



Dr Lucy Hone

THE VIRTUES OF 'GRIT'

Dr Lucy Hone is a widely published writer on topics such as resilience, grief, and coping strategies. Her regular columns appear in publications including *stuff.co.nz* and the *Sunday Star Times*, and she's director of the New Zealand Institute of Wellbeing and Resilience. Dr Hone talks about 'grit', and the importance of patience and perseverance in success.

A decade ago I wrote an article for *North & South* extolling the virtues of cricket. Taking part in a game that unfolds over hours – and, at the professional level, days – teaches our tamariki that good things sometimes take time. As a parent I regarded the somewhat unglamorous game of children's cricket as the 'slow food of sport' – a rare opportunity to teach our children the art and value of patience in a fast-paced world where instant gratification has come to rule.

I've long been intrigued by the findings following on from Walter Mischel's famous marshmallow experiment, whereby those children demonstrating the capacity for delayed gratification as four to six year olds went on to experience better outcomes on a range of variables in later life, including their academic test scores and ability to cope with stress.

More recently, I've been delving deeper into the topics of self-control and 'grit' through the work of Angela Duckworth, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. Defining grit as "passion and perseverance for very long term goals", Duckworth's studies suggest that an individual's grit is more strongly predictive of academic achievement than their IQ.

Whether she was studying naval cadets from West Point Military Academy, children participating in the National Spelling Bee competition, or students from a wide variety of schools, the same pattern emerged: grit was the key factor determining success.

Grit, the book she wrote summarising the findings of her studies and other research relating to grit,

became an overnight publishing sensation in America, reflecting a growing appreciation of the importance of considering learning from a motivational perspective.

While I'm not personally a huge fan of the term 'grit' – finding it perhaps too American in a gun-slinging John Wayne-esque kind of way – I have become fascinated by the topic of perseverance and the mechanisms through which we can stay motivated to achieve our goals over time, and despite obstacles.

In my opinion, too much emphasis is still put on the limited remit of 'goal setting' in our schools, with insufficient attention applied to the all-important related area of 'goal planning'. Here I find Rick Snyder and Shane Lopez's hope theory a useful addition to traditional pedagogy, emphasising as it does the importance of both the *will power* and the *way power* aspects of our goals.

Will power concerns agency thinking ('why is this goal important to me?'; 'what will motivate me to go the distance?') while way power refers to pathways thinking (the perceived capacity to find routes to desired goals by anticipating obstacles we may encounter and envisaging strategies to find a way around them). I'd love to see schools introduce these conversations into their student planning meetings next year.

Likewise, useful recent additions to the literature have been Caroline Adams-Miller's *Getting Grit* and Caren Baruch-Feldman's *The Grit Guide for Teens*.

The Baruch-Feldman workbook, particularly, makes a worthwhile addition to any secondary school's

teaching resources for the way it provides students with research-based scientific strategies shown to enhance self-control (situation selection, situation modification, selective attention, cognitive change and response modulation) and draws attention to the areas of their life where they already demonstrate passion and perseverance, asking how can you build on that? It's written for teens and encourages them to consider grit across five distinct life domains – academic grit, social/relationship grit, health grit, extracurricular grit, and emotional grit.

Ultimately, we all do better when we set ourselves up for success, identifying obstacles and planning for alternatives. Let's dedicate more time to understanding what motivates our students, to the *way power* that will help them navigate their way around obstacles, to identifying the strengths and self-efficacy that has enabled past successes, to sharing with them the neuroscience indicating their brains' ability to learn new things and master new skills, and to helping them identify the strategies underlying success in one life domain and then consider how these might transfer to support goals in other areas. Let's notice where they do demonstrate grit in their current lives and build on the ingredients of that.

Dr Lucy Hone, a research associate at AUT University, will be a keynote speaker at the Positive Education New Zealand conference on 6–7 April 2018. ★

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