

# THE PROBLEM with GRIT

## DISMANTLING DEFICIT MODELS in INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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Slides: [tinyurl.com/GritAndInfoLit](https://tinyurl.com/GritAndInfoLit) | Handout: [tinyurl.com/GritAndInfoLitHandout](https://tinyurl.com/GritAndInfoLitHandout)

LOEX 2018 | Houston, TX | 5 May 2018

# OVERVIEW

1. Deficit models of education
2. Deficit thinking and information literacy
3. Alternatives
4. Ideas and examples

Deficit models shape our approaches to information literacy and library instruction without our being aware of it. We must actively resist deficit thinking to provide meaningful education.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does deficit thinking play out within academic libraries and information literacy?
- How are these values adopted and reinscribed in information literacy instruction?
- How can we reject deficit models but encourage effort and engagement, especially for our most vulnerable students?

# DEFICIT MODELS of EDUCATION

The deficit model “posit[s] that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies...it take[s] different forms to conform to what is politically acceptable at the moment.”

- Richard R. Valencia

“Conceptualizing the Notion of Deficit Thinking,” 1997

## WHAT'S the PROBLEM?

- Ignores systemic inequalities and injustices
- Locating the problem at the individual level results in inadequate solutions
- Places the burden on students and teachers instead of those with power
- This burden falls disproportionately onto marginalized students, who often have the least support

“While we might like to believe that grit and effort can make it possible to use education to overcome adversity... rather than providing social mobility, more often than not, schools actually perpetuate the status quo.”

- Pedro Noguera

“Grit, Overemphasized Agency, Overlooked,” 2015

"Psychologists have spent decades searching for the secret of success, but Duckworth is the one who found it. . . . She not only tells us what it is, but also how to get it."  
—DANIEL GILBERT, author of *Stumbling on Happiness*

ANGELA  
DUCKWORTH

# GRIT

THE POWER *of* PASSION  
*and* PERSEVERANCE

“Grit resonates with so many people who believe in the popular American adage that if you work hard and pull yourself up by your bootstraps, you can achieve anything. This belief unfortunately assumes that individuals have the power, privilege, and access to craft their own futures, regardless of circumstance and systemic barriers.”

- Christine Yeh

“Forget Grit. Focus on Inequality,” 2017



Louisa 🌹 🍞 🌹

@LouisatheLast

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Reminder that “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” was initially a joke about an absurd, impossible thing to do, and that it is not a real thing one can do

"The term appears to have **originated** in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century United States (particularly in the phrase "pull oneself over a fence by one's **bootstraps**") to mean an absurdly impossible action, an adynaton."

[Bootstrapping - Wikipedia](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bootstrapping)

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org › wiki › Boots...](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bootstrapping)

1:40 PM - 19 Apr 2018

“Both the ‘grit’ narrative and the rugged individualism myth focus an accusatory and evaluative gaze on the individual, leaving systemic forces that control individual behavior unexamined.”

- Paul L. Thomas

“The ‘Grit’ Narrative, ‘Grit’ Research, and Codes that Blind,” 2014



**Paul Gorski**

@pgorski

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JUSTICE mindset: We stop critiquing mindsets of kids and focus on efforts of schools to be equitable and just.

**#FixInjusticeNotKids**

Mindset	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset	Innovator's Mindset
Beliefs	Abilities are innate and cannot be changed.	Abilities can be developed through practice and effort.	Abilities can be developed through practice and effort, and can be applied in new and creative ways.
Challenges	Challenges are threats to self-worth and should be avoided.	Challenges are opportunities to learn and grow.	Challenges are opportunities to learn and grow, and to apply skills in new and creative ways.
Effort	Effort is a sign of weakness and should be minimized.	Effort is a sign of strength and should be maximized.	Effort is a sign of strength and should be maximized, and used in new and creative ways.
Failure	Failure is a sign of lack of ability and should be avoided.	Failure is a sign of a need to try harder.	Failure is a sign of a need to try harder, and to apply skills in new and creative ways.
Success	Success is a sign of innate ability and should be sought.	Success is a sign of effort and should be sought.	Success is a sign of effort and should be sought, and applied in new and creative ways.

