



Friday 28 July 2000

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
Suite R1 116 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir

I attach my submission to the *Inquiry into the Education of Boys*.

I would welcome the opportunity to address the committee personally. As the Headmaster of a boys' school with much expertise in working closely with parents, in employing comprehensive character education programs, and in fostering high levels of academic performance (median Year 12 student UAI score >80 for the past years) without the benefits of academic selectivity, I believe I have useful insights to share with the committee.

Furthermore, I have written extensively on virtue education, and spoken at several national conferences on the topic. I believe this material to be very relevant to the terms of the inquiry.

I would be grateful if you would bring these suggestions to the attention of the chair of the committee, Dr Brendan Nelson MP.

Yours sincerely

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Submission

**Inquiry into the Education of Boys
July 2000**

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Appendix I Ten reasons for the declining prestige of fatherhood. (Taken from my draft manuscript of *Classic Fathers*, which draws on primary evidence in classical times arguing that the prestige of fatherhood has declined, and that we have departed from the virtue based model of upbringing.

Appendix II “*Teaching Virtues: the Theory and the Practice*”, a paper delivered at the 2000 AHISA national pastoral care conference.

Appendix III Presentation to the *Leadership in Boys’ Education Conference*. Newcastle 1999.

Appendix IV **The Spalding Method** for teaching literacy and the experience gained by Redfield College in its use with boys in Years 2-6.

1. Rationale

I regard the fundamental problems in the education of boys at present in Australia to be first, the lack of effective models of character education, and second, the difficulties faced by fathers in providing the necessary role modelling. I argue that the very significant problems boys face in the classroom and in their socialization stem from these two deficits.

This submission argues that, for 2500 years, education in the development of good habits, or virtues, has been seen as the path to building a character that is strong and self directing, but that this vision has been largely lost.

The submission proceeds to present a vision of schools which can provide effective support for parents in the character education of boys. I argue also that schools are ideally placed to provide fathers with urgently needed input to help them be more effective.

In conclusion, some comments are made about Spalding literacy program in the Redfield College primary school which is proving very effective.

2. Strengths of character are the key to happiness and to many of the present challenges facing adolescents.

It is not surprisingly that boys' education is in the public forum. So many conferences on the topic, books written and strategies put forward, and several parliamentary enquiries held or being held. Higher rates of self harm, depression, substance abuse, precocious sexuality, expulsions and criminal activity, and lower levels of literacy and HSC performance indicate boys are at a significant disadvantage as a group in our society compared with girls. Australian statistics are amongst the most alarming rates world wide. The statistics are exhaustive and none seem to be improving. Eighty percent of drug deaths are male. A teenage boy has three times the death risk of a teenage girl. And so on.

The present crisis in raising boys indicates that our methods of raising children have, for complex reasons, lost much of their effectiveness. The reasons include, I suggest, an over emphasis on what we could call "micro parenting" at the expense of raising children with a clear set of aims and goals in mind. Much of the current "know-how" in raising children has become myopically focused on the immediate and short term. ... how to have a happy child (not how to raise a happy adult), how to avoid tantrums, how to talk to an adolescent, how to change a nappy. All these things are important, but they are, by no means, the complete picture.

Yet in Western society since Socrates (d. 399BC), a period of 2400 years, there has been an unbroken tradition of agreement, a universal model for character development. Virtues, good habits, have been regarded as an essential key to character. Studies of other major cultures and civilisations affirm the same thing. An understanding of virtues has become part of the common heritage of mankind. It would be the height of either ignorance or arrogance, for anyone to suggest growth through virtue development to be just one more opinion about the way a human being ought to mature.

This big picture has now been largely lost. Virtues have been traditionally regarded as the foundation for good deeds and a good life. "*Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good... habits of mind, habits of heart, and habits of action*" Dr Thomas Lickona, of State University of New York, writes in *Educating for Character* (1991, Bantam). Yet few modern parenting books take this approach; few discuss fostering good habits in any systematic way; very few use the word, or the concept, "virtue".

Few people now will overtly aim to raise children of virtue, *good* children, as if *good* were not in the best interests of the child itself. But *good* is a moral term, and morals are defensible on rational grounds. Often this extremely important point is misunderstood. Based on the mistaken impression that *good* is first of all a "religious" evaluation, many parents and educators avoid using it, or aiming for it. Consequently, in a society that is becoming increasingly secularised, the rationally defensible ultimate goal of parenting, to

learn to live a moral life, to be raised to value and aspire to moral goodness, has been dismissed. Parenting has lost its universal standard.

And just as seriously, our society has forgotten what brings happiness. The link between virtue and happiness has broken. Beautiful documents exist from many other cultures, books and letters written from fathers to sons, outlining the need to live a moral life if one is to be happy. For example, Aristotle wrote for his son one of the great texts of civilisation, the great *Nicomachean Ethics*. The general argument of the work may be summarised in once sentence: “*Happiness is the reward of virtue.*”¹ The Roman Cato left very practical moral guidelines for his son. Cicero wrote *De Officiis* for his son, a practical yet inspiring manual for moral behaviour, based on a case study method. The great Middle Kingdom scribe ‘Eny, in Ancient Egypt, dedicated a long poem of moral advice to his son which commences:

*Behold I give you these useful counsels,
For you to ponder in your heart;
Do them and you will be happy, (my emphasis)
All evils will be far from you.*

All these texts from the pre-Christian era argued unashamedly for a moral code and that on fulfilment of this code depended happiness in life. Countless similar texts are available from the Christian era.

