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Teaching Hope, Not Grit

Hope and education are deeply connected. Education itself seems to be a hopeful endeavor insofar as schools are focused on preparing for the future and aim to make that future better than the present.[245] Many people see cultivating hope as an important goal of education, one that sustains graduates through changes and ushers our society into an uncertain future with a positive spirit. While you might expect school administrators and parents to believe that student achievement is the primary indicator of school success, especially within an age of test-based accountability that often overshadows educational aims beyond test scores, 83% of superintendents actually believe that getting children to have hope in the future is a marker of school effectiveness, and 77% of parents agree.[246] Some schools are now labeled "schools of hope"[247] and others are celebrated for the hope they produce in films like *Waiting for Superman* and *The Lottery*.[248] These images of schooling are accompanied by proclamations that " 'Hope is the essence of teaching,' 'To teach is to be full of hope,' and 'Teaching is . . . in every respect a profession of hope.' "[249]

Yet some schools are coming up short. Or, perhaps some schools and teachers are unable to embrace teaching for hope in light of the penalties they face if they divert attention from tested areas. For evidence shows that only half of students say they are hopeful about their ability to succeed in school or other areas of life, while the other half identifies as either "stuck" or "discouraged."[250] Those who are hopeful tend to do better academically, attend school more regularly, overcome obstacles to pursue their goals, and have a positive outlook on the future.[251] People tend to regard most children as essentially hopeful beings. While we know that youth often offer a refreshing outlook on the world and a faith in great opportunities ahead, we certainly know this is not always the case for all children or in all communities, especially for children who have witnessed or been victims of great suffering. In many cases hope is not inherent in the lives or outlooks of children; rather, developing informed and sustainable hope requires education.

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Hope is more than just a political project, as I've largely described it in the chapters so far; it's also an educational one. Beyond correlating with increased academic performance, developing habits of hope can lead to being better citizens because it attunes students to their civil potential, grows their political agency and courage, and enables them to craft visions for our future democracy. Surely, then, teaching pragmatist hope, with its significant implications for social and political life, should be central to citizenship education.

Educating good citizens has been one of the most important and longest held goals for American schools. Extending into recent years, preparing responsible citizens has been the highest or second-highest ranked purpose for schools on the annual Phi Delta Kappa poll, which surveys Americans' views on education issues.[252] And, on a 2013 national Civic Education and Political Engagement Study, 76% of respondents said that schools should be preparing responsible citizens.[253] But other studies paint a more complex and shifting picture of our goals. For example, a 2012 Thomas B. Fordham Institute survey found that respondents strongly believe a high quality core curriculum and an emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education are far more critical in schools than instruction in democracy and citizenship, which was found only moderately important.[254] And a 2014 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) poll, as reported in the blog of an ASCD associate, found the most widely held purpose of education to be "to create learning conditions that enable all children to develop to their fullest potential," followed by, "creating adults who can compete in a global economy."[255] Anecdotally, educating for citizenship is often not at the forefront of many citizens' concerns with schools, and actually may even be contrary to the self-interest and materialist educational goals we see developing today.

While the goal of educating for citizenship persists in some regard, changing understandings of the role of individuals, economic competitiveness, and academic achievement in tested subject areas may be reshaping this long-standing goal both in terms of its value and how we understand its practice. All of this not only suggests the importance of foregrounding teaching for hope but also reveals that the chief location for such teaching to itself be in an increasingly precarious position. While I will focus here on citizenship education as the logical home for teaching hope, I will argue in the next chapter that teaching hope should extend across the curriculum and into cultural and societal practices outside of schools.

In the meantime, I will turn my attention to one seemingly hope-aligned educational approach that has gained some traction in schools, developing grit, to raise concerns with that approach. I expose how grit may relate to or possibly event exacerbate political despair, as it leaves systems of injustice in place and may further frustrate citizens who face them. I show how the individualist and unquestioning focus of grit is not aligned with best practices in citizenship education that are social, deliberative, and engaged with community problems. I then show how learning how to hope may overcome some of the shortfalls of teaching grit. Finally, I ground the teaching of hope within practices that nurture habits of democracy.

Citizenship Education

While teaching hope must extend out into noneducational arms of our society, in order to reach a broader swath of our struggling citizenry, I want to begin by thinking about how we might teach hope within citizenship education. Of course, any discussion of creating good citizens is driven by an underlying view of democracy. Although citizenship is, at root, a status based on the rights and duties of a person within a specific location, we don't have to see citizenship as a mere status. Rather, citizenship is viewed as a normative way of behaving—how one *should* fulfill one's rights and duties in admirable ways aligned with one's conception of democracy. Given my pragmatist, participatory account of democracy, where publics form to work toward common goods and the flourishing of themselves and others, good citizens are those that participate in civil and political life, critique problems in the world, and ameliorate them through hopeful inquiry and action.

Any quality citizenship course aimed at children sufficiently old to appreciate historical differences should entail a careful discussion of how citizenship has differed across time, place, and social position, though I recognize that such discussions rarely occur. If they did, students would see that good citizenship is not something that has been decided once and for all. Students, as developing citizens, should feel some ownership in shaping the meaning of good citizenship. Importantly, though, they bear the responsibility of learning the history that informs the vision they craft.

