



What Is Your Mindset? Are You Gritty?

How and what we think determines our decisions, our outlook on life. How we view ourselves, the messages we voice to ourselves, positive or negative, often determine success in life. A plethora of theories abound today offering people strategies for achieving lifelong goals, such as, tools for stretching the brain, activities for developing noncognitive or soft skills (motivation, emotional and social skills), and techniques for strengthening important character traits, for example, grit. Schools can purchase programs to help their students advance in these areas. However, Catholic Schools are blessed with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Jesus taught us how to attain true happiness and peace in this life. He has provided us with many avenues for holiness: receiving the Eucharist, practicing the Beatitudes as a way of life, and following His teachings as proclaimed in the Gospels. The noncognitive skills of Jesus that we find in the Gospels include loving our neighbors as ourselves, being the servant of all, showing compassion to the poor, and forgiving one another as Jesus has forgiven us. When one follows and lives according to the teachings of Jesus, then his/her behavior strives to manifest the Fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, generosity, joy, gentleness, peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty, kindness, self-control, goodness, and chastity (Galatians:5).

These gifts are expressed daily in Catholic schools by our dedicated and selfless administrators, staffs and teachers. We pass on and live the Spirit's Gifts and Fruits by our example. We teach students the tenets of the faith. We highlight the importance of service to others by praying for the needs of all and by conducting service projects in our own parishes and neighborhoods.

Catholic Schools likewise benefit from the findings of educational research, such as the important *Mindset* work of Stanford University Psychology Professor, Dr. Carol Dweck. Her educational research offers us many insights that we can and should apply in our Catholic Schools. One important outcome of Dweck's research is the *Mindset* concept and how it impacts a person's ability to achieve.

She proposes that a **Fixed Mindset** is one in which a person's self-talk would mimic something like the following, "My intelligence is what it is and there is nothing I can do about it." Children who have been praised over and over again for being intelligent are likely not to take chances in a challenging endeavor for fear that their level of intelligence would be questioned. Therefore, the children believe, "I'm intelligent so I should be able to answer this problem with little or no effort." Children then begin to believe and act according to what others have instilled in them concerning their intellectual ability. Consequently, when faced with a challenge they may avoid it for fear that if they fail, others may come to the conclusion that perhaps they are not as intelligent as everyone thinks and they do not want to face embarrassment or perhaps be a disappointment to others. Conversely, a person with a **Growth Mindset** believes that working hard, putting in effort over and over again, and recognizing that mistakes are stepping stones to achievement and a means of coming to a deeper understanding actually achieve more than those with a Fixed Mindset. Dweck encourages educators to be sure to keep the findings of her research in mind when offering students praise. She has found in her years of research that offering empty praise, such as, "Good job." "Wow, you are so smart," promotes in the child a Fixed Mindset. Accordingly, the child looks for outward sources for encouragement rather than looking within, recognizing that time, effort, and persistence produce positive results. Dweck is not mandating that no praise be given to children, but suggests rather, that the praise be specific, and that it should focus on the effort and strategies used in problem solving instead of just saying something such as, "I knew you could do it." An appropriate, specific form of praise may be, "I noticed how you stuck with that project and came up with creative solutions. Way to go!" This form of encouragement is specific and pinpoints the process rather than the result. One receiving this type of encouragement will then be willing to take on challenges in the future, because he/she recognizes the importance of effort and perseverance. Take this test to determine your Mindset. <https://mindsetonline.com/testyourmindset/step1.php>

In addition to promoting a Growth Mindset, we can also review the research of University of Pennsylvania Professor Dr. Angela Duckworth, the guru of **Grit**. Dr. Duckworth studied characteristics of highly successful people and found that they exhibited the following traits: passion, determination, and direction when pursuing a goal, and exerted hours upon hours of deliberate, purposeful practice to gain skill proficiency. When these experts reached the pinnacle of success, they didn't stop there. Instead, they assessed their areas of weakness and worked to improve upon these, and committed themselves to making continuous improvement an integral part of their daily routine. These people continually challenged themselves for the sake and thrill of learning, and for the purpose of serving others in order to make a positive difference in others' lives and in the world. Is this not the goal and mission of Catholic schools? Do we not believe that God has called us to teach His children to be upstanding citizens of this world, and in cooperating with His grace to become holy, so that one day we may enjoy eternal life with Him in heaven? Educational and psychological research has so much to offer, and we as educators use these valuable resources to make our schools

the best that they can be. Want to know how gritty you are? Check your rating at: <https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>