The paths of false pursuit of happiness in our modern societies are well documented... escapism into drugs, into selfish greed and materialism, or to indulgent hedonism at the expense of lasting relationships, etc. It is urgent that we attempt to restore terms like *virtue, morality, character*, back into the vocabulary of parenting.

In simple ignorance of this great heritage, most of Australia’s schools in these decades at the end of the twentieth century are not focusing on building virtue. Schools are restricting themselves to what could loosely be termed academic matters... the three Rs and UAIs, forming the mind, building some practical skills, and most importantly scoring as high as possible on exams which, when all is said and done, will have only a degree of relevance to the later lives of many of the students. Without question there is some overlap here with a virtue building approach, but without a clear understanding of how schools can enhance the pivotal role of parents in building virtue, both will be much reduced in effectiveness.

3. It is a question of internalising reasonable social expectations.

The Hills District of Sydney has normal urban challenges for young persons: drugs on sale at the mall and on station platforms, unsupervised parties, kids on the street after midnight, negative peer behaviours, and so on. How should we react to this?

One temptation in the face of youth lawlessness can be to resort to harsher punishments which may well produce some short term benefit. Should the police be the ones to solve this? Legislation can’t solve upbringing issues. We need to be raising strong-willed young people who have a keen sense of right and wrong. We need to focus on raising good kids who carry their convictions within, not in their criminal records.

Confucius spoke out against the danger of using laws and punishments to maintain order. He said, “*If laws and punishment are used to maintain order, people will try to avoid the punishment and have no sense of shame if they do what the law prohibits.*” By shame he means a sensitive response to what is right and wrong, what some might call “conscience”.

He added, “*If they are governed by virtue (good habits), and if rules of propriety (accepted standards of behaviour) are used to maintain public order, they will have a sense of shame and will become good as well.*”

¹ Aristotle.1099b16

Confucius is saying that the laws must be internalised. If rules remain someone else's rules, one does not put one's heart into them. If we have been raised according to certain principles that have, from our first awareness, been part of our home life we are more likely to live by these groundrules.

Can this translate into third millennium parenting? Kids need the same good habits that they always did. We should be starting with the four classical virtues which address the potencies of the intellect, self mastery, responsibility to others and toughness to follow one's convictions in life: the habits of sound judgement, self control, justice, and fortitude. Kids who are raised in homes where their mums and dads use every opportunity to model these virtues and behaviours are less likely to end up doing drugs in the mall.

This is not wishful thinking. A landmark and major longitudinal youth study by Michael Resnick published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1997 demonstrated that children raised in homes where they learn strong moral principles are less likely to get into drugs, binge drinking, sexual promiscuity, and self harming behaviours. This study is now being quoted by some of Australia's foremost authorities on adolescent health, for example by Michael Carr-Gregg. We need to think about this. The conclusions are profound.

A national culture shift is needed. Character education based on the continuous experience of 2500 years of civilisation must return to the agenda.

4. Good habits, or virtues are best learned in the pre-teen years.

It is only when problems are already manifesting, after adolescence has begun, that so many of the current approaches kick in. The *Leadership in Boys' Education Conference* in 1999 at University of Newcastle, featured many papers from educators, all with strategies to help boys. But the focus of the papers was almost exclusively on the teenage years: strategies in secondary English classes, training for staff to recognise children at risk, leadership programs, self esteem programs, strategies that create "boy-friendly schools" and so on.

Strategies during the teenage years are essentially bandaiding. While bandaids will always be needed and should be used, such strategies do not go to the causes of the problems; they only address the symptoms and help the child at risk. These approaches do little to prevent the thousands upon thousands of other children who will end up in similar predicaments.

Why do we wait till adolescence to act when it is through his strengths of character that a boy will survive a challenging adolescence. Kids need strong characters today more than ever. A major blindspot in boys' education is that we have forgotten that good habits are much more easily learned when one is younger, in pre-adolescent years, be they habits of reading, or habits of respect for others.

The strengths of character that may well make a difference in a moment of crisis are best learned in the years of infancy and childhood, not of adolescence. When a young man gets knocked off balance by peer influences or other pressures, this indicates he lacked the inner strength to hold his own course. In other words, an actual *cause* of teenage vulnerability can often be deficiencies of character in the young person himself.

This was apparent to the Greeks and Romans and from those cultures entered our mainstream Western tradition. Aristotle wrote: "*Good habits formed in childhood make all the difference*"². Before him Plato had written: "*The beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender child. For that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.*"³ Later the Romans picked up the same principles: "*And we are by nature most tenacious of childish impressions, just as the flavour first absorbed by vessels when new persists, and the colour imparted by dyes to the primitive whiteness of the wool is indelible. Further it is the worst impressions that are most durable. For while what is good readily deteriorates, you will never turn vice into virtue.*"⁴ The poet Horace noted simply: "*A young person's character is like wax for the growth of bad habits.*"

² Aristotle 1103b

³ Plato *Republic* Bk 1

⁴ Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria*, I, i, 1-7 (trans HE Butler)

We know that we, as adults, can find it hard to turn around certain ways of responding to people or certain eating behaviours, etc. In a similar fashion, it is already late for teenagers to change or acquire new habits. Try teaching your teenager to be tidy. My observation is that it can be all but impossible for a fourteen year old boy without study habits to develop them without the most resolute determination. Most boys of that age cannot harness such determination, nor will not wear the close management and supervision required to bring them back on track.

