

# Expecting All Students and Educators to Use the Hearts and Minds Well

Martin Krovetz

It is the first day of school at almost any public middle or high school. Oscar enters his math classroom thinking, “I have never been successful in math, but I will try to make this year different.” The teacher enters the classroom thinking, “Here I go again, 150+ students, many of whom have big gaps in their math knowledge. I will try to get off to a good start today.” The teacher introduces herself/himself and begins class. Homework is assigned. Oscar goes home thinking he understands the lesson, gets a snack, and starts on the homework. Not able to do most of the problems, he gets discouraged and gives up. The next day Oscar has no homework to turn in. “Here I go again,” he thinks. “Here they go again,” thinks the teacher. The 179-Day War begins.

About a year ago I read Paul Tough’s book *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (2012). I found the premise intriguing and consistent with my writing on resilience and my reading about mind-set. For me, the critical question is NOT “How do people learn perseverance and grit?” or “How do students learn to be resilient?” The critical question is ***“What are the characteristics of school, family, community cultures that support students to act with perseverance and resilience?”*** If we focus only on the student, we too easily blame Oscar and Oscar’s family. If we focus on the culture of our school, family, community we have control over how **we** relate to the student.

During my fourteen years as a high school principal every year several parents, usually fathers, came to my office to talk about their senior student, almost always a daughter. The parent would tell me that he thought his daughter had received a quality education but was concerned about how she would do in college. She had made excellent grades but had not scored as high on the SAT as the parent had hoped. The parent felt that the school inflated grades and had given him and his daughter false hopes about college. My response was always the same, “You know your daughter, and I know your

daughter. She works very hard. She has tremendous self-discipline, sets high standards for herself, and perseveres. She asks for help and will redo any assignment as many times as it takes to earn an “A”. She earned those “A”s. She will do fine in college.” The term “grit” was not yet in my vocabulary or I would have described these daughters as “gritty”. I have kept in touch with several of these fathers and daughters, and the daughters have not let me down. They approach life with the mind-set that they can overcome obstacles, be resilient, and accomplish what they set out to do.

It is usually not the smartest person or most athletic who excels in the long run, but the person who displays the mind-set to work hard, to persevere, to be gritty. I attended graduate school at the University of North Carolina (UNC). I am therefore a huge college basketball fan and particularly a Tar Heel fan. Michael Jordan is regarded as the best basketball player of all times. When he was a freshman UNC won the national championship, and he made the winning basket. When he was a sophomore, UNC lost to Indiana in the quarterfinals. Bob Knight, the renowned Indiana coach, noticed that Jordan did not drive well to his left, so he had his defenders overplay Jordan to the right. Indiana won. As a junior Jordan had a fantastic drive to his left. He was a very talented basketball player, and he was talented because he had a mind-set that helped him work hard to be so. Very importantly, he had a coach in Dean Smith who believed in him and insisted that he improve his game both offensively (driving to his left) and defensively (Jordan’s fame included his prowess as an outstanding defensive player).

As the Director of LEAD, [www.lead-ces.com](http://www.lead-ces.com), an affiliated center with the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org), my colleagues and I have the opportunity to work with teachers and administrators to develop Habits of Mind and Habits of Character that focus expectations for students and teachers. Habits of Mind are aligned with Bloom’s taxonomy in kid-friendly language. See the attached EPERRS from Anzar High School ([www.asjUSD.k12.ca.us](http://www.asjUSD.k12.ca.us)). Habits of Character are the expectations for how students will approach being a student and are closely aligned with grit and perseverance. See attached PIKE from Renaissance Academy ([www.arUSD.org](http://www.arUSD.org)). Both are as much about the culture of the school as they are about expectations for the students.

How do people learn to have these qualities? Can they be learned? In his book *Tough* claims that brains develop differently for children up to age three who have high stress in their lives than children without such stress. The part of the brain that does not develop as well is related to self-regulatory behaviors, ie: perseverance and delay of gratification. If we want to be optimistic that everyone has a fair chance in our society, then we have to believe that one can be resilient and learn the skills, behaviors and attitudes to overcome adversity.