One such example of a school that fosters the Growth Mindset and Grit is Saint Francis de Sales School in Southwest Philadelphia. *Do It Better! How the Kids of St. Francis de Sales Exceeded Everyone's Expectations* is a book written by Sisters Constance Touey and Jeannette Lucey, IHM, who share their stories of 31 years serving Saint Francis de Sales students. The school has students representing almost 50 countries throughout the world. This is a book that will inspire every Catholic school educator, evidence that each one of us truly makes a difference in each of the children and families we serve.

Sister Constance, principal, and Sister Jeannette, grade 8 teacher, in collaboration with dedicated faculty instilled in students the Grit and Growth Mindset framework. Grit was taught through their example in never giving up during times when financial hardships for the school, parish, and families seemed insurmountable. Their determination proved to students that hard work, a lot of time and effort, and a never-give-up spirit is what makes for a successful and compassionate school community. Many of the students came from very traumatic circumstances, such as fleeing from a war-torn country or seeking refuge in school from a violent neighborhood or from an abusive home situation. The attitude of Sisters Constance and Jeannette was not one of pity, but as former student John explained, "There were many students at de Sales with difficult lives, but the Sisters never accepted excuses. They were compassionate and gave us the sense that 'we're giving you opportunities; don't make excuses'" (p. 120). The faculty reinforced the "We" attitude, that is, when students participated in a contest, it wasn't just about the one child in the contest, but also those who practiced with the contestant and encouraged him/her: teacher-coach, parent-coach, student-coach, and classmates-coaches, and student body-coaches. One might say – all were contest participants!

The "We" attitude and a deep sense of welcome made all students understand that individually they may be culturally different, but cultural diversity was celebrated as a means of learning and appreciating what each group brings to the whole. Josh Walls described, "We learned diversity on so many levels at SFDS – to be accepting of people from other races, countries, and cultures.... de Sales helped us all to understand that people are people at the end of the day" (p. 129). As Sister Jeannette expressed so meaningfully, "While some refer to the United States as a melting pot, we like to describe our community as an orchestra – made up of all the beautiful customs that each child brings from his and her native land. Together they became a magnificent symphony" (p. 24).

In addition to instilling tenacity, perseverance, and grit in students these characteristics took on meaning as Sister Constance described, "Our purpose is to spread the word that every effort possible should be made to unfold the potential in a budding child so that he or she can become a beautiful flower to enhance this world and the next" (p. 145). Sister Jeannette added, "What I know is that by defying stereotypes of race, sex, ethnicity, and culture, we wheedled from these young vessels full of promise and possibility some thing wonderful, some one wonderful" (p. 146)! Saint Francis de Sales is just one example of many Catholic schools that teach students the tremendous importance of putting forth consistent effort, persevering even when the going gets tough, using our gifts and talents to the best of our abilities, and recognizing the truth that our intelligence, gifts, and talents are not fixed, but, in fact, can grow and develop in unimaginable ways throughout our lives. Now this certainly is a hopeful and exciting message!

The Growth Mindset and Grit is still alive and well in our IHM schools since 1845. On November 10, we IHMs celebrated our 173rd anniversary of our founding in Monroe, Michigan by Fr. Louis Florent Gillet, a Redemptorist missionary and our founding Sister Theresa Maxis, IHM. Fr. Gillet with Sisters Ann Schaaf and Sister Celestine Renauld joined Mother Theresa to begin a community based on the spirituality of St. Alphonsus Liguori. Thus began the educational apostolate of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Many hardships were endured in these humble beginnings, but Fr. Gillet and the Sisters were on fire with the love of God and wanted to share this love and knowledge of God through Catholic education. They had a clear vision and mission to continue the mandate of Jesus, the Redeemer, to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19). We continue this legacy as we IHMs work hand in hand with our wonderful and dedicated lay colleagues promoting Gospel values to all we serve. Many of our IHM schools have implemented the *Virtue of the Month*, adapted from Father Daniel Lowery's, C.S.S.R., *Growth through Virtue: Month by Month with Saint Alphonsus Liguori* (1984). This is a practice that helps to strengthen virtue in our students and provides practical applications. Click here for the Virtues of the Month: <http://ihmimmaculata.org/wp-content/uploads/13.-Religious-Education-Treasures.pdf>
Please visit our IHM website to learn more about our Congregation and perhaps consider whether God may be calling you to religious life © <http://ihmimmaculata.org/>