We need a national focus on character education in childhood years, and within the terms of this committee's work, a national focus on the character education of boys. I recently read some words from Senator Newman: "*parents... want to be able to help themselves. They like the idea of acquiring skills before difficulties arise in bringing up children.*" Apparently as a consequence of *To Have and To Hold*, the 1998 Parliamentary report, a National Marriage and Family Council is to be set up with the role of improving relationships education, and of overseeing trials of pre-marriage education programs. This is a step in the right direction but now we must extend comprehensively the program from relationships into the skills of parenting themselves, and we need to find effective mechanisms for the widespread delivery of these programs... to parents of young children and, perhaps more importantly, to future parents.

5. We need to recognise that fathers are the most effective role models for their sons, and give them every support to do so.

Another cause of vulnerability is the lack of impact of the positive male role models in the life of a young man. Many studies are showing this, for example, the groundbreaking book "*Fatherless America*" documented this phenomenon. Australian writers also note the same problem. Steve Biddulph says bluntly, "*We live in the most underfathered era in mankind's history.*" Jocelyn Newman and Kevin Andrews also wrote, in *Family Matters*, about recent evidence of the deleterious effects of domestic discord, and broken marriages, on children's upbringing.

However publicity continues to be drawn by studies that would have us believe that children are not disadvantaged if they have been raised by a single mum (or a single dad). Such studies, despite all their statistical methodologies, ignore simple logic. Such conclusions would have us believe that, across our society, the impact of fathers (or of mothers in the second case) provide no value added! Dads may well be more ineffective in this era than in any other, but more ineffective does not equal totally ineffective. Nobody disputes that single mums and single dads can do a successful job in raising their kids. Of course they can, but it's much harder. All we presently know about youth self harm in Australia insists that home discord is a major risk factor. The experience of every teacher in Sydney's Mount Druitt schools is that the abnormally high levels of homes in crisis in the region completely colour all aspects of school life. On my first day in Mount Druitt in 1979, the Headmaster addressed new staff and his first words were, "*Realise that 80% of the families here are in crisis and this effects everything we do.*" To assert this would not be the case is nothing but ideology obscuring reality.

It is also reasonable to suggest that fathers are the natural role models for their sons. From their fathers, boys should be learning what it "means" to be a man... not the ancient 'macho' nonsense, but lifeskills: fidelity to one's family, resilience before difficulties, respect for all women, work as service, etc. It is an axiom of human existence that we imitate those we admire. Yet in teenage years, in many homes, dad and his fifteen year old son are not particularly close mates. Sometimes both have even stopped trying.

Take this further. Many Australian dads grew up in the fifties and sixties when the "generation gap" was already alive and well. They too did not relate well to their dads; now they, as dads, are living out the same image of fathers they saw in their own homes. A recent survey of all secondary boys in my school demonstrated that in the opinion of the boys themselves they do not communicate as well with their fathers as they do with their mothers. It would be interesting if this finding held across Australian society. The song *Cat's in the Cradle* is far too close to the bone.

How do we change this? Sadly, once a father-son gulf has opened, it is very difficult to close it in the short term. It is much easier to stop the gap opening. Fathering skills can be learned... but who is teaching them? If

we do not support fathers to be the best fathers they can be, of course kids are going to reach adulthood short on the character they will need to be strong and happy in life.

Last year millions of dollars of parenting supplements were inserted in Sunday papers. But to what effect? Excellent supplements in themselves, but as one-offs, they were hopelessly inadequate. Skills are not acquired by reading. Blind Freddy knows that. Sunday paper inserts "*How to be a good father*" are not the most effective way to deliver parenting support. But schools have a line to 95% of the fathers of younger children in this country, and we must be finding ever-new ways to utilise this open line to fathers.

6. The role of schools

Every school across our nation has a line into the hundreds of homes of its students. This line can be utilised to give parents the support they need to become better, more effective parents. Senator Jocelyn Newman, the Minister for Family and Community Services, wrote recently, flagging a National Families Policy: "*The rate of marriage breakdown, youth suicide, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, unemployment, and school drop-out are all too high.*" Yet as a nation, we are not wiring the school-home network to address these issues. There is neither the funding nor the vision to make the connection. But the reality is that no other support network for parents exists with this potential.

There is a tendency for anyone in management to rely on "*solution by decree*". Politicians are no exception. The Commonwealth Government responds to social problems by convening committees to draft policies with complex flow charts and appendices. One fears they will remain on the bookshelves of bureaucrats. Recently we have seen a *National Drug Education Strategy*, a *National Strategy for Health Promoting Schools*, National Frameworks for drug, alcohol, and HIV education. The list goes on.

There is no question that all effective action needs guiding policy, but it is also true that socio/educational policy, if it does not empower parents, is fundamentally flawed. For example, *Talking Sexual Health: A National Framework for Education in Secondary Schools about STDs, HIV/AIDS and Blood Born Viruses* describes "parents/care givers and elders as the primary educators of sexuality" but gives little impetus to the need to equip them or motivate them to do this. Almost in its totality, the document focuses on school curriculum, school policy, professional development of the professionals and student welfare. The *National Drug Education Strategy* similarly marginalises parents.

In general we have no method in our society of delivering education in sound parenting practices across the population. How can schools help?

The parent body is *bonded* to its school, often linking in individual families for ten years or more. This is a perfect context in which to deliver ongoing, skills-based, programs. Schools draw together a wide community with tremendous experience in rearing children... all this too can be brought into play. Furthermore, effective school administrators know their students, and know the parents of their students, and are thus well placed to respond to their needs. Also, schools have access to the parents of younger children and can provide critical and timely input. All that is needed is the vision and a will to budget accordingly.

