

Character Education through Outward Bound: There is more Grit and Resilience in you than you know

Briefing

Prepared by Alpenglow Education Consulting LLC

January, 2016

This report is based on the doctoral dissertation work by Curt Davidson at Indiana University's School of Public Health. Grit was measured by the Grit Inventory, copyright Angela Duckworth at Penn State University. Resilience was measured by the Resiliency Scale for Children and Adolescents, copyright Pearson Education, Inc.

Alpenglow Education Consulting LLC

650 Mulberry St.

Sellersburg, In 47172

812.786.7701

www.alpengloweducation.com

Copyright © 2016 by Alpenglow Education Consulting. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever, mechanical, digital, or electronic, without prior permission from the publisher, except in brief quotations or summaries in articles or reviews, or as follows:

- Outward Bound California or its designee may reproduce and distribute this report in its entirety for informational and educational purposes only.
- Outward Bound California or its designee may reproduce or adapt findings from this report to other formats (including, but not limited to, brochures, websites, and presentations), provided Alpenglow Education Consulting is acknowledged as the source of the information.
- The text and appendices contained in this report may not be reproduced as part of any adaptations—mechanical, digital, or electronic.
- Alpenglow Education Consulting will treat this report as confidential. Because the data upon which this report is based can be used to advance the understanding of adolescent development, Alpenglow Education Consulting reserves the right to add the data to its larger database. No individual identifying information will be included.

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| The Project at a Glance | 4 |
| Purpose of the Study | 5 |
| What is Grit? | 6 |
| What is Resilience? | 6 |
| Study Specifications | 8 |
| Findings | 8 |
| Conclusions | 9 |
| Summation..... | 10 |

The Project at a Glance

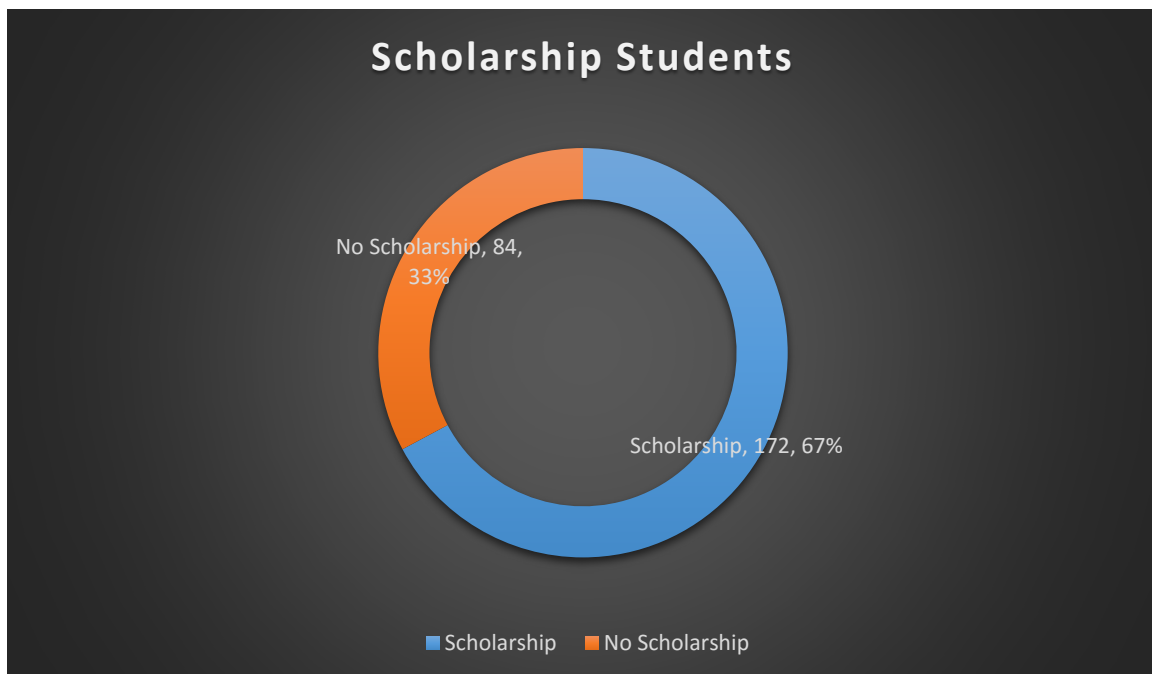
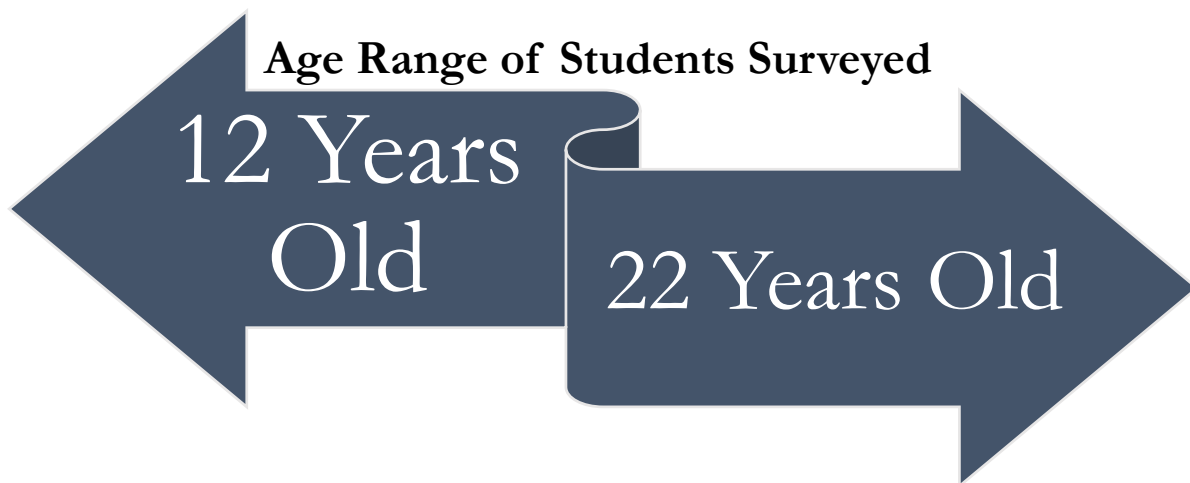
What was Measured:

Grit: Interest and Effort to complete a project lasting a month or more.

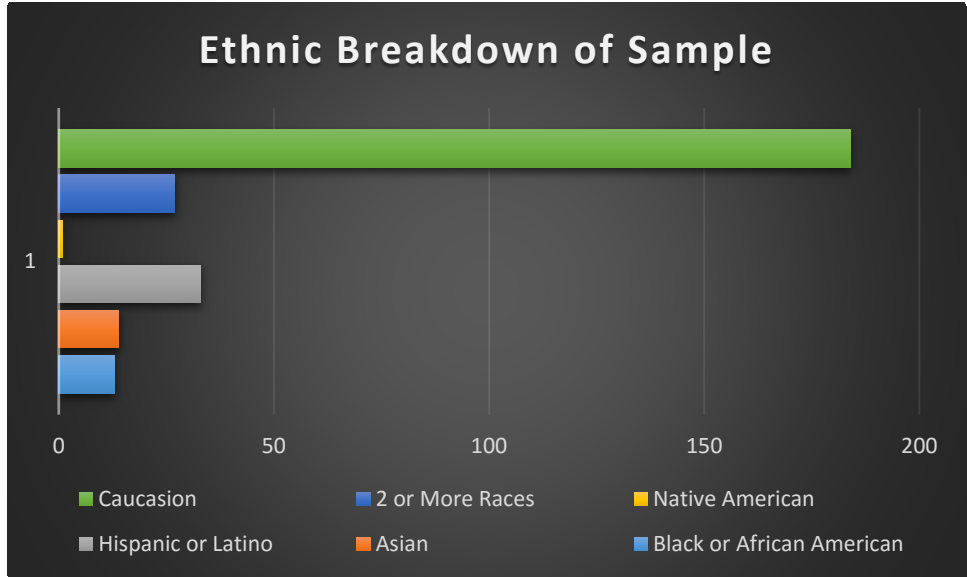
Resilience: The ability to recover from setbacks and “rise above” difficult circumstances.