Fixed/Growth Mindset Activities: Teach students the meaning of a Fixed and Growth Mindset. Have them act out scenarios and decide which mindset the actor/actress is employing. For example: A student is preparing for a math test. He thinks to himself, "I've never been good at math, I'm probably going to bomb this test as I have done in the past." Have students assign the type of mindset utilized in this situation (Fixed). Then act out how a student can change his thinking and experience success in math or any subject or challenging activity. Students will discuss, perhaps with the

teacher's coaching, that with practice and hard work, a person will eventually improve their skills. It's important to stress that improvement requires time and consistent effort and that failure is part of the learning process.

The following YouTube clips help to explain the Fixed and Growth Mindsets. After viewing one of the videos, have students create scenarios of their own with various solutions. Students may find it difficult to accept that there may be a number of solutions to the same problem. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1CHPnZfFmU>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyiDqWQLlaQ> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zrtHt3bBmQ>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUWn_TJTrnU <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNHas97iE78>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pamzG81yt7g> – Which Mindset are you quiz?

Fostering Grit Activities: The following are some worthwhile sites that will assist in strengthening grit in children and also a growth mindset. Working with children to establish goals to complete a particular task is a skill that will benefit them throughout life. Together as a class, solve problems that will aid in creating a more peaceful classroom environment. When there are problems at recess and inevitably the conflict continues when they re-enter the classroom, take the opportunity to address creatively the concerns. These type of activities develop their stick-to-it-ness skill. It is essential that students have experiences of truly listening to one another, gaining one another's perspective, and then calmly resolving an issue. In situations like this, it is worthwhile to pause and pray spontaneously asking the Holy Spirit to guide the class' deliberations. Allowing a student who is willing to lead the prayer is often very touching and inspirational. <https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/activities-grit-resilience-children>
<https://www.teachstarter.com/blog/15-books-and-activities-to-foster-grit-in-the-classroom/>

If you type in Grit or Growth Mindset in Pinterest or Teachers Pay Teachers, there are hundreds of activities to teach and strengthen these concepts. Here are a few Grit YouTube videos, enjoy☺

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwsZZ2rprqc> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGKSb_dSZII
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzle_Puyg5o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuTY-xEdf74> Grit song
Famous Marshmallow Test: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614HQ

We, IHMs, are blessed to work with our colleagues in Catholic education. Your dedication, grit, growth mindset, and love of God's children are an inspiration! May God bless each of you and your loved ones in a special way this Thanksgiving, Christmas, and always☺

Take care and God bless,
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Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. NY: Scribner.

Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. NY: Ballantine Books.

Resilience and Learning. (2013). *Educational Leadership*:71(1)

Hoerr, T. (2017). *The Formative Five: Fostering Grit, Empathy, and Other Success Skills Every Student Needs*. VA: ASCD.

Touey, C. & Lucey, J. (2018). *Do It Better! How the Kids of St. Francis de Sales Exceeded Everyone's Expectations*.

PA: Touey & Lucey Publishing. **You may order copies of Sisters Constance and Jeannette's book at thewelcomeschool.com (It's cheaper and faster this way). Their book is also available through Amazon and at Barnes and Noble. This book makes a GREAT gift: Christmas, Birthday, Graduation, or just for everyday reading! "Do It Better! offers hope and optimism amidst today's divisive conversations about immigrants and refugees."** <https://www.thewelcomeschool.com/> **Enjoy☺**

Tough, P. (2016). *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why*. UK: Penguin Random House.