Many schools already have experience in these areas. For example, some bring in guest speakers or constitute panels of experienced parents, others run nights combining curriculum and parenting input, others take on the big issues... drug education for example, through high profile input, others prefer ongoing case studies to build skills in parenting, and still others prefer to build the skills of a core group of parents in each class so that they can assist at a grass roots level. In each case it has been a matter of drawing up a parenting curriculum and giving a member of staff the wherewithal to implement it.

Last term in my school we held two major parent functions. I will describe some discoveries at the night for secondary parents, which focused on parent-adolescent child communication. Our experience illustrates the potential of nights such as these.

We wanted parents as active participants in the proceedings. The evening was to involve a plenary session and smaller group discussions inspired by readings. We sent the readings home beforehand asking parents

to select a discussion group. Prior to the evening we briefed parents who were to moderate these groups. Also, at the suggestion of the planning committee of parents, we gathered raw data in an anonymous survey of all our secondary students. Hugh McKay would have been proud of us.

The survey results gave us all much to think about. It was clear many dads needed to lift their game. Often boys would write that they felt the biggest obstacle to talking with dad was that he comes home from work “stressed”. One boy wrote that the best time to communicate with dad was when his footy team won... and the worst, when his team lost! Mums were not perfect either, though they did outscore dads. Year 8 and 9 students felt it was hardest to communicate with mum when she was “moody” or “grumpy”, but it was amazing how many boys wrote that communication improved when some food was involved! Of course all this is subjective, but the need for parents to do something about it is very real. What was inescapable was that teenage children can be badly discouraged by what they regard as their parents’ moodiness, impatience, or unwillingness to be disturbed.

The responses gave us telling data on one to one conversations between parent and child. The older the respondent, the more evident if he was connecting well. One older student wrote: “*The best time for communication with dad is when he comes home from work at night and we have a chat about each other’s day.*” Almost ideal... but the resentment coming through in other replies was a warning that the connection can drop out when parents don’t change habituated ways of talking and reacting. This data enabled us to remind parents that ninety percent of communication must be positive. And even when it is necessary to talk about things that need to improve, we should look forward not backwards.

It was apparent from the survey that the quality of parent child communication hinges on habits of affection, and habits of relaxed one to one talk. We encouraged parents to turn the family timetable upside down but to find time each week to establish relaxed one to one time with each child. So many responses emphasised the need we all have *to feel listened to and understood.*

We also encouraged parents to raise deeper topics in conversation with their sons. The most moving responses in the questionnaire came to the question “*What is the best thing your parents have ever said to you.*” There was no doubt that children treasure those moments when parents take them into their confidence and speak sincerely and deeply about their own lives, their love for their spouse, their faith. One senior wrote, “*Communication is best with mum when she is open with me.*” Another wrote, “*Communication is best with mum when we discuss important issues.*” But some responses felt communication was trivialised on superficial topics, or dominated by one-directional lectures about study.

In our experience, practical advice of this nature can be extremely helpful to parents. There is no parent who does not want to be the best parent he or she can be... but our habituated approaches limit our effectiveness. And the reality is that poor parenting can cramp a child’s potential for life, and at worst it can leave them scarred and vulnerable. Let us use our position in schools to deliver focused parenting support. The line is open; we just have to start the conversation.

Parents, as primary educators, should be given every support by other agencies (eg schools) in their mission of raising their children to be independent happy adults with all the necessary lifeskills. Although schools carry the primary responsibility for certain specialist functions addressing the intellectual development of children they still carry out this role on behalf of parents. In areas outside of a strict scholastic program, schools have a duty to work closely with parents, recognising that the most effective education takes place when school reinforces the values already being taught at home. So schools can play a major part in values education... but it needs to be in step with parental values. Schools have an ethical responsibility to work in step with parents. Nobody more than a child’s parents has the right to set the moral agenda for that child’s upbringing.

7. Classroom programs.

Content.

I don't want any of you players looking back and wondering how good you could have been.

Jack Gibson, Rugby League Coach

Some form of human virtues program would be the basic vehicle to deliver character education. I describe below the essential form of the current program running at Redfield College. (cf **Appendix II** “*Teaching Virtues: the Theory and the Practice*”, a recent paper delivered at the 2000 AHISA national pastoral care conference. Please also refer to my article, “*In pursuit of virtue: uniting home and school*” in *The Practising Administrator*, I,1999, the journal of the Australian Council for Educational Administration.)

At Redfield we highlight a different virtue each week, appropriate to the age of children, with plenty of practical suggestions and ideas for the children to put the virtue into practice. The aim is to foster habits of action which will build virtue. Redfield has developed and used this approach since its foundation in 1986.

There are other commercially available programs, but their quality would need to be evaluated.⁵

Parents need to be made aware of the virtue on which focus is falling. Their efforts to highlight the virtue at home are decisive in making the program more effective. For example, discussion at the dinner table on the topic of the virtue will reinforce the program most effectively. Parental efforts to put the topical virtue into practice during the week will also provide excellent motivation for the child.

Class teachers need get into the habit of often drawing attention to the virtue in practice during the week’s classes. This will require considerable inservicing and leadership energy at the school level. But, in our experience, momentum will build.

Class teachers need to be aware that the culture in the classroom fosters or undermines the practice of virtue. If a teacher accepts messy desks, if he turns a blind eye to nastiness, if he does not mind if a student leaves a jumper on the ground, or if he does not ensure that if something is broken that it is paid for, if he or she does not follow up insincerity and graffiti, much good work at the family level can be undermined. In my experience, every teacher wants to back up virtues education, but the intensity of that backup varies greatly. Focus and a will to monitor and correct are essential.

Links to Civics.