**George Couros** @gcouros

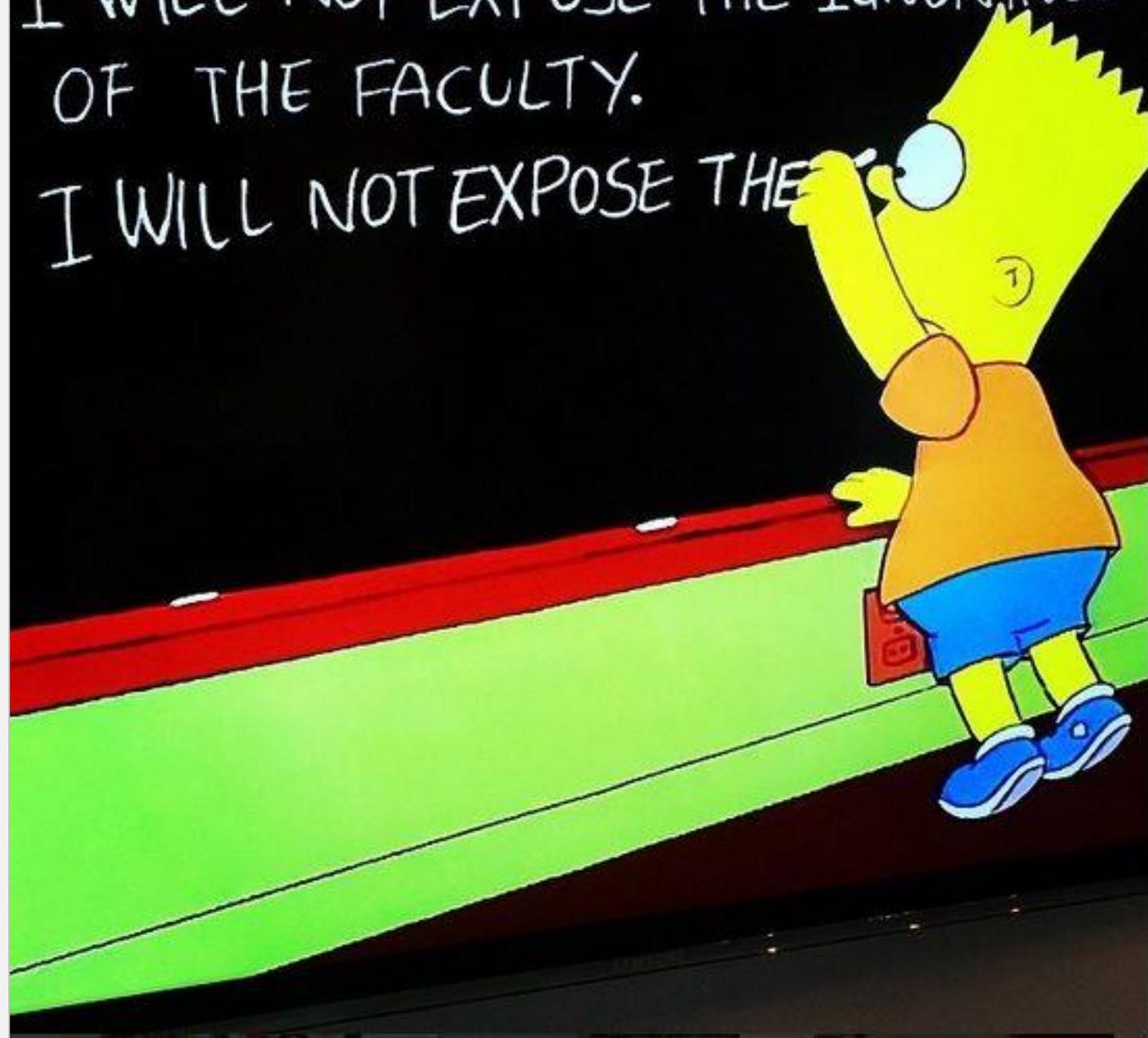
Fixed vs Growth vs #InnovatorsMindset in different situations

#IMMOOC

8:53 AM - 1 Nov 2017

I WILL NOT EXPOSE THE IGNORANCE  
OF THE FACULTY.

