

Real Learning Comes Mainly with True Grit By Geoff Johnson



Golf is a game in which a series of successive failures, interspersed with the occasional success, may lead the realist to a sense of personal victory. Success in golf is as much the product of perseverance as it is the result of natural skill or any innate gift for the game.

Ask any Masters' winner.

Perseverance along with a positive understanding of what is to be gained from failure builds character — not a word we hear much anymore but a concept being welcomed back into the educational dictionary.

Some educators are now recognizing perseverance as a factor that may contribute more than anybody thought to academic success.

In Paul Tough's new book *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity and the Hidden Power of Character*, the author argues that the qualities that matter most to children's success, now and later in life, have more to do with character — and that parents and schools can play a powerful role in nurturing the character traits that foster success.

Angela Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania started studying self-control and concluded it has a huge impact on kids' grade-point average. Duckworth suspected there was some other skill, as yet undefined in intellectual terms, that had more to do with having a passion for something and a determination to stick with it, despite setbacks.

She invented a "grit scale" to measure in general terms how likely people are to stick with projects. She found the scale surprisingly predictive, and people were pretty honest about their "grit" levels.

Those who say, "Yes, I really stick with tasks," are much more likely to succeed, even in tasks that involve a lot of what we normally think of as driven by IQ.

Dealing with failure productively might have a lot to do with success in learning, according to Williamstown, Mass., mathematics professor Edward Burger, whose unconventional approach to student failure is producing successful long-term results.

Burger does not just allow students to fail. He actively promotes it. In class, Burger's methods manifest as a form of tough love, usually when a student offers an incorrect answer to a problem.

"I'll just say, 'OK, well that's just wrong,'" he explains.

But as part of his approach, Burger requires students to assess their own failures throughout his courses while asking themselves key questions: Are they learning from their mistakes? How did they arrive at the incorrect answer, and what do they need to do to arrive at the right one?

Then what follows makes all the difference: "I turn to the class and say, 'Now, why is he wrong?'" There is a class discussion and the student who volunteered the incorrect answer is part of a broader conversation.

No embarrassment — just part of the learning process.

Burger says a poor score on an assignment becomes a gift from teacher to student, an opportunity to engage in some "high-quality failure." This involves the student assessing where he or she went wrong and making positive changes.

Poor-quality failure, says Burger, is when the student simply gets a poor mark, never to be reviewed again and that is the end of the student-teacher conversation; the end of learning, if you like. In fact, all the student learns is that he/she failed.

That would be like making a poor golf swing, watching the ball dive dramatically off into the trees and never wondering or learning why.

Standardized tests and final exams, sometimes marked in another town by an unknown person and never returned with any explanation or discussion are like that.

After learning of Burger's methods, McGill University education professor Jon Bradley says he would consider taking a similar approach in his own classroom.

Some high schools in British Columbia are weaning students off "fear of failure" by allowing them, after a failed test, to review the unit on which the test was based and then take a different version of the test on the same topic. More than once, if necessary.

That's not dodging failure, it's pursuing success.

Like the golfer who figures out what happened with his swing and corrected it, kids can learn that failure is not an end in itself, just a step toward success — but only if they persevere.

Source; <http://www.independentteacher.com/2013/04/real-learning-comes-mainly-with-true-grit/>