Who were the Research Participants:

This study, which took place in the summer of 2015 at Outward Bound California. Adults and Veterans were excluded from this study. Ages ranged from 12-22 years-old.



The total number of students used for this project was 283



| Variable | Significance | Small Effect | Medium Effect | Strong Effect |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Grit | Yes | | X | |
| Sense of Mastery | Yes | | | X |
| Sense of Relatedness | Yes | | X | |
| Emotional Reactivity | No | | | |

Results and implications are discussed in depth in the following report.

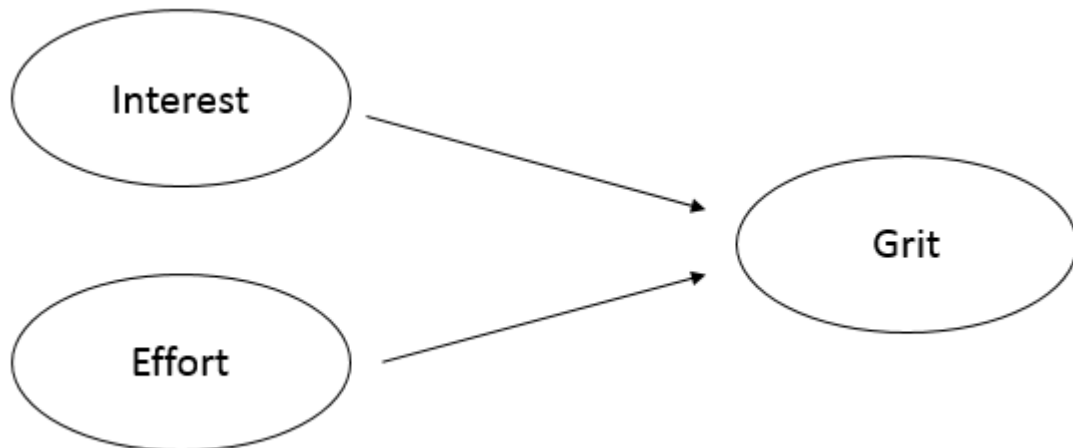
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how levels of grit and resilience change in young people after participation in an Outward Bound Program. The findings from this study are expected to further our understanding of the nature of OB courses and their influence on selected character development traits. Not only can this study provide insight into the specific programmatic outcomes, it also expands the comprehension of OB practitioners and researchers by revealing information on the process of how grit and resilience may be effectively enhanced through the OB experience. For example, if grit is enhanced through OB programs, one question that needs to be addressed is whether it's the rock climbing, group membership, or other variables that contribute to this increase in levels of grit. Additionally, this study examines what factors contribute to the development of these character traits in OB Programs with a focus on age, gender, and course type, and whether or not the student received a scholarship to participate in the program. Additionally,

differences in courses based on these selected variables were also analyzed such as differences in instructor experience and weather experienced by students while at Outward Bound.

What is Grit?

Grit is defined as the passion for achieving long term goals and perseverance to accomplish projects that last a month or more (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The modern concept of grit in the literature is relatively new, and now has a growing body of research (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Hoerr, 2013; Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014). The concept of grit moves beyond mere perseverance to encompass both resolution and energy to accomplish longitudinal projects more than a month in duration, with an emphasis on goal attainment (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). By this definition, a person who works on a project for two months and completes it, contrasted to a second person who works on a project for one month and gives up, losing passion to work on that project, would be said to have more grit. In this way, grit can lead to the accomplishment of goals, which is also an important aspect of character education, how children find success, and an outcome of many AE programs including Outward Bound (Hattie et al., 2014; Tough, 2013).