I WILL NOT EXPOSE THE



**Q: HOW DOES DEFICIT THINKING INFORM  
INFORMATION LITERACY?  
HOW DOES IT INFORM LIBRARY INSTRUCTION?**

**DEFICIT THINKING and  
INFORMATION LITERACY**



# What is information literacy?

CILIP defines information literacy as:

*“The ability to think critically and make balanced judgements about any information we find and use. It empowers us as citizens to reach and express informed views and to engage fully with society.”*

“The current dominant paradigm of information literacy emphasizes the importance of connecting with textual information. This produces a deficit model of information literacy which does not take into account the importance of informal learning or other sources of information which are accessed through communication or action.”

- Annemaree Lloyd

“Information Literacy: Different Contexts, Different Concepts, Different Truths?” 2005

# CLASSROOM PRACTICES

- Database demonstrations
- Lecture-focused
- Limited to academic information sources

# **Resilience: The Most Undervalued Information Literacy Disposition**

Chapter Five: Cultivating a Growth Mindset

**Making Students Gritty**

We Need a Growth Mindset for Learning Library Research



**Charleston Conf**

@chsconf

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"Libraries need a competition mindset."

[#ChsFutLab](#) [#chs17](#) [#chsconf2017](#)

6:07 PM - 6 Nov 2017

How you define a problem determines  
your solution and approach.

**Q:** WHAT DOES DEFICIT THINKING TELL US  
about INFORMATION LITERACY  
in the CASE of FAKE NEWS?

**ALTERNATIVES**

# CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY

- Asks librarians to work with their patrons and communities to co-investigate the political, social, and economic dimensions of information, including its creation, access, and use.
- Seeks to involve learners in better understanding systems of oppression while also identifying opportunities to take action upon them.

# INFORMATION PRIVILEGE and QUESTIONING ACADEMIC AUTHORITY

Explore the economics of scholarly communication and who has access to paywalled information:

- Why can't we access just any article?
- How much do you think the *Journal of* \_\_\_ costs?
- What does this mean for someone who needs articles but isn't affiliated with a university?

Have students examine search results and respond to:

- Who tends to publish on this topic?
- Whose perspectives are not represented?

## CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY

“‘Culturally sustaining’ requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence.”

- Django Paris

“Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” 2012

## CREATING COUNTER-NARRATIVES

“Asset-based approaches are not predicated on identifying assets before the educational encounter. Rather students and teachers are continually identifying and translating assets for use in the academic environment.”

- Kim L. Morrison

“Informed Asset-Based Pedagogy:  
Coming Correct, Counter-stories from an Information Literacy Classroom,” 2017

**Q: HOW CAN INSTRUCTION BE REFRAMED  
to COUNTER DEFICIT THINKING?**

# IDEAS and EXAMPLES

## ACTIVITY 1: SOURCE EVALUATION

1. Divide students into groups of 3-5
2. Assign each group an information source
  - a. Wikipedia
  - b. Google
  - c. Library catalog
  - d. Library database
3. Group answers questions about source
4. Group presents findings to classmates

## ACTIVITY I QUESTIONS

- Who wrote or contributed to this source?  
How can you tell?
- How might this particular source be useful to you?  
What are its disadvantages?
- Do you think this is a trustworthy source?  
Why or why not?
- Who can publish on this specific topic?  
Whose voice might be included or excluded?

## ACTIVITY 2: COLLABORATIVE CRITERIA

1. Divide students into groups of 3-5
2. Group writes down the 3-5 places they go most often for information in their personal lives
3. Group ranks these sources by frequency of use
4. One person from each group writes down the sources on a whiteboard

## ACTIVITY 2: COLLABORATIVE CRITERIA

- Discuss as a class: “what stands out about these lists?”
- Get back into small groups to write down 3-5 criteria they use for deciding if information is good or bad
- As a class, students suggest different criteria based on their lists
- Criteria are discussed, and ones the class agrees are useful are added to the whiteboard

I. Recognize deficit thinking when we see it

1. Recognize deficit thinking when we see it

2. Build upon the knowledge students bring  
to the classroom

1. Recognize deficit thinking when we see it

2. Build upon the knowledge students bring  
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3. Teach at the level we want students  
to learn, while recognizing differences  
in familiarity with academic cultures and  
expectations

# THANK YOU

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## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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