



ENRICHING MENTAL TOUGHNESS AMONG THE STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper will be to enrich mental toughness among the students in higher education. Today's busy world doesn't lend itself to make much time available for quiet reflection. Create time to reflect upon the students' progress toward developing mental toughness. At the end of each day, ask the students what they've learned about their thoughts, emotions and behavior. Consider what they hope to improve upon or accomplish tomorrow. Developing mental toughness is a work in progress. There is always room for improvement, and at times this will seem more difficult than at other times. Reflecting upon their progress can reinforce their ability to reach their definition of success while living according to their values. This article presents information about mental toughness among the students.

Key words: Mental toughness, Positive Behaviour, Control, Commitment, Confidence.



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Introduction

Mental toughness refers to a set of positive psychological characteristics that have almost exclusively been studied within sport; however their potential to understand non-cognitive attributes which may be important within education are now being considered. The concept of mental toughness and its underpinning attributes are confidence, challenge, control and commitment.

Commitment refers to setting goals or targets and working hard to achieve them. Challenge refers to seeing new activities or situations as opportunities for self-development, rather than as threats. Control is divided into life control and emotional control; life control refers to feeling that we have the power to shape our own life and future, while emotion control refers to being able to manage emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger) to an appropriate level of intensity. Confidence is divided into confidence in abilities and interpersonal confidence; confidence in abilities refers to being confident to attempt new or

difficult tasks, whereas interpersonal confidence refers to levels of confidence within social situations.

Mental toughness in Education

Mental toughness attributes overlap with a number of non-cognitive attributes already demonstrated as important within education e.g., resilience, motivation, self-control, confidence. Among students, we discuss the role of these positive psychological traits across a range of educational contexts e.g., managing exam stress/anxiety, developing positive peer relationships, influences on academic attainment etc. However consider the value in studying and developing mental toughness among teachers. As a high number of teachers leave the teaching profession early in their career, often citing stress as the cause, developing mental toughness type attributes may increase retention, but perhaps more importantly, enhance teacher well-being, effectiveness and professional satisfaction.

Mental Toughness in the education sector has emerged as a highly significant factor in the development of young people. The key challenges they face and what they can do about them, particularly when approaching exams or tests.

The components of Mental Toughness appear to be positively related to certain favourable educational outcomes, including attainment, attendance, behaviour and peer relations (St Clair-Thompson et al., 2015). Studies involving athletes indicates that Mental Toughness can also be enhanced through psychological skills training.

Meaning of Mental Toughness

Mental Toughness is a mindset which determines in some part, how you perform when exposed to stressors, pressure and challenge. It can play a significant role in determining how we manage stress as well as being a key factor in enabling us to perform to the peak of our abilities.

Mental Toughness is a personality trait which determines, in some part, how individuals perform when exposed to stressors, pressure and challenge irrespective of the prevailing situation. (Clough and Strycharczyk, 2011)

Importance of Mental Toughness

Studies show that there is a clear, consistent and positive relationship between an individual's mental toughness and their

- Performance – explaining up to 25% of the variation in performance in individuals
- Positive Behaviour – more engaged, more positive, more “can do”
- Wellbeing – more contentment, better stress management , less prone to bullying
- Aspirations – more ambitious, prepared to manage more risk

Usefulness of Mental Toughness

Mental Toughness can

- Assess an individual's capacity to deal with stressful situations.
- Understand why one person succeeds where another struggles
- Develop approaches to help schools and individuals perform under pressure and respond positively to challenge
- Make better decisions about people and what they can do

Five Tips for increasing our Students' Mental Toughness

1. Struggle is Good!

If we want our students to grow up mentally strong, then they need to struggle, they have to struggle. We don't remember our easy teachers, we remember our tough ones. Are some of them over the top...of course, and we do not need to accept behavior from adult mentors that berates our students for their ability. Surround our students with teachers that give honest, and sometimes painful feedback, and we will develop mentally tough students who perform at a high level as well.

2. Let them Fail

There is a myth out there that says if our students fail, their self esteem and confidence will suffer. This is not true, especially if we help to frame the failure for our students. Researchers have shown that if we explain that failure is part of the learning process, and is actually a necessary component of achievement, then their self esteem is not affected. In fact, if the necessity to fail is explained properly, on subsequent tests children often out-perform their peers who are not told that is OK to struggle and come up short. So explain the need to fail, and create an environment where our students do not fear failure and we will see better performance from our students in the long run.

3. Praise Effort

Praising our students ability like you are so smart, you are so artistic, you are such a great one actually can be damaging to their mindset, and ultimately to their performance. Praise their effort, highlight the work they are putting into their studies, the extra hours of training, their added effort in training, etc. This is what will help our students grow tough, confident, and strong. Effort is always the key to ultimate success.

4. Strict is a Good Thing

Being a strict teacher for our students, is actually a good thing. Studies show that not only do children perform better with strict teachers, but that eventually they realize sometimes years later the benefits of having a leader who told them to do it again, do it better, is this our best effort, etc. Is our students doing better in math than in English?

Chances are the math teacher is demanding more! Surround our students with people who demand their best effort all the time. They will grow tougher, and they will appreciate it in the long run.

5. Stress is Good

Research shows that children who encounter a moderate amount of stress as they grow up actually develop resilience to stressful situations in the future. Since we cannot protect our students from difficult, stressful situations throughout their lives, why not teach them how to deal with them when they are young? Something as simple as having a difficult teacher will help our students develop the resilience necessary to live in the real world, and, when difficult situations arise in studies, perform at a high level when others around them crumble!

The process is not always easy, and can even be emotionally painful for them, as they struggle in stressful, difficult environments. Just remember that the teachers are building a sturdy foundation for our students, one to last a lifetime.

Conclusion

Becoming a mentally strong person takes practice and mindfulness. It requires tuning in to your bad habits and making a point of learning new habits to replace them. And sometimes it simply means learning to get out of your own way and let things happen. The key to mental toughness is applying consistently the traits of self motivation, positive attitude, emotional self control, calmness under fire, and being energetic and ready for action. Consistency is important. Through applying these traits day in and day out, the students will be able to reach new heights in whatever endeavors they seek in higher education.

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