Citizenship education should prepare children to participate and thrive in social and political life, as it currently exists, including all of the despair and divisiveness we witness today. These struggles should be fodder

for classroom discussion and action, rather than ignored or checked at the schoolhouse gate. But citizenship education should also prepare students for a better democracy, including preparing them to improve the current ways of life to move toward that enriched vision. We don't want to merely acculturate children into an existing order; rather, they should question how that order came to be and consider whether there are other, better ways of living. Both to perpetuate and to improve on current democracy require civic knowledge, which has been shown to help students understand how public policy and events affect themselves and others, and civic skills, which have been shown to increase student comfort with political participation and their likelihood to pursue it.[256] Over time, the ways in which we teach children to be citizens have changed, and we have learned that some approaches are better than others for nurturing such knowledge and skills.

For many decades, beginning during the Progressive Era, American schools required civics courses, often with the intention of assimilating new immigrants into American ways of life and affirming those practices for native-born citizens. Those courses were based largely in textbook study and class lectures about how to be politically and civically active. As the years passed, civics focused in on citizens' rights and responsibilities. By the 1950s, civics education was largely conformist in nature, seeking to inculcate obedient and hard-working citizens who would do as expected in order to keep the state stable and secure. To achieve that end, civics courses focused on the tedious details of governmental laws and procedures, which appeared to be part of a well-oiled machine further maintained by a heavy dose of patriotism. Sometimes, especially during war and social upheaval, students were encouraged to unquestioningly support their country and their government, without critiquing or criticizing it. Today, many of those courses have been replaced with general US Government courses that are more likely to describe the details of how government works with little discussion of how the particular student or community might be involved in that process.[257]

The broader term of "citizenship education" seeks to go beyond that twentieth-century view of civics education to consider how one might actually best live one's public and private life in the context of others in one's local, and increasingly global, community. While citizenship education is still concerned with understanding how our government works and how the safety and well-being of our country can be preserved, it extends beyond just the confines of government. It stretches into learning about other sectors where people interact, from churches to online communities. Education for

democracy extends even broader, going beyond school walls to teach children about the many ways in which we engage in associated living. While I'm ultimately concerned with that broadest realm, I will confine most of my discussion of teaching for hope to citizenship education. Citizenship education takes place most overtly within schools, typically as part of the social studies curriculum. But it doesn't happen only in schools; rather good citizenship education brings the outside world into the classroom and brings classroom learning to bear out in the real world.

Unfortunately, however, social studies education has been increasingly squeezed from the K-12 curriculum in recent decades, as emphasis has shifted to the more heavily tested areas of math and language arts.[258] Additionally, social studies opportunities vary across demographic groups, with wealthier and white students more likely to receive higher-quality citizenship lessons than other children.[259] When considered in light of recent struggles with despair, which also vary across populations, limited or subpar social studies education opportunities, which nurture hope, may further hinder some students more than others. While I call here for quality citizenship education to teach all students in all locations how to hope, I recognize that evidence already shows considerable inequities in citizenship education opportunities and those disparities must first or simultaneously be ameliorated. Moreover, as we work to cultivate hope, the history of those disparities should itself become fodder for conversation about the presence of despair and injustice.

So, what do we know about the best forms of citizenship education that are offered in schools and how might they shape the way hope should be taught in schools? First, we know that issues-based citizenship education classrooms engage students in a critical and collective setting with real issues in the world around them—social questions and problems that are directly relevant to their lives. The problems are viewed as real and meaningful, and within an inquiry-oriented classroom the approach emphasizes how those issues may be changed and improved by the youth, unlike adults who may increasingly feel like that cannot make a difference in political life today. The inquiry approach aligns with the recommendations of the National Council for Social Studies in their C3 framework. Through such inquiry, students come to "know, analyze, explain, and argue about interdisciplinary challenges in our social world."[260] Students are supported in asking questions about the world around them, gathering the disciplinary knowledge and facts needed to make informed decisions about the

problems, exploring supportive and counterevidence, developing confidence in expressing their opinions about the issue, planning a course of action to address the problem (when relevant), and reflecting on their actions and their impact on the world.[261] Each of these steps aligns with how hope is supported and enacted in social groups.

Second, opportunities to express influence over the policies of one's own school can be an especially fruitful approach to citizenship education that simultaneously validates students' voices and knowledge. But these action- and issues-based approaches must be supported by knowledge of government and political theory so that students move past the mere excitement of civic and political action. Such supports can lead to more enduring knowledge of how engagement is best done and why it matters for democracy, enabling students to sustainably continue such acts in the future. Such knowledge guides action with "intentionality, context, and, ultimately, meaning."[262] The results of quality citizenship experiences have positive impacts on both individual and neighborhood social outcomes, including reduced violence and improved health, when citizens have "collective efficacy, which means a habit of taking common action to address issues."[263] Such collective action is well aligned with habits of hope.

