

# ‘Grit’, Governmentality & the Erasure of Inequality? The Curious Rise of Character Education Policy

A BSA Sociology of Education Study Group One-Day Conference  
in association with Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King’s  
College London and the School of Sociology and Social Policy,  
University of Leeds

Monday 11 July 2016,  
King’s College London

## Call for Papers

Over the past five years, there has been a growing interest and investment in ‘character’ education. A growing number of policy initiatives and reports have asserted the importance of nurturing character in children and young people – with qualities such as ‘grit’, ‘optimism’, ‘resilience’, ‘zest’, and ‘bouncebackability’ located as preparing young people for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and enabling social mobility. This includes the Department for Education’s multi-million pound package of measures to help schools ‘instil character in pupils’ and the ‘All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility’ *Character and Resilience Manifesto*. The positioning of character education as a panacea to social and educational inequality has coincided with policies promoting ‘resilience’ in areas as diverse as health and housing to employment and welfare. It is notable that the policy traction of these terms has emerged against a backdrop of austerity in which programmes of welfare reform and continuing economic uncertainty have seen rising poverty levels among children and young people, and in which political rhetoric has explained poverty as resulting from behavioral and moral deficiencies rather than the structural inequalities unleashed by neoliberal capitalism.

This one-day conference organized by Dr Anna Bull and Dr Kim Allen will bring together researchers to critically discuss this policy agenda. It will attempt to unravel how and why it has emerged and at this particular moment, and consider its implications. The day is designed to enable a critical, participatory and collective dialogue with a series of plenary panels and break-out discussion groups. Invited speakers include: **Dr Janet Batsleer** (Principal Lecturer in Youth and Community Work; Manchester Metropolitan University) and **Professor Val Gillies** (Visiting Professor, Sociology, Goldsmiths).

We invite proposals for short papers of up to 15 minutes on themes including but not restricted to:

Character education and social class	Music, sports and arts education
Military education and character	Religion, spirituality and character virtues
Policy actors/ policy ‘evidence’/ genealogies of character education	Character education, early years intervention and the ‘troubled families’ programme
Survivalist cultural narratives: resilience and character in the cultural sphere	‘Knightly virtues’: gender and character education

We welcome papers from researchers from across the career stage and located in a diverse range of fields including Sociology, Education, Social Policy, Youth Studies and Youth Work; Cultural Studies; History; Politics; Classics and Philosophy.

Deadline for abstracts **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2016**. Please send your abstracts (up to 250 words with your email and institutional affiliation) to: [anna.bull@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:anna.bull@kcl.ac.uk) Please direct enquiries to Anna Bull ([anna.bull@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:anna.bull@kcl.ac.uk)) or Kim Allen ([k.allen1@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:k.allen1@leeds.ac.uk)) There will be a small registration fee for attendance (Reduced rate for BSA members). Registration will open at the end of April.



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