play in school culture?

Participant: I think it's huge. You can tell the difference, in my opinion, between a

principal who is at a school where they're just, I don't know how to say this politically correct, so, you can tell the difference by an administrator, a principal who is at a school what their passionate about, that they want to be there and they want to do good things. They want the school to be successful... than a principal who is just, wants to be an administrator and just is in a school an is, "Oh, okay, I'm not sure what I'm here to do, I don't have a goal, I'm just the boss, and I don't know where to go, don't know what to do." And I've seen people like that who don't have passion. They're not excited about the school; they don't own it. And I was in a meeting one time when somebody said... how did they say it... "I am the principal... I am assigned to be the principal at such-and-such school," and they'd been at that school six months. That was a red flag to me. I thought, you're not assigned to there you own it. I AM the principal of my school; it IS my school- there's a difference. So, I think passion and that perseverance- you can tell whenever you talk to people, whenever you're in their school, I think it influences the culture, influences buy in from the staff, it influences buy in from the stakeholders, the students, and the parents. If they can tell you really care about the place and you want things to go well, they can tell a difference.

Researcher: What barriers did you encounter in terms of addressing the culture in your schools?

Participant: Barriers in my current school were attitudes of teachers who had... they didn't want to be held accountable. They liked things more... I'm very structured, have lots of procedures and processes and I inspect what I expect, and there are some teachers who want the autonomy completely in their classroom and they don't want anybody coming in, and they don't want anybody watching what they're doing. They want to do it

their way. That was a real problem for some people to adjust to, so I see that as a conflict, an obstacle. People who want to do things their own way- they don't want to be part of the team, they don't buy in to the vision, they don't buy in to what you're trying to do, and they resist.

Researcher: What makes building a culture of grit a worthwhile endeavor?

Participant: Everybody needs to buy in and needs to be passionate about teaching children, and about educating our society and about being a part of something bigger themselves- everybody's got to be passionate about that, and not give up, because we have some tough students- every school does, and you can't give up on students. Just because... you can't say, "Oh it's because where they live or it's this factor or that factor," and I just... "They can't be successful." Yes, they can. We've got to take care of each child and persevere, and try, try again, and don't give up. Don't give up on the mission, and the goal, and what we're trying to do. Even if we have setbacks, and some of those setbacks are test scores and letter grades in the paper, and we can't let that, even if they're not where we want them to be, we can't let that discourage us. We have to keep forging forward, keep going, keep doing what we know is right for children and what's best for them and I think that's where a lot of people give up. They work so hard and they don't see results on paper but they're making a difference in children's lives, and that's what's important.

Researcher: How does a building level administrator foster a "culture of grit?"

Participant: Well, for me personally, I think one of the ways I do that they see that I'm excited. I'm smiling all the time, I'm passionate- they see that passion. I'm always upbeat when I'm talking about our school, when I'm talking about our students. They

very seldom see... I try to... if I am down, or something's bothering me, I try to my best to cover that up with a, "It's great today." When people say, "How are you doing?" "I'm having a great day! How are you? How's your day going?" You just got to be positive. You've got to have that positive energy and that passion has got to show through every day- everywhere you are, even when you're having a bad day. You've got to show that good face, and that perseverance, and show them you hard, that you work just as hard as they do or harder. You come to work early you stay late, you get the job done. If they need something, you do your best to get it for them. You don't quit. You keep going. Even when you're discouraged, you keep going. Because there are some discouraging day as you know as a principal, there are days when things...like I just... this is more than I can do, but you just keep going. And you have to show them. They have to see it. They have to see you walk the talk. They can't just think, "Oh, she's just saying that." I know I've had people say to me when I was assigned to [Named School], people would say, "Are you really excited to be there?" And I would say, "Yes! I am! I am excited- this is not an act! I'm really excited. I'm excited to make a positive impact on children's' lives, plus it's my home school! I graduated from there. I'm very excited to be here." So, people have to see that. You have to go around every day, go walk up and down your halls greeting people, "Good morning! How are you? I'm great! How are you? It's going to be a great day!" On the intercom, you're getting on there and saying to students- good morning, and you say your school, and you tell them it's going to be a great day, and you tell about good things that are happening. You're always publicizing the good stuff at your school. I know one of the things I'm doing this summer is I'm creating a physical brochure that highlights all the accomplishments for this year-

everything great that happened. I'm going to publish it, we're going to print it, we're going to put it in the restaurants in town, we're going to put it in the beauty shops. We're going to put it out there to the public, plus that will be on our website, but we're giving something physical, tangible they can pick up when they're standing, paying their bill at [Named Restaurant]. They can grab one of those brochures and take it with them.

Because we're trying to promote all of the positive things. Perseverance is a part of that.

I think you create that culture by the way you act, what you say, and what you do.

Researcher: Any other take-aways or learning? Anything else you'd like to share?

Participant: Oh, my goodness, I'm not sure... I really liked in the book whenever Duckworth talked about Carol Dweck and the growth mindset- the difference between having a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. She talked about people who possessed a growth mindset are grittier than those who do not. I think that is so true- a growth mindset leads to optimistic explanations of suffering and, thus, leads to perseverance. I think that's important- you've got to have a growth mindset. If you've got grit, you're always- we can do better, we can do this, we can move on. You don't settle for where you are. You keep trying to achieve higher and better. I really like that part. She talks about that culture of grit and how you've got to start it, but then you've got to get people around you who have grit. You got to have leaders in the building- teacher leaders, I think, who have grit and who persevere and have passion. I think you foster that- you improve that by the way you lead as the principal then you can get them on board with you and you find those people who have that perseverance and that grit and you try to promote that and help them spread it. That idea of we're here to make a difference, and this is... we're going to do this and we CAN do this. Don't give up. No matter what our

test scores are, don't give up. I think that's all important that you find those people who are like-minded and who have that never give up attitude. And that helps. It spreads, it's contagious- one way or the other. Whatever you're selling at your school, is going to spread- whether it's never give up and persevere or it it's- oh, this is a lost cause, we're done. Whatever the principal is trying to promote, it's going to spread through that building.