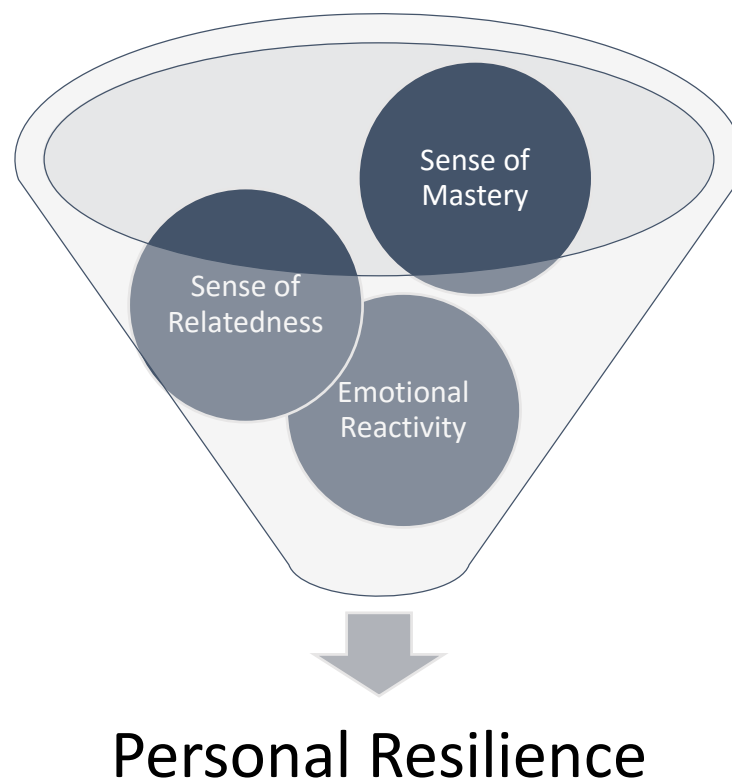


What is Resilience?

For the purposes of this study resiliency is comprised of three subcategories: sense of mastery, sense of relatedness, and emotional reactivity (Prince-Embury, 2009). These three constructs were chosen by Prince-Embury in an effort to capture an array of different aspects of resiliency, as they were shown to be important for children and adolescents (p. 4). This theoretical context is chosen for this study because of the shared language between the instrumentation and OB programming. Additionally, it is believed to fit well with the OB educational process model which cites that progressive challenges and group membership are essential to the OB process of learning and personal growth and development (McKenzie, 2003; Sibthorp, 2003; Walsh & Golins, 1976).

Resiliency through a sense of mastery is rooted in self-efficacy theory which states the belief in one's own ability can be enhanced through mastery or repetitious trial of a particular task

(Bandura, 1977). This idea that resiliency can be enhanced through a sense of mastery is essential to the OB process, which facilitates repeated chances for a student to find success through their performance of necessary tasks or skills they have learned for course completion and survival in the wilderness. This sense of mastery has been linked to a host of variables including resiliency, overcoming hardship, and maintaining health in late life (Pudrovska, Schieman, Pearlin, & Nguyen, 2005; Schieman, Nguyen, & Elliott, 2003). The importance of resiliency through sense of mastery manifests in AE contexts with the belief that the student experience can be structured for learning, and that a student will experience increases in their belief of their own abilities by accomplishing more than they thought possible, or by succeeding in a task that is difficult to accomplish. This can also lead to positive expectations of the future, which influences a person's sense of resiliency as well (Cohn et al., 2009).



Sense of relatedness is also considered to be an important facet of resiliency (Prince-Embury, 2008). Rooted in the concept of social support and survival, human nature tends to impel human beings to turn to others in times of hardship and distress (Cobb, 1976; Cutrona, 1990). Prince-Embury suggested that resiliency may be developed from sense of relatedness in two ways. First, convenient relationship access is considered to be beneficial because a person knows he or she can rely on others in the face of adversity. Second, having an external other can be viewed for the individual as a shielding effect from the negative stimuli (p. 5). For example, in the case of loss of a loved one, a person may find solace in the bonds with other siblings who are experiencing the same scenario, at that same given time (Mikkelson, Floyd, & Pauley, 2011). In this way, sense of relatedness is thought to provide significant levels of resiliency for an individual.