Quoting America’s founding fathers, Dr Thomas Lickona argues that education for virtue was seen as the foundation for democracy. Theodore Roosevelt said that “*To educate a man in mind but not in morals is to educate a menace to society.*”

*Strong personal character should manifest itself in service to organization and communities and in courage in public life...more and more people lack the liberating self mastery that allows them to commit and serve with an independence and integrity befitting a free people.*⁶

Now, as support materials for the new Civics curriculum is being drawn up, it is the time for appropriate character building and virtue development material to be added.

A school culture emphasising responsibility in studies.

In addition to delivering parenting input to parents, and some form of human virtues curriculum to students, schools can do much to foster a climate of character growth. The first prerequisite is that a culture is established in which students are held to their responsibilities in their studies. Close ongoing communication between parents and school must be established; the once a year parent-teacher interchange is clearly inadequate to ensure that expectations at home are the same as expectations at school.

This would be accompanied by close monitoring of academic application of each pupil⁷. Habits of self discipline, order, industriousness, and love for the truth are fundamental virtues and are most easily

⁵ There is considerable interest in Human Virtues programs in some independent quarters. The Junior School Heads Association newsletter early in 1997 ran a short piece on an initiative in SCEGGS Redlands, and mentions a commercial program.

⁶ Nicgorski, W. (September 1987)“The Moral Crisis: Lessons from the Founding”, *The World and I*. p7

fostered in a scholastic environment. There should be no conflict between academics and character development. A student's responsible approach to his studies is a key to his character development.⁸

Attention to the peer group.

As peer group in any youth environment can be decisive, schools need to focus on building a tone of positive peer support. The example of the senior students is vital. The role of year coordinators and class teachers is important in establishing the dominant culture one is seeking in a classroom or in a cohort. Clearly a number of messages must be unequivocal: in this school you may not put your fellow students at risk by sharing drugs, binge drinking, etc.

8. Parent support programs.

Teaching fathering skills.

Example is more efficacious than precept.
Samuel Johnson, 1709-1784

Some of the options:

- Training of staff in schools to provide better support for fathers. Ideally there would be a concerted approach in conjunction with tertiary teaching institutions. Support would need to be both by way of systematic input... newsletters, parenting programs, and also at point of particular need.
- Curriculum for fathers/couples. Suitable courses and curriculum would need to be developed with several meetings scheduled during the year. For example, couples could be asked to undertake programs at various stages of their children's progression through school. Methodology would include interactive groups, but with a good proportion of informative content, a mix of theory pitched at the right level, and practical tips, etc.

Possible staging and topics⁹:

- K: Virtues and educating for character. The importance of parental example.
- 2: Atmosphere in the home and its role in forming character.
- 4: Having high but realistic expectations for your child.
- 6: A positive view of adolescence.
- 8: Studies and character development.
- 10: Raising the next generation of parents.

It seems essential to give parents training so that they are better able to equip their children to enter into stable marriages of their own. There should be additional specific input for fathers (See **Appendix III**)

- Literature. Most parenting materials and courses lean toward a "hands on" approach: what to do if your child throws a tantrum; how to know if your teenager is on marijuana; etc. No question that such books are essential, but unfortunately there are fewer books which take a character building approach. This will change as the community rediscovers virtue.
- Experts. Most high profile speakers on parenting issues in Australia also tend to keep themselves close to the action... possibly mastering the microdynamics of parenting, but sometimes profoundly quiet on issues relating to character. But speakers who do emphasise the bigger picture do exist.¹⁰

⁷ In the 1996 HSC, Redfield and our sister school Tangara were noted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as the top performing small schools.

⁸ cf. Castillo, G. (1986). *Teenagers and Their Problems*. Dublin: Four Courts Press. The author is Assistant Director of School of Education, University of Navarre.

⁹ It is our experience at Redfield that parents of younger children are immensely interested in receiving all the input they can. As their children grow into secondary school, interest can fall off, and more importantly, parental effectiveness also falls off. If parents have not been focused when their children were younger, their efforts in adolescence will be severely diminished in effectiveness.

¹⁰ For example, the PARED Foundation has brought various speakers to Australia. Rafael Pich, founder of a school in Barcelona with innovative parent-school links, father of 16, and energy behind a parent education organisation in Spain, visited in 1990 and 1994; David Isaacs, Professor of Education at University of Navarre, and author of *Character Building* lectured in 1991; Professor William May, one of the leading philosophers of

- Mentoring programs, where parents help fellow parents, could be most effective.¹¹ A strong attraction is that once parents are trained as mentors, they could run ongoing programs.

If a climate of mutual support amongst parents can be generated in a school or amongst the parents of a particular year group this can greatly help. The nature of this mutual support can vary greatly, from coordinated material assistance from fellow families when needed, to the development of close friendships between parents, allowing all to tap into the collective parenting wisdom. Every family has its strengths and weaknesses. If fora are established where all can share their strengths, all benefit.

Appointment of a School-Parent Coordinator

Programs within the possibilities of schools could include the appointment of a coordinator at the school level. Some form of Parent-School Coordinator, in conjunction with special in-servicing of senior staff, year masters, class patrons etc, would be needed.

One aspect of the Coordinator's role would be to inservice staff. All teachers need to be conscious of the need to be sound role models for the students, realising children imitate those people they admire. Staff need to talk often about these issues. Staff should receive regular professional development to help them foster effectively the character development of each one of their students.

The Coordinator could also monitor curriculum, assisting teachers with suggestions to help reinforce parents. Each class and textbook should uphold values that a reasonable parent advocates. Schools simply do not have the right to teach material which is in conflict with reasonable parent attitudes. As this culture became established, teachers would develop a greater sensitivity to what material was inappropriate¹².