There have been criticisms of the research on grit and resilience, indicating that the emphasis too often is a deficit model, blaming children for not being gritty or resilient enough. Again, my focus is on the institution of schooling, and how the school culture can and should foster grit and resilience in our students, especially students of poverty, who may learn to be gritty and resilient in their interactions their peers, but who are too often not successful in the school setting.

**Resilience** - *The television show Cheers had it correct; everyone wants to hang out in places where people know her/his name.*

I have written extensively about how schools can foster the resilience of students (Krovetz, 2008, 1999). Based on the work of Emmy Werner (1992) and Bonnie Benard (1991), we know that children (and adults) are more resilient when they are in a family, community and/or school where people know them well and care deeply about them, have high expectations for them and focus support on helping them meet these expectations, and when their voices are valued. If these conditions are not present in a child's life we know that any child will have a very difficult time succeeding in life.

When you talk to someone who has overcome great stress in his/her life, she often talks about a grandparent or teacher who cared deeply about her and championed her. I have a good friend who had older brothers who were in trouble with the law. Two of his high school teachers took him aside, telling him that they would not allow him to go down the same path. They helped him apply to college and paid for his first year. He went on to be a teacher, principal and superintendent in that school district.

## Locus of Control

A relevant personality trait is locus of control (Rutter, 1954, 1966; Krovetz, 1974). **Internal** people explain success by indicating that they tried hard and/or had ability; they explain failure by indicating that they did not try hard and/or did not have ability. **Externals** explain success by indicating that the task was easy and/or good luck; they explain failure by indicating that the task was hard and/or bad luck. One might think that internal students outperform external students in school, but there is no research to support this. In fact, school practices often favor external students, as teachers talk about “giving a grade to a student” or students say “the teacher gave me the grade” instead of the grade earned. However, perseverance/grit and resilience are internal traits. If students are to be successful in and after school, they need to learn these traits and value them.

## Mind-set

Students’ mind-sets have a direct influence on their grades and achievement test scores. As Carol Dweck (2007, 2010) reports, students who believe that intelligence can be developed through effort outperform students who believe in a fixed mind-set. She writes that teaching students to have a growth mind-set raises their grades and achievement test scores. Students who believe in a growth mind-set are more likely to focus on learning, to believe in effort, and to demonstrate resilience. These results have been shown to reduce the achievement gap for female, African American and Latino students.

I am often asked what interventions I think school districts should implement to help students, particularly in math. Educators consider adding time during the school day or before or after school, computer programs, etc. I say that in my opinion lack of student progress is 75% mind-set on the part of students **and** teachers and 25% gaps in academic skills. I believe that students struggling in math for example would benefit more from AVID (See below) than from a second period of math.

Teacher mind-set is critical. John Hattie has written that a student’s mindset has an effect size of .19. “He says that the reason that growth vs. fixed mindset has a low effect size is due to the fact that adults have a fixed mindset and keep treating students

accordingly, so right now the effect size is low, and will continue to stay low, unless we change our practices in the classroom. We put students in ability groups, they get scores on high stakes tests that help label them, and then we place them in Academic Intervention Services (AIS) which adds to their fixed mindset. Once students enter into AIS or Special Education, very few leave. *Students are conditioned to have a fixed mindset, and it's due to us.*" (De Witt, 2015) Many teachers need quality professional development regarding mindset and equity. They need to approach teaching with an equity lens rather than an equality lens, that is not giving all students the same thing (only works if everyone starts from the same place), but instead giving all students what they need to have access to the same opportunities.

### **What are Examples of School/Community Programs that Foster the Mind-set of Perseverance/Grit and Resilience?**

#### **Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)** ([www.avid.org](http://www.avid.org))

AVID is a college readiness intervention for elementary through higher education that is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. Beginning with one high school and 32 students in San Diego, AVID has impacted more than 700,000 students in 4900 schools (K-12) and 28 postsecondary institutions in 46 states and the District of Columbia. The formula seems simple - raise expectations of students and, with the AVID support system in place, they will rise to the challenge. What distinguishes AVID from other educational reform programs is its continuous success rate. Many of its components, ie: cross-age tutoring, Cornell Notes, graphic organizers, are now practices in many schools.

