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# INTRODUCTION

Twenty-five hundred years ago, Socrates defined education as helping students gain both knowledge and virtue, to become both smart and good. In recent decades schools sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously have lost their focus on this historic mission. Now, however, educators are being called back to help children gain the virtues, the embedded habits, which constitute good character. Often those calling for character education are parents. Increasingly, they are politicians articulating the will of worried citizens. A few scholars have recognised the current lack in our schools and have become champions for character education. While these voices have been articulate in pointing out the problems of a value-neutral school or a school that rejects responsibility for character formation, these voices are limited. They lack the knowledge of and experience with the instructional issues surrounding this topic. They do not speak to the real world of schools. The authors of this book possess that knowledge and experience.

John Heidel and Marion Lyman-Mersereau have written a book that takes character education to a new level, a level that enables teachers and administrators to go beyond the abstract into that real world of their classrooms and their schools. *Character Education* is based on the authors' action research project at the Punahou School in Hawaii.

The book reflects a complete plan for engaging a school community in the mission of character development. Central to their work and to the organisation of the book is a school-wide, monthly focus on a particular virtue, such as respect or courage. In this, they are addressing one of the core problems with school's efforts to respond to the call for character education. Educators have frequently replaced the language of moral values and virtue with the language of psychology. Cheating is referred to as 'inappropriate behaviour' rather than 'wrong.' The goal has been 'student development' and 'adjustment,' but development *into what* and adjustment *to what* has been left vague or unstated. This book and the program it offers educators, while on the one hand being new and fresh, returns us to an older, richer language system, one based on views of human excellence.

Over a two-year cycle, students are introduced to a deeper meaning of common words, such as loyalty, commitment and wisdom. It is here that the authors' gifts as educators become apparent. Students are not simply told the meaning of these virtue words. They are immersed in them. During the months that a particular word is being studied, each day there is a new activity which will give them greater experience and thus deeper understanding of the concept behind the word. Activities range from journal writing to a structured conversation with parents, from creating a poster about the virtue to listing ways students can practise the virtue in their everyday lives.

One of the most plaguing problems of education is the continuing search for 'the one right way': the one right way to teach reading, the one right way to evaluate student performance, the one right way to discipline students. As character education is again becoming a concern of educators, this same one-right-way mentality is becoming evident. The authors of *Character Education* take a very different approach, one that recognises that children have very different ways of learning and that the best way to master something is to acquire it in several different learning modes. Therefore, the book offers students and teachers a rich reservoir of stories, sayings, and biographical sketches, which together bring out the depth of these concepts and show how they exist in a human life.

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# Respect



## SUPPORTIVE VALUES

**Acceptance • Kindness**

## DEFINITIONS

**Treating everyone including yourself with dignity.**

“**Respect** means showing regard for the worth of someone or something. It includes respect for self, respect for the rights and dignity of all persons, and respect for the environment that sustains all life. Respect is the restraining side of morality; it keeps us from hurting what we ought to value.” (Thomas Lickona) Mutual respect is the way we create a harmonious life with each other; respect is freely given to others and must be earned for oneself.

**Acceptance** is the approval of a person’s worth and agreement with others’ individual rights. Tolerance is often listed as an important value, but we have not included it because of the negative connotation of ‘putting up with someone.’ Acceptance goes much further. We acknowledge a person’s right to disagree with us and we accept their opinion as valid.

**Kindness** is an expression of love and respect. Kindness puts our feelings of respect into action through words of acceptance, encouragement and support, and through acts of comfort, help and generosity.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Why is it important to be courteous to each other? Are you courteous to teachers, shop attendants, people you meet, everyone?
- Why are table manners important? What are good table manners?
- What have you done in the last two days that indicates your respect for the earth?
- What are some examples of self-respect?
- Why are cleanliness, exercise, healthy eating, language, and everyday manners considered signs of self-respect?
- How is common courtesy a sign of our respect for others? What are some everyday examples?
- What are some examples of respecting the property of others? (no vandalism, no graffiti, turning in a lost wallet, taking care of something you borrow)
- What are the qualities you look for or expect from a good friend? Do these qualities describe a person who is following The Golden Rule (See page 17)?
- What are some examples of not following The Golden Rule with others, especially those who aren't our best friends? (gossip, stealing, putting others down, sarcasm)
- What are some examples from current events of people not being accepted because of their race, religion, or gender?
- Why is littering such a problem today? How can it be improved?