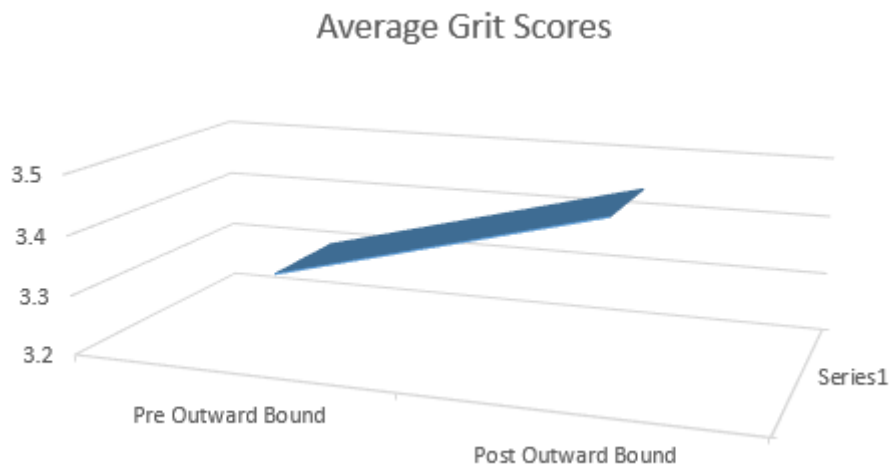
Study Specifications

The subjects range in age from 12-22. OB categorizes their students by age, and they are subsequently grouped together into age groups for participation in their course: 12-15 year-olds are classified as “youth,” 16-18 year-olds are grouped together as “teens,” and 19-22 year-old are combined to form the “young adult” group. Thus, the analysis of this project reflects these age groups, where both males and females are queried for this study.

The sample includes 174 males, 104 females, while five others self-identified as “other” or chose not to answer. The mean age of the sample is 16.24 and ranges from 12-22 years old. Ethnicity of participants is asked as part of the descriptive statistics as follows: Caucasian 184, Black or African American 13, Asian 14, Hispanic or Latino 33, Native American or Alaskan 1, two or more races 27. Students who received scholarship compared with those who did not is also analyzed.

Findings

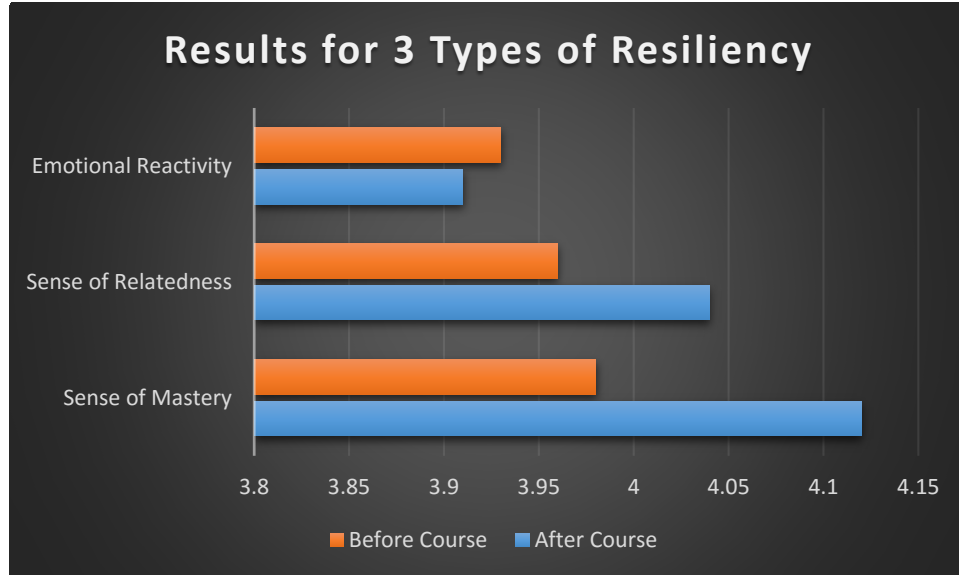
Grit was found to be significantly different in students after their Outward Bound Course. Further, there was a medium effect size meaning they were very different, or saw moderate amounts of change in this variable.



Sense of Mastery was also found to be statistically significant in students after their OB experience. Further analysis showed that the students showed strong increases in this type of resilience.

Sense of Relatedness was subsequently found to be significantly increased from participation in Outward Bound. Likewise, there was a medium effect found, meaning that students experience a strong change in this type of resilience.

Emotional Reactivity was found to not be enhanced from participation in Outward Bound.