Next, from a study of more than 90,000 teenagers, we know that classrooms that encourage respectful discussions of civic and political issues and explicitly focus on learning about voting and elections, produce students with greater civic knowledge, civic engagement, and voting rates.[264] And when those discussions also engage people from different backgrounds and cultures through small group work, reading of diverse literature and news, and forming groups that ensure equitable representation when possible, students build relationships and civil engagement.[265] Such interactions may help confront and overcome divisiveness in our society today.

But, citizenship education should expand not only outward toward others but also inward toward oneself by targeting social and emotional learning.

> Social and emotional learning involves developing the skills needed to recognize and manage emotions, handle conflict constructively, establish positive relationships guided by empathy, engage in perspective-taking, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively. . . . When such experiences are well-designed and managed, with space and time for reflection built in, they can support the ongoing development of social-emotional resilience, intellectual agility, and cultural competence.[266]

Recently, many states have shifted toward teaching and measuring aspects of social and emotional learning, partly as a way to move beyond the narrow educational aims of testing only a handful of subject areas.

Of course, these citizenship education approaches also need to be considered relative to trends among the youth population. While it is difficult to gauge many of the changes currently unfolding, especially within younger age ranges, we do see some significant shifts forming from the Millennial Generation (born 1980–1995) to Generation Z (born in 1996 and after) that can help us improve high school and college education. During the 2008 election, many Millennials embraced the "yes we can" spirit of President Obama, leading to dramatic increases in voter turnout.[267] And yet, only a few years later in 2014, youth voting was at record lows, only to rise again in the 2018 midterms—perhaps a sign of significant swings and frustration among Millennials.[268] In recent years, Millennials have continued to see politics as a vehicle for change, but are frustrated that the political system is often inefficient and difficult. Many want to participate, but doubt their impact or aren't sure how to do so.[269] They are also frustrated with the spin of polarized debates, yet they enjoy discussing the nuances of and compromises to difficult situations with their friends. They seek group consensus and collective action and don't want deliberations to get bogged down by competition or other problems that stall action.[270] As a result, some turn away from political activity and prefer only to volunteer occasionally with local groups on issues of personal importance.[271]

It appears that Generation Z, however, is more politically active than the previous generation, even though percentages of actual action are still relatively low. The rise may be linked to certain social protest movements that many youths are leading or participating in, including school walkouts over gun violence, #MeToo in response to sexual harassment and assault, and Black Lives Matter regarding the unjust killings of black people. What seems to be emerging is that this generation is more aware than ever of social and political issues due to the instant access to information provided by the Internet. While Millennials also largely had that access, they were not as mobilized to action. Perhaps this was due to a sense of despair and separation from the issues happening around them—a feeling that they could not make a change and that the outcome would be the same regardless of their involvement. Generation Z is more likely not only to get involved but also to feel that they can make a difference. They are also more motivated to assume leadership positions, with 40% of those polled in 2015 claiming it was "essential" or

"very important" to become community leaders and nearly three-quarters saying that helping others is an important goal.[272]

Generation Z appears more committed to helping others, evidence that disputes anecdotes about youth as merely self-centered.[273] Indeed, researchers of one major study of the group concluded that they have a "'we'-centered mentality, one in which the majority of their concerns center around the well-being of everyone rather than solely themselves."[274] Finally, Generation Z seeks to transform the world around them by pragmatically addressing root problems of issues, rather than just taking on symptoms or simply discussing ideals, as some in previous generations were prone to do. Rather than performing brief volunteer projects, Generation Z members prefer to undertake larger efforts to alleviate the underlying problems leading to the need for volunteers.[275] As a result, project-based learning, which seeks to deeply understand and impact large, cross-disciplinary issues, aligns with the tendencies of Generation Z.[276] Engaging Generation Z in authentic civic experiences while simultaneously giving them tools for effective communication and foundational civic knowledge will likely continue to encourage action, service, and support leadership development.[277]

Distinguishing Teaching Hope from Teaching Grit

In the midst of background talk of hopeful schools and changing generations, emphasis on teaching grit has come to the foreground as another aim of education intended to enable children to pursue their goals and achieve success during and after school. Indeed, some states have identified it as a teachable and measurable component of social and emotional learning. For many parents and citizens, this has been a welcome shift away from narrow adherence to the particulars of tested subject matter and toward larger issues of life and character. Grit has moved from speculative psychological literature and research studies into school practices and policies from major districts like Baltimore City Schools to small schools like Edge Middle School in Texas. In my town alone, I've witnessed "grit" on everything from high school sports team t-shirt logos, to an elementary principal's yearly goal list, to a chest tattoo on a leading school reformer and city councilman.

In addition to the celebration and implementation of grit in many individual schools, recent federal law (Every Student Succeeds Act) now requires all schools to assess at least one nonacademic measurement of social and

emotional learning. Grit, believed to be measurable, appeals to some schools and states as a worthy choice. Additionally, students taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress will now also be assessed on their grit.[278] Even teachers have been studied for their grittiness in order to assess their effectiveness and retention.[279] Catching on to the trend, philanthropic education reformers, like the Walton Family Foundation, have pledged millions of dollars to support the study, teaching, and measurement of grit.[280]

I want to briefly discuss this seeming hope-aligned trend of teaching grit in order to differentiate it from pragmatist political hope and reveal some of its shortcomings, including showing how teaching grit does not reflect what we know about quality citizenship education and how it may relate to political despair. As education becomes enmeshed in the discourse of grit, I intend to bring hope out of the background and into focus. While there are marked differences between the two concepts, my intention is not to construct a problematic dualism between the two, for not only is there some value in having grit but also surely there is helpful space where they are informed by one another and crafted into something unique and useful. As such, the notion of hope I offer in this book may be used, at times, to supplement, refine, or improve theories of grit. Or it may be used to supplant theories of grit by suggesting alternative ways forward as we seek visions of educational effectiveness that extend beyond test scores and into the lives of children and the future of American democracy.

