Fostering Academic Diligence in K-12 Education

“Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and diligence.”
-- Abigail Adams

“The expectations of life depend on diligence; the mechanic that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools.”
-- Confucius

“Diligence is the mother of good luck.”
-- Benjamin Franklin

What is diligence?

Diligence is usually defined as being thorough completion of a task or goal. The construct of diligence was studied by Bernard (1991) in an attempt to determine the contribution of effort to student success and was initially defined as an expression or reflection of effort extended by students toward a balanced or holistic development of their mental, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of life. Diligence is also related to the psychological constructs of conscientiousness, effort, grit, and persistence. Some of the underlying psychological mechanisms involve executive control (e.g., planning, keeping track of time, evaluating ideas). The theoretical foundations of diligence include attribution theory, self-efficacy. This review is mainly focused on academic diligence (includes conscientiousness, effort, grit, and persistence). It contains a brief summary of useful strategies and resources, dedicated to those K-12 educators (teachers, counselors and administrators) who want to deepen their knowledge about how to promote diligence in schools.

What is academic diligence?

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1 See Bernard, 1991
2 See Colquitt & Simmering, 1998; Richardson & Abraham, 2009; Roberts et al., 2004; Roberts et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2009
3 Trautwein, 2007; Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2006; Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2009
4 Duckworth, 2006; Duckworth, 2007; Duckworth 2011
5 See Ryans, 1939; Feather, 1962; Eisenberger, 1992
6 Diamond & Lee, 2011
7 Hunter & Baker, 1987
8 Bandura, 1986
Academic diligence refers to the effort put forth by students to achieve and includes an important group of behaviors (e.g., time spent on homework, task completion, etc.) necessary for students to attain a high level of academic achievement.

**Influencing factors of academic diligence**

Research in primary, secondary, and higher education settings has shown that academic diligence may be associated with diverse factors, such as:

- **The school and its environment**
  - Educators’ shaping students’ attitudes toward their academic responsibilities
  - Engagement in purposeful activities
  - Teacher quality improvement (e.g., increasing confidence and self-esteem)
  - Including all students in its efforts to succeed (paying close attention to minorities)

- **The home and family:**
  - Parental affective support (i.e., praise and encouragement)
  - Parents’ expectations
  - Socioeconomic status

- **Students’ beliefs and actions**
  - Self-efficacy
  - Locus of control

**How can we promote academic diligence?**

An effort in promoting academic diligence must include strategies that address contextual factors in the learning environment and fundamental psychological resources within the student. These are some strategies that K-12 educators can implement in order to promote academic diligence in schools:

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9 See Shechtman et al., 2013
• *Implement school readiness programs that address executive functions*: This approach includes training with games, aerobic exercise and sports, martial arts and mindfulness practices, and classroom curricula and teacher professional development.

• *Implement interventions that address mindsets, learning strategies, and resilience*: Academic mindsets are the psycho-social attitudes or beliefs one has about oneself in relation to academic work. Positive mindsets motivate students to persist at schoolwork, which manifests itself through better academic behaviors, which lead to improved performance. Effective learning strategies allow students to leverage academic behaviors to maximize learning. These include strategies to help students recall facts; strategies for monitoring one’s own comprehension; and, strategies to self-correct when one detects confusion or errors in one’s thinking. They can also include goal-setting and time management.

• *Consider alternative school models and school-level reform approaches*: Character education models include explicit articulation of learning goals for targeted competencies, clear and regular assessment and feedback of student progress, and intensive teacher professional development. Project-based learning and design thinking models help students develop competencies through engagement in long-term, challenging, and/or real world problems. Organizations may also be able to provide support for schoolwide improvement (e.g., teacher professional development, networks of school communities, and strategies to improve school organizational structure).

• *Explore informal learning programs*: These programs provide various kinds of support for diligence (e.g., academic support, community involvement, college guidance, etc.)

• *Utilize digital learning environments, online resources, and tools for educators*: Digital learning environments can provide optimal challenges, help teachers promote a rigorous and supportive classroom climate, teach about academic mindsets, and promote learning strategies.

**Recommended Web-Sites / Blogs**

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/true-grit-measure-teach-success-vicki-davis

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/growth-mindset-driving-philosophy-david-hochheiser

http://www.edutopia.org/blog/focus-process-results-will-follow-nathan-barber
Recommended Books


References