Further analysis explored gender, age, scholarship, course length, varying instructors, and ethnicity. These variables were found to not significantly increase or decrease how a student attains increases in grit and resilience on Outward Bound Programs.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn as a result of this study after data is analyzed. The analysis conducted shows positive results for both grit and resilience:

1. Levels of grit in young people can be enhanced through participation in Outward Bound Programs;
2. Levels resiliency through sense of mastery of skills can be enhanced through participation in Outward Bound Programs;
3. Levels of resiliency through sense of relatedness with group members can be enhanced through participation in Outward Bound Programs;
4. Levels of resiliency through emotional reactivity will likely not be effected by participation in Outward Bound Programs;
5. Character traits, such as grit and resilience, can be positively influenced by participation in Outward Bound Programs;
6. Outward Bound Programs have a medium to large effect on a subject's sense of resiliency; and
7. Outward Bound Programs can have a medium effect on a subject's sense of grit.

The findings of this study yield many implications for Outward Bound (see full report for all the details). This research can serve as a starting point for future projects to investigate how increases in character traits such as grit and resilience occur in standard OB programs. In addition, this study is a much-needed addition to the OB literature about what types of outcomes can actually be achieved in these programs. As Outward Bound is categorized as a “character education school,” this research seems to imply that the character that so many of the programs seeks to instill into

their students may in fact be possible to obtain. What is less known is the method in which these traits are actually enhanced and through what modality.

Despite issues with data collection, this study also provides important insight into if character education can be enhanced by an OB experience. The findings suggest that this is possible through programs like OB. This study validates the mission and function of OB programs around the globe who seek to instill traits like resilience, compassion, and integrity into the young people that participate. Future studies should seek to expand the list of character traits that are shown to be enhanced through these types of programs. However, Outward Bound should be validated by the findings from this project.

Although this study does indicate that levels of grit and resilience can be influenced by participation in OB programming, the scope of this project does not include the mechanism in which these variables are enhanced. Future projects should thus be undertaken to examine the methods by which students actually gain increases in levels of grit and resilience. It is hypothesized that these variables are influenced by prolonged and incremental challenges that the students must endure while on their OB course. This is suspected because of the difficult physical challenges and cooperative social nature that is provided by their OB experience, and the connection between grit and resilience to perseverance or enduring hardship. Future studies that can further explore the concepts of grit and resilience are explained in the following section.

While there is no empirical evidence inherent in this study, through his own anecdotal evidence it is believed by this researcher that grit is enhanced through programs like OB because of the systematic and daily hardships that are endured throughout the student's experience that later translate for that student into maintaining focus to complete a task lasting a month or more. For example, the learner is encouraged throughout the experience to put on their backpack and hike each day which is often difficult for the students because of their inexperience, heavy backpacks, and steep terrain where OB courses occur. Additionally, this happens within a supportive environment (the group), with access to expert resources (the instructors), and in a setting where few choices are perceived (i.e. they have to hike out of the wilderness one way or another so there is no easy escape other than enduring the hardship). Through these processes and circumstances it is believed that OB experiences or others similar experiences may contribute to the enhancement of these selected character traits in young people. It should be reiterated that, this is speculation on the part of the researcher and future projects are encouraged to seek exploration into these issues and processes.

Summation

This study is purposeful and timely as it sought to examine the non-cognitive, character education facet of Outward Bound Programs with special attention given to grit and resilience development in young people through adventure experiences. As stated, young people between the ages of 12 to 22 years-old have extremely challenging lives. They are faced with many challenges like meeting increasingly stringent academic, parental, and societal expectations. The physical, social, and emotional changes taking place during this period of transition for teenagers in particular can be nerve-racking for children, parents, and teachers. The non-cognitive skills of grit and resilience in adolescents are explored with a pre- and a post-survey in order to understand the level of improvement statistically. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are made for Outward Bound Programs and researchers who will help guide professional practice and maximize the organization's ability to enhance these types of character traits. This shift in professional

practice, staff training, and course implementation can thus support the enhancement of non-cognitive skills such as grit and resilience through Outward Bound Programs.

The findings from this study are an important step for understanding what types of character traits can be enhanced through Outward Bound programming. By investigating these variables, it is shown to be possible to increase traits like grit and resilience in young people via Outward Bound Programs. This is important for validating Outward Bound as a character education school, as well as providing insight into what role this program plays in the lives of young people. By building on this work, researchers will be able to provide clearer direction for programs that wish to increase exploration and education in specific character traits and positive character development.