To understand grit, including its benefits and drawbacks, I want to begin with a brief summary of its key elements and related aspects of hope, as described by major proponents. It is important to acknowledge that while developed only relatively recently in psychological studies, grit has been picked up in education literature, practice, and policy in myriad ways, sometimes morphing considerably from the ways in which the original researchers understood it. Some of these adaptations, such as measuring its growth in children to evaluate the quality of schools, have raised new concerns about the focus on grit, causing even leading proponents to issue statements of caution regarding how grit is now being used in schools.[281]

Defining Grit

Psychologist Angela Duckworth has made the most noteworthy contributions to the study of grit. For her, grit is not just working hard, but also staying

loyal to one's overarching goal for an extended period of time and through all obstacles that might hinder one's path to the goal.[282] That overarching goal is supported by a hierarchy of smaller goals. While one may not stubbornly pursue all of the smaller goals, the overarching goal should be pursued with passion and perseverance. She explains, "What I mean by passion is not just that you have something you care about. What I mean is that you care about that *same* ultimate goal in an abiding, loyal, steady way."[283] Duckworth also appreciates hope insofar as she says it is important at every stage of grit because it helps us persevere as we pursue our goals.[284]

While other proponents of grit and some school applications understand it to be more narrowly tied to goals that are concerned only with oneself, Duckworth acknowledges that many of the grittiest people she has studied claim that the purpose behind their passion and perseverance arises from the fact that their overarching goal benefits others.[285] She also suggests that grit can help one be more "useful" to others.[286]

Using a test originally designed alongside her fellow researchers Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman, Duckworth developed a series of questions designed to measure one's level of grit, which she calls the Grit Scale.[287] Interestingly, her Grit Scale includes measuring the character traits of grit and optimism.[288] Also, she argues that grit can be improved by one's self or by others; in other words, grit can be taught.[289] One way to do this is to engage in deliberative practice, which one should do repetitively until it becomes what most people characteristically think of as a habit.[290] Additionally, surrounding oneself with what she calls a "gritty culture" may enhance the grit of individuals.[291] Finally, developing grit is aided by adopting a growth mindset. As defined by researcher Carol Dweck, a growth mindset is "based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts."[292] People with a growth mindset "take the challenge, learn from failure, or continue their effort."[293]

KIPP charter schools have adopted Duckworth's vision of goal-setting grit and now measure each student to determine whether s/he has "finished whatever s/he began" and has "stayed committed to goals."[294] Following Duckworth, they pair the measurement of grit with measurements of self-control, including determining whether s/he "remained calm even when criticized," "was polite to adults," "kept temper in check," "followed directions," and "resisted distractions." This focus and self-control even play out in everyday classroom expectations such as SLANT, a physical way of controlling oneself and staying focused on the teacher.[295] Elsewhere, teachers such as

New Hampshire's Amy Lyon, have crafted grit curricula that bring together perseverance, self-control, and optimism.[296] She encourages students to construct their own specific, measurable goals and then to exhibit self-control in devotedly pursuing them.

C. R. Snyder, a leader in positive psychology, made significant advances in theorizing hope. His work has also been picked up in the study of grit due to the many similarities between how grit advocates understand the two terms. I will lay out his contribution and related contributions that followed in order to shed light on the understanding of grit that I will then critique. Like Duckworth, Snyder focuses on a long-term future mapped out through goal-setting. He emphasizes forming one's own specific goals and pursuing them independently. Once those goals are clearly defined, hope acts as the cognitive willpower and waypower to fulfilling them. However unlike hope and the process of inquiry that supports it, Snyder's goal-setting typically demonstrates little regard for the substance of those goals and their consequences for the well-being of others.[297] Much like grit for Duckworth, Snyder's hope moves us forward and increases our agency. Snyder has also developed a Hope Scale, which measures one's cognitive drive and self-confidence. The Hope Scale is primarily focused on one's own agency, without concern for other aspects or people involved in hope, or the impact of one's hoping and goals on other people or the environment.