Parent-pastoral care coordination

Close teacher-parent links which enable teachers to reinforce the same values and attitudes that parents are emphasising. The focus must be on character building as well as academics.¹³ Effectiveness would be greatly enhanced by coordination with a personal pastoral care system in the school, some more personal program focused on fostering virtues and freely held convictions which would reinforce parental efforts at home, provided the advice being given at home and at school is in step. If students are to have strong characters and convictions that will take them through life, they must be helped to do things freely, because they want to. Students should be encouraged to set their own goals, to reflect on their performance, to realise that in life one has to drive oneself, and that sometimes one has to get up and have another go at things.

9. Prerequisites for implementation of extensive character development and parenting programs.

Teachers tend to be practical and busy people who are reluctant to move away from their own proven formula that they feel gets a job done. Therefore it would be important to show from the start that this program is not politically driven, nor ideologically driven.

the USA and member of the Pontifical Commission on the Family, addressed parents in July 1993 and in April 1994; Monsignor Cormac Burke, author of *Covenanted Happiness*, spoke at a parent gathering in October 1993; James B. Stenson, author of *Upbringing*, and founding Headmaster of Northridge Preparatory School in Chicago, presented seminars for parents and teachers in 1995; Dr Donald DeMarco, Philosopher and author of numerous books including *Heart of Virtue*, spoke in 1996.

¹¹ For example, under the auspices of the PARED Foundation, Family Education Australia has been running programs for the past 12 or so years, using a case study methodology. Currently, a "First Steps" Program is underway weekly in Wahroonga, attended by twenty young couples.

¹² Parents will complain, quite legitimately, that standards in school are out of step with home standards, for example, when an M rated video is shown in class without explicit parental permission.

¹³ Redfield has instituted a system of close coordination between teachers and parents. A personal mentoring system for each student operates whereby each student meets personally with mentor fortnightly, in a goal setting interview. Parents and mentor meet each term in an extended interview to review progress and close the loop.

I believe the successful refocusing of our education system on character building and on working closely with parents would depend on a number of factors:

- the presentation of a case, based on sound educational arguments, for its adoption;
- a well defined and managed consultation stage;
- preferably support from both major political parties;
- commitment of some prominent academics and key media figures;
- enthusiasm from the parent representative bodies or at least the majority of those bodies;
- confidence of loyalty from leadership in the Department of School Education and Board of Studies;
- commitment from CEO and the independent sector to back development through an extended teething period;
- the formation of a dedicated group of attuned educators and parents who could produce suitable curriculum support material efficiently;
- political will: as Field Marshall Foch said, *“Victory is a thing of the will”*.

I suggest that the commitment of key figures could be best obtained by the formation of small working parties through which major difficulties could be ironed out before the draft changes were released for discussion and wider consultation.

Evaluating effectiveness.

2400 years of accreditation mean that any comprehensive program of virtue education is not experimental. It needs to be made clear at the start that there will be a long term commitment operating to virtues education.

It has been said that one evaluates the impact of an educational process when those who went through that system are raising their own children... say fifteen years after leaving school.

But we can say that the program will be as effective as it is comprehensive. Although results of any human virtues program will not be immediately assessable, there will be some indicators that it is on track. And the chances are that the results will appear to be slow in coming... given the fact that the teachers themselves oftentimes will have but a slim commitment to the program.

In time it will be possible to generate a culture whereby human virtues, character development, and parent-teacher cooperation are held in great esteem. Then it will become evident that a truly great service has been performed for future generations of Australians.

Appendix I

Ten reasons why fatherhood has lost prestige.

1. A lower percentage of men are now experiencing fatherhood, and smaller family sizes and longer life expectancies mean that men experience fatherhood for shorter interludes in their lives.
2. The extended family has shrunk. The concept of patriarch is lost. Grandparents often no longer live with the family.
3. Male and female fulfilment outside the home are seen as a very real alternative to the homebound paradigms of past eras. More men work outside of the home and away from their families than ever before. Fatherhood looks uninviting against predominating contemporary values: financial success, fame, and fun.
4. The pressures of economic survival detract from the attention a man can commit to his family.
5. Television and a horizontal world youth culture swamp family traditions and compromise cultural continuity. Little vertical enrichment between generations is possible.
6. The twentieth century has visited catastrophic afflictions on men... world wars which decimated generations of men, and a depression that stole the dignity of a third... resulting in a discontinuity of parenting know-how and paternal role modelling.
7. The totality of modern warfare has made modern man powerless to afford his family the protection that he could better provide in previous eras. Bereft of this fundamental *raison d'être*, man's prestige has sufferedⁱ.
8. The rise of cloning, IVF, surrogate motherhood, and artificial insemination have all blurred the significance of blood relationships and natural parenthood.
9. On an operational level men have become less necessary. Men no longer are expected to provide family leadershipⁱⁱ. The wife is more often financially independent.
10. As more and more marriages break, more men experience minimised access to their progeny. The number of redundant, frustrated, and disillusioned fathers is growing, and the former intrinsic rewards of fatherhood are now much more problematic. Paternity now implies a greater risk of unhappiness than ever before. Many men are thinking to themselves, "Why bother?"

- i. A view expressed by Les Murray, the Australian poet.
- ii. Yet Arrius (150AD) said of Alexander the Great "*that he would not lead his men forward against their will*", that leadership need not imply subjugation, and that sensitive leadership can and should fully respect the freedom of those who are led.