#### **Big Brothers Big Sisters** (<http://evidencebasedprograms.org/1366-2/117-2>)

Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based and school-based mentoring programs match youths age 6-18, predominantly from low-income, single-parent households, with adult volunteer mentors. This program was evaluated in one randomized controlled trial of 1,138

youths, age 10-16, who applied to one of eight large Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies in various U.S. cities between October 1991 and February 1993, met the program's eligibility requirements, and agreed to participate in the study. Youths were randomly assigned to 1) an intervention group matched with a mentor or 2) a control group that was placed on a waitlist for the duration of the study (18 months). Follow up with participants demonstrated significant benefits of this program over school, family and community variables.

### **What Does a School Look, Feel and Taste Like if it Fosters the Mind-set of Resilience and Grit in its Students?**

The answer to this question is based on the three key factors of resilience – each student is well known by at least one adult, expectations are high and support is focused for all students, and students know that their voices are valued. The two programs discussed above – AVID and Big Brothers Big Sisters - share these factors. In addition, students need to be placed in situations where perseverance is valued and rewarded, where students are faced with some frustration and they learn to overcome this frustration. Letting students experience “failure” in a safe environment and then working to learn from that and try again is something few adults in schools feel comfortable with, especially in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, or the new Common Core mind-set, where critical thinking is said to be valued but teachers might be paid based on their students' responses on a national exam.

During my years as a high school teacher and principal I did not know the terms mind-set, resilience and grit. I did understand that it was critical for teachers to believe in their own self-efficacy to teach all of their students and for students to believe in their self-efficacy to be successful learners. Too often teachers and students do not have these beliefs and prove themselves right, as in the opening paragraph for Oscar.

School practices that foster resilience, perseverance and a positive mind-set:

- Small schools and/or small learning communities/academies where every teacher knows every student by name and knows something personal about a large number of students

- Teaching in depth rather than breadth, with skillful checking for understanding, differentiation, re-teaching, and extension as appropriate
- Student as worker, teacher as coach, that is students working as hard as the teacher
- Expecting all students to do rigorous, challenging, relevant work that engages their interests, ie: problem-based and place-based learning, students exhibiting their learning to authentic audiences
- School leaders being visible with students and adults, setting the tone of inclusion by daily conversations with each staff member about professional practice and with students and parents about student learning and interests
- School governance practices that include the voices of all key stakeholders in important decisions about how the school operates
- Student discipline practices that are designed to cause students to reflect on their actions and improve their behaviors rather than to punish
- Cross-age tutoring, mentoring and apprenticeships that expects all students to receive support from older students and adults and to give support to younger students
- Service learning that expects all students to contribute to their community
- Recognition that adults in schools cannot foster resilience and growth mindset for their students if their own resilience and mindset is not fostered. The three factors must be in place for the adults as well as for the students

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## Attachment 1

### Habits of Mind - Anzar's EPERRs

- Evidence:**            **What do I know and how do I know it?**  
What are all the choices?  
Show the evidence.
- Perspective:**        **What are the biases - mine and others?**  
What do I already know from my past experiences, and what's my bias?  
What is the bias of the research used?  
What are alternative points of view?  
What did I learn from the experiences of others?  
Walk in somebody else's shoes.
- Extension:**         **What are the deeper implications?**  
How might this affect the future?  
What if something changed?  
Is there a pattern here?  
How does this connect to other ideas/issues?  
Going beyond what you know ...
- Relevance:**        **What difference does this make?**  
Why is this important to me?  
How can I use this?  
How does this issue influence the community?  
How is this important to my community?  
What can people do with this information?
- Reflection:**        **What did I learn?**  
What other questions does this bring up?  
Has what I've done changed my way of thinking?

## Attachment 2

### Renaissance Academy for Arts, Science and Social Justice Habits of Character

#### PASSION

“Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow.”

Anthony J. D’Angelo

“By believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it.

The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired.”

Franz Kafka

#### INTEGRITY

“Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not.”

Oprah Winfrey

“Right is right, even if everyone is against it; and wrong is wrong,

even if everyone is for it.”

William Penn

#### KINDNESS

“Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.”

Mother Teresa

“Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”

Mark Twain

## **EFFORT**

“We will go to the moon. We will go to the moon and do other things, NOT because they are easy but because they are HARD.”

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

“The difference between a successful person and others is neither a lack of strength, nor a lack of knowledge but rather a lack of will.”

Vince Lombardi