In similar spirit, educational psychologist Valerie Maholmes ties hope to personal agency and working toward one's goals.[298] Hope becomes a form of action and will, reflected in the adage "Where there's a will, there's a way."[299] Hope is not mere wishful thinking, but rather happens in the development of pathways toward achieving our goals, motivation to act on those goals, and believing that we can be effective in doing so. That cognitive work can produce emotional responses as goals are or are not fulfilled, but the emphasis is on the action and resilience of the mind, demonstrated through adaptation and growth. This accent on the mind is significant, because few psychologists describe their study of grit or hope this way. Education reformers such as Paul Tough often champion grit as a noncognitive aspect of character, juxtaposing it to the cognitive work of demonstrating mastery of tested subject matter.[300]

Another pioneer in the area of positive psychology is Martin Seligman, who focuses primarily on developing optimism through cultivation of cognitive skills. For Seligman, and later for Duckworth, optimists are those who see defeat as not their fault, but rather as a temporary setback that pushes

them to try harder, while pessimists see defeat as not only their fault but also likely to endure.[301] He adds, "Finding temporary and specific causes for misfortune is the art of hope. . . . Finding permanent and universal causes for misfortune is the practice of despair."[302] This relates to Dweck's growth mindset, which includes having optimistic ways of responding to adversity. Dweck, in her account of growth mindset, and Duckworth, in her account of grit, both call for optimistic self-talk to help one persevere through adversity.[303] Teachers have operationalized the ideas of all three scholars by encouraging optimism in students through the use of positive language and focusing on what they can control.[304]

Relatedly, Harvard physician Jerome Groopman, drawing closely on the work of psychologist Richard Davidson, extends hope from being simply a cognitive experience of believing one can have control over the world to being an emotional response that can shape our mental understanding. For Davidson, hope, unlike blind optimism that obscures our vision of the world and leads us to only see rosy outcomes, helps us "bring reality into sharp focus."[305] Unlike trends in the educational implications of grit and hope, he describes their shared feature of resilience, not as springing back and carrying on through dogged persistence, but rather as maintaining positive feelings in the face of struggle.[306] Groopman explains that these positive feelings are related to the release of endorphins and enkephalins that block the pain we may experience during physical adversity.

Finally, Paul Stoltz implements ideas about grit in schools, including the High Teach High School in San Diego. He uses "grit" as an acronym that includes "growth (mindset), resilience, instinct, and tenacity." Like other views of grit described so far, his is goal-directed, though more tied to self-beneficial goals. He describes grit as "Your capacity to dig deep, to do whatever it takes—especially struggle, sacrifice, even suffer—to achieve your most worthy goals."[307] While he does claim that good grit entails striving for goals that may help others, the focus should "ideally" be on oneself and then extend outward to benefit others. In a telling example, he notes exercise as primarily serving oneself, but also reducing one's burden on others.[308] This reveals a pretty limited understanding of social benefits, where they are merely a reduction of one's personal burden on others rather than a concerted effort to achieve common goods.

Stoltz argues that gritty education is intended to "fend off the mass wussification (weakening) of kids worldwide"—a sort of "get tough" approach to education that puts the onus on individual children to better

themselves and, thereby, society.[309] One's ability to face and overcome adversity using grit is measured by what he calls the "adversity quotient."[310] Schools following the spirit of Stoltz and Duckworth have upheld exemplars of grit, such as Will Smith and Scott Rigsby (double amputee Ironman record holder), who value triumphing over others or over their own physical limitations at all costs.[311] Finally, reflecting this sense of drive, many teachers now only praise students with words that assess one's focus and determination, and some, such as those at Lenox Academy, overtly encourage students to rate and discuss the grit of their peers.[312]

Benefits and Problems of Grit

As grit makes its way from psychological theories to classroom practice, it has rightly drawn our attention to the fact that good education is more than just nurturing intelligence or demonstrating achievement on a test, but rather reaches other aspects of character development, outlook, and ways of being. Emphasizing grit also helps us to see the importance of related traits, such as positivity, perseverance, and tenacity in responding to challenging conditions, with a bent toward continued learning and commitment. It works against anecdotal trends among youth for instant gratification. Finally, it draws attention to personal responsibility and urges children to claim and demonstrate some important aspects of such responsibility.

As grit has made its way into classroom teaching, policy, testing of students, and evaluations of schools and teachers, problems with theories and research on grit are becoming apparent. This may be, in part, because common understanding of grit is too limited to serve as a clear guide for school practice or, especially, as a criterion for school evaluation. Overall, there have not been many studies on how to develop grit. Instead, most suggestions come from self-help style books of suggestions.[313] The studies that have been completed tend to focus on already high-achieving populations. For example, Duckworth speaks most frequently about studying national spelling bee participants and Ivy League and West Point students.[314] Indeed, many of those students come from families of means and Duckworth herself recognizes that grit scores are significantly higher for wealthy students than poor students.[315] And, in some studies, grit has added little to predictions of academic success[316] or creative achievement among children.[317]

Additionally, some results do not show that teaching techniques can improve students' grit[318] or, if it does produce improvement, the results are only short-lived.[319] Others have alleged that Duckworth's studies have exaggerated the impact of grit.[320] Even though there is much that isn't settled about grit, what we can glean from its implications and applications in schools reveals worrisome elements. I will summarize some of those concerns here, in order to later highlight how a pragmatist version of hope helps to supplement the weaknesses of grit or replace it entirely.

