



CHARACTER, GRIT & RESILIENCE Pocketbook

C J Simister

Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone

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Moral and intellectual character



A helpful way to think about the different qualities we might wish to encourage is to sort them into two broad categories, though there'll always be a degree of overlap:

Moral character

Dispositions we associate with being
'a good person',
eg: kindness, fairness, gratitude,
integrity, responsibility, patience
and humility.

Intellectual character

Attributes that help you to be
'a good learner',
eg: persistence, curiosity, good
judgement, originality, initiative
and collaboration.

Nineteenth century educationalist Horace Mann said:

'Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day, and at last we cannot break it.'

This book focuses mostly on weaving the threads of *intellectual* character, but if you choose to combine this with moral character, many of the same principles will apply.

A character checklist



When working in schools, I use the following 14 Future-Smart® dispositions as a starting point for exploring **intellectual character**.

- 1 Collaboration – working productively and fairly with others.
- 2 Curiosity – asking questions, investigating, exploring and seeking understanding.
- 3 Drive – aiming high, setting goals, being conscientious and putting in lots of effort.
- 4 Empathy – understanding others' feelings and points of view.
- 5 Flexibility of mind – being 'porous': open to new evidence, ideas and arguments.
- 6 Focus – concentrating, avoiding distraction and being careful, accurate and thorough.
- 7 Good judgement – the 'stop and think' factor; using reason and thinking critically.

A character checklist



- 8 Initiative – being independently minded, resourceful and strategic.
- 9 Originality – generating ideas, making connections, approaching problems creatively.
- 10 Persistence – having the self-discipline, grit and determination to stick with a challenge.
- 11 Reflectiveness – being willing to review and learn from experience.
- 12 Resilience – dealing positively with mishap, disappointment and failure.
- 13 Risk taking – stepping out of your comfort zone to push yourself and try new things.
- 14 Self-assurance – believing in your ability to manage a range of situations.

More detailed definitions can be found at: www.cjsimister.com/FutureSmart/Future-Smart.html

Grit – an equation for success



Professor Angela Duckworth's work suggests that **grit** may have a particularly powerful role to play in predicting a person's success – both at school (where some say it outstrips IQ as an indicator of academic achievement) and beyond.

If you were writing an equation for grit, it might look like this:

$$\begin{array}{l} \textbf{Self control} \\ \text{the ability to put} \\ \text{temptation aside} \\ \text{in favour of} \\ \text{longer-term aims} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} \textbf{Direction} \\ \text{a goal that} \\ \text{you really,} \\ \text{really want} \\ \text{to achieve} \end{array} + \begin{array}{l} \textbf{Dedication} \\ \text{the motivation} \\ \text{and drive to} \\ \text{commit} \end{array} = \textbf{Grit}$$

In short, grit is perseverance with passion and a longer-term spin.

The R Factor



Resilience is like a celebrity disposition: it's well-known, everyone is intrigued to find out more about it, and it's in demand. For good reason. How many of your pupils:

- Deal positively with stress, challenge and set-backs?
- Learn from difficult experiences and don't take failure too much to heart?
- Are proactive in taking corrective steps and seeking new courses of action?

If the answer is '*not as many as I'd like*', you're not alone. Resilience is complex. Better seen as a developmental process than a single disposition, it's the *product* of a range of other traits: persistence, flexibility of mind, reflectiveness, optimism, humour and so on. If you learn to exercise these, you're more likely to be resilient when times are hard.

We'll cover both grit and resilience in more depth later in the book. For now, we'll start with an integrated approach to developing a broad range of character qualities.



The achievement conundrum



Exploring character with your pupils is like uncovering a set of powerful secrets: ways in which they can flourish and do well at school and beyond – achievable goals which may before have been much more apparent to some than to others.

However, as John Hattie notes in *Visible Learning*, his comprehensive investigation into what works in schools, while these personal qualities are likely to *feed into* higher achievement in school, they can't be guaranteed to *result from* it. This may go a long way to explain why children who do best at school aren't always the ones who go on to do best at university and in their careers. To put it another way:

'You can get all A's but you can still flunk life.'
Walker Percy

Hattie concludes that *'such dispositions need planned interventions'*.



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About the author

C J Simister



C J Simister has spent many years gathering and developing a huge range of innovative techniques that teachers and parents can use to help young people develop the intellectual qualities and skills needed to thrive and succeed in school and beyond.

With a degree in Economics from Cambridge University and almost 20 years of teaching experience behind her, she now advises schools around the world, helping them to become Future-Smart[®]. Her focus is on supporting teachers with simple, effective and inspiring ideas and her training sessions are packed full of lively activities, teaching strategies and examples from the many schools with which she has worked.

C J Simister has written two other books, is a regular speaker at UK and international conferences and has presented at events alongside Professors Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth. In 2011, she was selected by the National Association of Gifted Children as their 'Inspiring Person of the Year'.

More information and contact details can be found on her website www.cjsimister.com