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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.

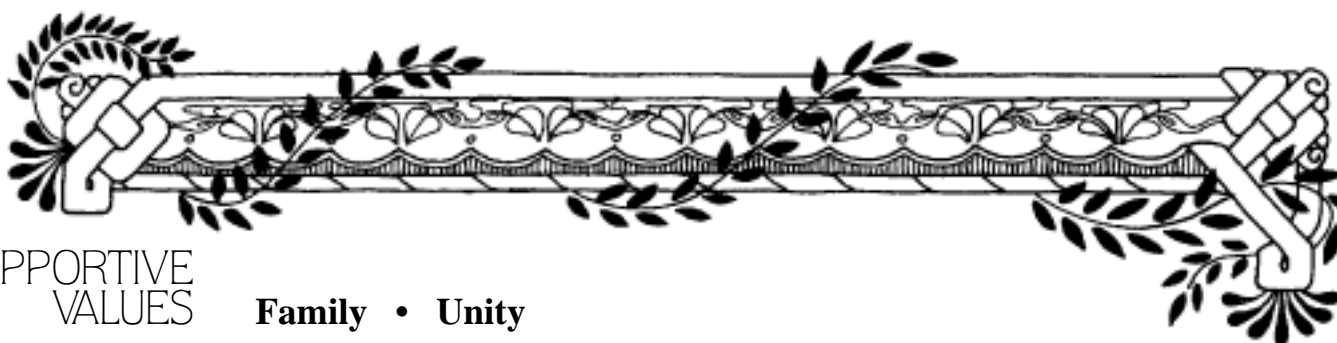
The book reflects a complete plan for engaging a school community in the mission of character development. Central to their work and to the organisation of the book is a school-wide, monthly focus on a particular virtue, such as respect or courage. In this, they are addressing one of the core problems 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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Cooperation



SUPPORTIVE VALUES

Family • Unity

DEFINITIONS

Common effort of a group for their mutual benefit.

‘There is no ‘I’ in team.’ ‘United we stand, divided we fall.’ ‘No man is an island.’ If all of these statements relate to the importance of cooperation, to the idea that we live interdependently, it is then necessary that we do so as effectively as possible. **Cooperation** is as much a cornerstone of this country as is independence, and both values, as paradoxical as it seems, are highly honoured in our society.

Family is commonly defined as a group of people who share common ancestors. In a broader sense, family can also include all people everywhere, by virtue of our common link as human beings. Montaigne said, “Every man beareth the stamp of the whole human condition.” The nuclear family, extended family, and the family of humanity are the focus of the partner value, family.

Unity connotes oneness. Unity is what is required for cooperation and for a well-functioning family.

PURPOSE

As our world becomes smaller, as a result of mass communication and our networking technology, we are becoming more aware of how necessary it is, for our own survival, to work with other people cooperatively. Competition has long been the driving force of our democratic society; yet if we look at the history of civilisation we see that it was cooperative effort which created and continues to sustain communities everywhere.

‘The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,’ speaks of the importance and the strength derived from unity. We also know that in creating a team, or a unified effort of any kind, it is wiser to stay together than stand as individuals.

The importance of understanding that we are interconnected with our environment, as well as interdependent with humanity, is an understanding without which we cannot survive as a species. The demand for cooperation in the world is obvious and has already affected the way most educators conduct classes. The rewards of cooperation are numerous; as students move out of their sometimes self-centred moulds and work with others, they reinforce many of the preceding values, which are inherent in the cooperative process.

STORIES AND THOUGHTS FROM SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS**Hinduism**

The joys of liberation are for then, the joys of a loving family are for now.

– *Tradition*

Never may brother hate brother or sister hurt sister. United in heart and in purpose, commune sweetly together.

– *Atharva Veda*

Buddhism

Cooperation comes through realising the interdependence of all living beings.

Once there were four friends: an elephant, a rabbit, a monkey, and a bird. Each of them looked enviously at the ripe mango fruits high on the treetops. They each in turn tried with all their might to get to the fruits hanging on the branches, but the fruits were too high to reach. Finally, they hit upon a plan. With a little cooperation, they could all eat their fill. First, the elephant stood sturdily at the base of the tree. Then the monkey helped the rabbit climb up on the elephant's back. Then the monkey leapt up and stood on the rabbit's back. And finally the bird perched on the monkey's back. Collaborating like this, the four friends were able to pluck one ripe mango after the other and pass them along until everyone got to eat as many mangoes as they liked!

Zen Buddhism

Water is known as H₂O. It consists of the mixture of hydrogen and oxygen at the ratio of two to one. However, it is impossible for us to drink only the oxygen or the hydrogen part of water. They say that the bird named hamsaraja is capable of separating water from milk and drinking on the concentrated milk. We human beings, however, cannot perform such a feat. The analysis of human beings in terms of individuals, classes, or races certainly serves to deepen our view of human beings. However, the one-sided emphasis on any particular one of the above groups with the exclusion of others is undesirable. There is no other way to reward such men of inflexible thought than by commanding them to drink the hydrogen component of water alone, if indeed they can.