Most notably, grit focuses too much on following a respectable path to success, reminiscent of Horatio Alger stories of hard-working boys overcoming poverty and hardship to earn a middle-class way of life. This path is primarily one of doing what you are told and not challenging one's conditions, as evidenced in some of the KIPP measurements of self-control listed earlier. It entails complying with one's larger circumstances such as poverty and lack of opportunity, and persisting to achieve grand future goals within or in spite of those circumstances. Perhaps even focusing on meeting one's goals in a far-off future may be aligned with economic privilege, for impoverished people are often so focused on the daily struggle of meeting basic needs that, to them, a call to prioritize a distant future may seem unfathomable or perhaps even foolish.[321]

Sometimes talk of grit seems to even romanticize struggle, glorifying hardship as a source of or demonstrable location for grit. Surely, we do not want to celebrate the incredible strain of conditions such as racism or poverty nor overlook the persistence that many children have already demonstrated under such strain by suggesting that it hasn't been sufficiently directed toward worthy large goals, especially those that mirror images of middle-class success or academic achievement.[322] Nor do we want grit to be so focused on the achieving of grand goals in a distant and glorious future, such that the present, including the depths of struggle and pain within it, is ignored or downplayed.

Finally, we do not want to support an educational approach that does not encourage or aid students in questioning and challenging injustices in society, but rather, as Ariana Gonzalez Stokas says, "reveals itself as a pedagogy in learning to endure suffering."[323] We want students to examine and challenge the social, economic, and political conditions that support or hinder their success and that of others, not just blindly withstand them, focusing merely on achieving their personal goals despite the obstacles they face. We want an educational experience that teaches children how to be democratic

citizens who speak out in dissent against injustice and work to assuage it for the sake of oneself, others, the present, and the future.[324]

All of this leads to a pick-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality, a well-established practice that sometimes places blame on the victim for not being "gritty enough" and urges him or her to just work harder—ignoring the structural hurdles that are often so significant that they cannot be overcome alone. Stokas chronicles the history and persistence of this mentality well in her article, "A Genealogy of Grit."[325] This worldview locates failure within the character of the child, rather than acknowledge the severity of the conditions faced by that child. It sets up false promises by leading one to believe that demonstration of just the right sort of persistent behavior will result in success, and that one deserves such success. To highlight that mentality, literature on grit tends to celebrate exceptional cases, such as Michael Jordan earning a spot on his high school basketball team after initially being rejected.[326] While such examples can help us see elements of grit, focusing on them sets up struggling students for frustration and blame when they do not achieve what those exceptional folks do. It may also be the case that grit gets picked up later in life by successful people seeking a justification for their success and a rationale for why others have not achieved similarly and therefore don't deserve similar rewards. It can feel good to believe that one has earned one's position through demonstrating grit, rather than acknowledging how other factors, such as wealth or family connections, may have influenced one's success.

While it can be good to wholeheartedly pursue one's individual goals, it's also important to occasionally question those goals to determine their worthiness for oneself and others, including any potential harm that the goals, or their relentless pursuit, may cause. Single-mindedness can provide focus, but it can also limit one's awareness of potentially more fruitful alternative options or the implications of one's efforts. Indeed, the best and most difficult choice may be to abandon one's long-term goal and redirect one's effort elsewhere, rather than doggedly stay the course. For example, some grit curricula encourage students to set goals related to the sports they enjoy. If a student aims to be a state wrestling champion, his goal may require extreme weight loss and lengthy exercise regiments that risk his health and time with his friends and family. He should stop to reconsider the goal when he faces obstacles that reveal he may be causing suffering to himself and others along the way, such as risking serious illness or injury or missing an important family event to attend a wrestling meet. We must be careful that unworthy

individual goals are not unjustly emphasized over or inappropriately balanced with the common good of families or communities. Furthermore, in the cases where grit pits individuals with the same or competing goals in competition with each other, problems may be magnified and hopelessness may result.[327] Grit is hard to sustain in tough circumstances, and employing grit doesn't help to change those circumstances to make one's future efforts or those of others easier.

Considering the larger systems of injustice and privilege that work to promote the success of some and thwart the success of others suggests that current understandings of grit may be too individualist. Focusing exclusively on one's individual goals without considering the impact of one's self on the pathways of others doesn't help to change larger systematic injustice or even encourage one to work with others within those systems. Adversity not only may be unworthy of celebration but also may stem from root causes that are too deep for individuals to deal with alone. When individuals then encounter systems of injustice, feel silenced in the face of them, or develop apathy about being able to impact them, political despair may set in. They may fail to see a political will for addressing those problems, hearing instead that they should just keep on trying themselves and that others have managed through hard work. Continuing to emphasize the need of individuals to be gritty may further exacerbate this political despair, cutting off communities of support and precluding the development of social movements aimed at dismantling systems of injustice. Such criticisms of grit are important and they pave the way for considering whether hope may be a better alternative.

Turning to Hope

Pragmatist hope, however, may point us in new, more ethical, and more sustainable directions in education. Hope arises initially through inquiry and problem-solving by exploring and testing opportunities that are presented in indeterminate situations, problematic moments when we are unsure how to proceed. Hope is less tied to the distant goals of grit proponents and more apparent in the everyday moments of not having a clear path before us. Said differently, "for Dewey, hope emerges in the anxiety that occurs when our habitual way of doing things fails."[328] It enables us to live and thrive with uncertainty, change, and complexity, where we expect that our efforts can make a difference in shaping our world.