Appendix II

*A paper delivered at the AHISA Pastoral Care Conference
Adelaide
11 –14 July 2000*

Teaching Virtues: The Theory and the Practice

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1. Introduction

*When considering the stature of an athlete, or for that matter any person, I set great store on certain qualities which I believe are essential in addition to skill. They are that the person conducts his or her life with dignity, with integrity, courage and perhaps most of all with modesty. These **virtues** are totally compatible with pride, ambition and competitiveness.*

Sir Donald Bradman

The above words of the Don remind us that it is very natural, or at least for other generations it was very natural, to think in terms of virtue education.

A clear appreciation of the virtues and how they are fostered allows a comprehensive and proactive approach to character education. It can be too easy to fall into praising beautiful kids, and criticising pests.

Every child is in our hands. As one member of my staff has said, *It's too easy to forget that the snivelling brat in the front row of your class is the greatest thing that has happened in the lives of two people.*

For 2500 years, the development of virtues, good habits, has been regarded as the key to building a strong character that is independent and self directing in life. There is no doubt that sensible and responsible parenting and teaching often incorporate aspects of virtue education, but we have largely lost the bigger picture.

2. Premises

We, as teachers, are interested in building strengths of character in our students; we are seeking to be more than excellent practitioners in our own subject areas. A central aim of education is to empower people to know what is best for themselves, and to be able to choose what is best for themselves in life. In other words, to empower people to be able to be happy.

Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good... habits of mind, habits of heart, and habits of action. All three are necessary for leading moral life; all three make up moral maturity.

Lickona

Children will all need to be masters of themselves: as free as possible of debilitating personal habits (laziness, lack of self control, timidity, etc), and able to effectively manage and direct their emotions and passions. And they need to be able to cope with external pressures, such as peer group and media. This is what the Roman Epictetus meant when he wrote, *No man is free who is not master of himself.*

And understanding of virtues is linked to an understanding of the human being based on rational psychology. Within each of us there are various faculties that are integrated into our own particular temperament: intellect, will (the power to choose and to love), emotions and passions, and senses. We can develop habits that are types of “short cuts” to action: both in a physical sense (a tennis forehand, or a skill in watercolours), and in a moral sense (habits of keeping calm in a crisis, controlling one’s eating habits, being orderly). In some way our habitual actions determine who we are... a person who lies habitually is, in a sense, a liar. Our habits determine the “quality” of our character.

Parents are the primary educators, and we are here to support them. A teacher doesn’t have a right to pursue his own moral agenda with the children in his care.

3. What is a virtue based approach to education?

A virtue based approach to education is a comprehensive vision for the development of human beings. Virtues have always been regarded as the “stuff” of human maturity. When we write on school reports “lacks maturity” what do we mean by that? Maturity may be viewed as the harmonious development of all the virtues. The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined good character as the life of right conduct - right conduct in relation to other persons and in relation to oneself.

This is not one more theory about how human beings develop. For 2500 years the virtually undisputed understanding for the growth of a human being was based on growth in the virtues. For example, Confucius wrote that *Sincerity and truth are the basis of every virtue.*

The last forty years has been dominated by pragmatic vision of raising children. There are signs of a revival in the last decade of virtue based approaches. Covey writes of habits. The Secretary General of Education in the States, William Bennett produced *The Book of Virtue*. Rather unfortunately, *Time Magazine* saw the developments and wrote of a “virtue industry”. Major publishers have now produced books on how schools can teach virtue. I recommend Dr Thomas Lickona’s *Educating for Character* and Ryan and Bohlin’s *Teaching Character in Schools*.

Virtues can be seen as the answer to so many of our problems at school and in wider society: motivation in studies (recent studies show that “internally motivated” high IQ students succeed better) ,some breakdown of marriage (infidelity is the absence of the virtue of fidelity), leadership with genuine service and prudence, drug problems (children finding themselves not free to follow own convictions but at mercy of a peer group), even world peace which requires virtues of forgiveness, and fortitude. The next generation of parents will be better parents if they think in terms of virtues.

4. What are virtues?

Let’s start with what they are not. Virtues are not ideals, sentiments or simple values. It is simplistic to think that they grow in children automatically because we read them moral stories at night.

Some definitions.

Aristotle:
him do his own work well.

Virtue in man is a state of character which makes a man good, and which makes

Augustine:

Virtue is that by which one lives righteously.

Simple working definitions: *A virtue is an established habit of right action.*

A virtue is a facility to act motivated by a good intention.

Virtues are habits of action. They reflect not only what is in our head but our habitual way of operating in life. They are strengths of character based on habits. Habits are capacities for effective action, facilities to act in certain ways. There is no coincidence that a description of Jesus Christ in the New Testament is that *He went about doing good*. Virtues enable us to act. In this world, we need to be able to turn our good intentions into action. Good intentions are not enough.

Hence, there is a wealth of teaching on this importance of developing the facility in one's character to act readily. The poet Pindar wrote of this in the fifth century BC: *The test of any man lies in action*. And later Pubilius Syrus, a school master, wrote for his pupils:

It is no profit to have learned well, if we neglect to do well.

All this sits so well with the most noble thoughts of our age. Dag Hammarskjold, the great first Secretary General of the UN said: *In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.*

Good intentions are not enough, but all true virtue is motivated by upright intentions. One philosopher, Dr Don DeMarco, writes that it is through virtues that we "deliver" love to others. There is no virtue without love for others. There is no such thing as selfish virtue.

Virtue is not present without freely elected action... but a small child's habitual smile lays the foundations for the calmness in adult life that gives reassurance to others and security to one's family; a child's diligent habits of work later can form the basis of a responsible character.

Virtues span the four major aspects of action in life: the internally directed virtues which are right judgement (prudence), and self control (temperance); and the externally directed virtues, responsibility (justice) and personal determination and courage (fortitude).