Most people understand schooling as an orderly march toward some clear goal, whether the mastery of material, a diploma, or preparation for career. Indeed, much of the talk about grit these days is concerned with setting and achieving clear goals in a passionate and driven way. For Duckworth, this typically means setting one goal, such as mastering one particular musical instrument and sticking with it for years, rather than exploring other instruments one may discover along the way or shifting to another extracurricular activity entirely.[329] For Dewey, however, the trajectory tends to be more complicated and less straightforward, as the realities of life alter our course and cause us to have to form new hypotheses about them and revise our aims. Moreover, moving headlong toward a fixed end may not be desirable, for it may entail a limited or even foreclosed vision of the unpredictable future. Hope moves us forward through inquiry and experimentation as we pursue our complicated trajectory. With each step, we alter our goals and our understandings of ourselves and our world; an approach quite different from that of grit, where one first identifies an overarching goal and systematically breaks it down into smaller goals to be tackled.

Unlike the more sophisticated account of meliorism that bolsters pragmatist habits of hope, common conversations about grit are sometimes tied to rather simplistic and even naive accounts of optimism—celebrating a rosy outlook on the future and believing that things will work out regardless of current circumstances. In the context of Seligman and Duckworth's work, optimism is believing that the causes of one's struggles are temporary and not one's fault.[330] Likewise, Maholmes explains that optimism is the perception that one's goals can be attained with little regard for external hazards or even one's agency in forces that may thwart those goals.[331] Snyder contends that optimists don't need to engage with the messy aspects of real life, but rather should stay focused on their personal goals with little regard for their larger social circumstances.[332]

Finally, hope is distinguished from grit because of its basis in habits. Whereas calls for grit often evoke the image of a lone ranger, setting out to achieve bold goals independently, the pragmatist celebrates hope as a social activity. Through transactions that mold our habits, we continually shape and are shaped by the people around us and our cultural traditions. Hope, unlike grit, is not a mere trait held by individuals, but rather an activity we do in relation to our world and in relation with others. The basis of hope in habits reveals its deeply social and political nature. Insofar as teaching grit is all about homing in on individuals, it is out of step with best practices in

citizenship education that unite children with others in deliberation and the tackling of real local issues and community problems. It also falls short on other elements of social and emotional learning that bridge divides between students, help them process their emotional responses to each other, and foster relationships. And, focusing on individuals may provoke political despair by turning attention away from communities of inquiry where pressing social problems are tackled and away from social movements where agency and expressing political dissent about injustice are fostered. Cultivating habits, however, falls well within good approaches to citizenship, develops agency rather than despair, and is situated within larger concerns for the maintenance of democracy.

Pragmatist hope is located within and attentive to the muddy and complex circumstances of our daily lives. Unlike grit, it is not invoked only with one's eye to the future and it requires more reasonable and tempered consideration of one's circumstances. Additionally, while habits of hope are housed within and compose individuals, hope is not individualist in the same ways that grit is. Instead, it extends to the social and plays out most fruitfully there because it is guided by growth, meliorism, and the democratic good, each of which takes into account the well-being of others and our impact on them. It pushes us from exceptional individual pursuit of our most ambitious goals to reflective, collective public work to make the world a better place, which may include speaking out in dissent about unjust circumstances. Rather than putting one's head down or digging in one's heels in the spirit of grit, hope urges reflection, change, and action. Pragmatist hope decouples grit from success, showing that one does not necessarily lead to the other, and then offers a path forward through the recognition that, while success is not assured, action is still worthwhile, especially given its impact on social and democratic life. Grit may help some individuals pursue the future they desire, but it will not sufficiently revive democracy, overcome despair, or sustain, let alone improve, social and political life in America.

Grounding an Alternative to Grit in Habits of Democracy

We often think of democracy as something occurring in far-away places, like state capitols, and carried out by other people, like elected officials. We tend to forget that democracy involves us—our words, our actions, and our daily

lives. Democracy is not merely a formal matter—bound up in documents, officials, policies, and procedures—but rather, is a way of life. As such, it requires a formative culture that supports the development of habits that lead us to enact aspects of democracy regularly in our lives.

Schools are a key location where we nurture habits of democratic living in particular. They are places where we learn how to share responsibility, work together, and communicate across differences, for example. Within schools, students watch, imitate, and interact with others, often trying out or responding to the habits that others display. Our norms and traditions related to democracy are inculcated through both direct teaching and the hidden curriculum—those behaviors and beliefs that are conveyed more indirectly by teachers, exchanges with peers, rules within a school, expectations for students, and more.

We nurture democratic habits within schools by providing environments and activities that encourage the use and development of those habits. In other words, students require opportunities to try out democratic habits and experiences that affirm the usefulness and value of those habits. In Dewey's words,

> The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment. . . . It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit.[333]

Developing habits of democracy, then, entails immersing students in practices of shared social living where they can see firsthand that those habits serve their needs well.

Through the process of inquiry, we learn to identify and focus on our habits so that we can shape them to meet our needs and the practices of a well-functioning democracy. We must craft authentic situations for students that engage them in inquiry and experimentation as they try out and reflect on their habits. Teachers should draw students' attention to their habits and those of others, analyzing their usefulness and questioning whether they

can be revised or improved. For example, a teacher might point out to a student his tendency to interrupt classmates, drawing attention to how this proclivity not only is hurtful to his peers who feel silenced but also denies that student the opportunity to be exposed to and learn from the opinions and experiences of his classmates. This can help the student not only see his habit in a new light but also provide reasons for changing it. Within a school, students can acquire new habits and, through the process of reflective inquiry about themselves and the world around them, they can also question and challenge other habits that may not be serving them well.

In a quotation discussed earlier, Dewey links our individual engagement of democracy via habits with institutions of democracy when he says,

> democracy is a *personal* way of individual life; that it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life. Instead of thinking of our own dispositions and habits as accommodated to certain institutions we have to learn to think of the latter as expressions, projections and extensions of habitually dominant personal attitudes.[334]

So, we should not view democratic institutions as entities separate from us and to which we must assimilate. Instead, they are extensions of our democratic habits. Therefore, we don't just tangentially influence public institutions, we compose them and shape them through our habits of daily life in democracy. Finally, as a personal way of life, our democratic habits arise from our interactions with others and are kept in check by our conjoint activities with them, even as we practice them independently. This differs from the more individualist focus of grit and privatized hope that I've described elsewhere. The emphasis is on seeing democracy within ourselves and our actions.

Habits of democracy are best developed through actively and directly engaging in democratic practices within civil society and schools, rather than through vague talk about how to be a good citizen when a child is grown. They cannot be deeply instilled by merely imparting pertinent knowledge that must then lie dormant, waiting for relevant circumstances to arise before it may be put to use. I recognize that this is a big task of today's schools, which are seldom able to engage in this sort of active and immersed learning, but I contend that citizenship education must employ democratic means to achieve democratic ends. In this way, rather than merely educating *for*

democracy—something to be achieved by graduates at some distant point in time or beyond school walls—Dewey's view of habit formation demands educating *through* democracy.[335] We cannot teach students to see democracy as an admirable end goal while engaging in classroom practices that are, for example, totalitarian. Rather, we must employ means that are aligned with the end, allowing students to engage in collective problem-solving, inclusive communication, and shared governance around real and significant issues as we nurture them into a citizenship role.

We also need to provide opportunities for students to engage with long-standing democratic traditions and ideals. While steering clear of indoctrination, a key aim should be to highlight the benefits of democracy. Students can be introduced and inducted into the American spirit, in part, through stories about how our past efforts have led to social, political, and economic success and well-being for many, though not for all or in all situations. Teachers can help students see how hope has supported our country in past difficult times, and how it has created shared objects and objectives that have moved us forward. Simultaneously, teachers can expose students to examples of how democratic principles (such as equal opportunity) have also supported hope, while still recognizing that those principles have not been carried out in ways that have fairly supported all citizens. While celebrating some aspects of success and progress, teachers must be sure to paint a fuller picture of elements of stagnation and injustice, and invite students to take up the work ahead of adapting or dropping past traditions and ideals in order to better ensure fruitful outcomes for all Americans. The thoughts and habits developed in this process are open to change and influence from students, thereby allowing democracy to transform across time, rather than limiting students to a narrow or predetermined sense of democracy or good citizenship.[336]

Finally, good habits of democracy should be flexible, allowing adaptation for an unknown future. While we cannot know for certain what lies ahead in America, we can develop political agency via the formation of habits of hope that supports a flourishing life and the capacity for improvement. Given this, I will highlight some of the aspects of habits of hope that are most in need of attention or could best fulfill some of our present and short-term future needs. I hope to do so with an eye to the extended future, where those habits may continue to be adapted and used. While there are elements of these habits that may have endured centuries of democracy, my focus is not on general or static habits, but rather flexible and context-specific ones that better

prepare students for adapting to new and changing environments. These are habits that can helpfully respond to or counter the current struggles in democracy. In addition to developing new habits, teachers can help students identify habits in need of change, such as cynicism, that have become stagnant and inflexible, thereby paralyzing our agency and hindering democracy. Habits of hope allow us to live with uncertainty and complexity. Hope thrives on flexibility, as it encounters new problems and faces indeterminate situations.

Hope and Habits, Not Grit

In sum, while grit may be popular in educational circles, and suggestive of a forward-driven spirit that may seem like hope, they differ in important ways. Rather than a pick-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps ideology aligned with achieving one's personal desires, pragmatist hope offers a democratic vision of justice and shared action to improve circumstances instead. It is supported by habits learned through democracy. Whereas grit may provide some useful outcomes for individuals, it does not show the promise for breathing new life into democracy that pragmatist hope does. Nor is teaching grit currently well aligned with best practices in citizenship education[337] or even the tendencies we see developing among Generation Z. Whereas Generation Z exhibits a penchant for political participation, serving others, fixing root causes of problems, and group leadership, teaching grit fails to build off those opportunities and may actually even stifle some of those potentially beneficial tendencies. In the next chapter, I build off this foil of grit to put forward a counterproposal for teaching hope—one that grows out of quality citizenship education techniques, responds to the potential of our younger generation, is based in habits of democracy, and is overtly tied to the overall well-being of our democracy.