Aristotle taught that it is through the practice of virtue that one finds happiness. He wrote for his son, *Happiness is the reward of virtue*. This has been a common teaching through the ages. One of the founding fathers of America, John Adams, in his *Thoughts on Government*. (1776) wrote: *All sober inquirers after truth, ancient and modern, pagan, and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well as his dignity, consists in virtue*. And George Washington wrote similarly: *There is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the course of Nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness*.

We want our students to be happy in life. This is a vital message to impart. Happiness is in virtue. Students need to take with them the desire to always strive to be a better person.

Christian teaching has always understood that the moral virtues lay the foundation for supernatural virtues. For example, unless you have the foundation of sincerity with oneself and with others, one will not be sincere in prayer.

History provides us with an interesting contrast in the characters of Alexander the Great and Aristotle the great philosopher. Alexander conquered everyone else, but he could not conquer himself: he died an alcoholic, having killed his best friend, having lost most of his army to thirst because of a lack of prudent judgement on his part. Aristotle, thrown with him by history as his tutor it has been shown had arguably the greater impact on civilisation through his teachings. Aristotle was universally regarded as a kind wise and self controlled man, and he lived a long productive life.

5. How are virtues acquired?

Habits are developed by repetition of the same actions. Hence Aristotle said: *We become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions*. Routines provide the structure for habits to develop. Habits are the stuff of virtues.

Childhood is a key time for the development of virtues. Family and parents are the most effective teachers of virtue, because so much of what a child sees in his or her parents is action motivated by a desire to help without self interest. As we have seen virtues are a facility to act motivated by a good intention. Charity is at the heart of all true virtue.

Younger children acquire habits easily if the adults responsible for them are diligent. Aristotle taught: *Good habits formed in childhood make all the difference.*

Consistency is very important: unity of parents, and unity of teacher with parents. There must be no mixed messages. All the respected adults in the child's life must realise the duty they have to give good example.

Underlying the importance of fostering this good intention, it is essential to give clear teaching on what is right and wrong. The Homer of three thousand years ago knew how important it was for children to have clear moral criteria. Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, says to his mother: *In my own heart I can now tell right from wrong well enough. I am no longer a child.* And elsewhere he proclaims: *I have learnt to use my brains by now, and to know right from wrong: my childhood is a thing of the past.*

A school must support the work of parents in the home. Aristotle insisted that teachers themselves need to be persons of virtue. For most of us this means that we strive to be better... to treat everyone with kindness, to do our duties responsibly, to live life with optimism focused on others.

6. Key principles for building virtues in the classroom.

- Find ways to work in partnership with parents: letters home, personal communication, comments which reinforce parent's esteem, opinions and values. Make it clear to the students that when they are parents they will have the responsibility and privilege to be the decisive influence on their children's moral character.
- Be serious about your own character development. Pay attention to one's own example of professionalism. The respect we earn must be based on dedicated well prepared teaching, and this will credential us to give character input. Growth in virtue is linked to love for the good, the true and the beautiful, so we need to give example of being less pragmatic and more idealistic. We must model the charity you wish to see in the students in the way we talk of students, and talk to students.
- Foster good habits in the classroom: classroom routines, consistent expectations, a climate of mutual respect and courtesy, encouragement to meet challenging expectations (have clear bottom lines, in going below which students know what to expect, e.g., disrespect in the classroom, a third homework miss, late for class after recess or lunch etc.), attention to class jobs, care of materials.
- Virtue education in a school starts with holding a student to responsibility in his or her studies. Hence firm demands and expectations, in a climate of kindness and good humour, are essential. So we find in Aristotle: *Human nature should be early habituated to endure all which by habit it can be made to endure, but the process must be gradual.* Augustine wrote: *Even my parents, who certainly wished me no harm, would laugh at the beating I got at school.* And the tutor of Nero, Seneca, drew on some real life experience to reflect: *A child must not be allowed to cry and ask for rewards, nor should such behaviour gain him anything... rewards should only be given if he has been good or promises to be!*
- An important aim is to help each student know himself or herself. *The unexamined life is not worth living*, said Socrates. In order to ensure that the student internalises these habits, that he acts from the personal conviction which turns habits into virtue, he must be helped to reflect personally on his actions. Help him or her in a personal conversation to reflect on the causes and consequences (especially to others) of his actions.
- Require students to think and choose. Insist that students use their freedom to make sensible choices. Adult life is about making the right choices. They need practise in making real choices now. Do help them reflect afterwards on the consequences of their decisions. Our aim and the aim of every parent should be to teach young persons to solve their own problems in life.
- Expect students to show the same good habits they will need to hold down a job and hold together a family in adult life: sincerity, generosity, responsibility, self control, critical judgement. Consider the four cardinal virtues as they apply in the classroom: sound judgement, responsibility, personal courage, and self mastery. Expect behaviour to be motivated by charity.

- Foster sincerity in the intellect, and generosity in the will. They are the basis of our two deepest aims as human beings: to seek the truth and to give ourselves in love.
- Educate for convictions not just conformity. Teach right and wrong, helping them to see that these values are not matters of opinion, nor in the core issues, matters of religious belief. This knowledge of right and wrong will enable the student to act with a good intention.
- Character is taught personally. Assist each student in helping him or her to have a clear personal focus for your classes e.g., thorough homework, more contribution in class, better cooperation with team, respect in addressing class mates. Look for opportunities to personally encourage the student in this focus. Numerous times in the term remind students of the focus. Help them to take responsibility for it. Encourage students to reach their own potential, to do their best, not measure up (or down) to someone else's standard.
- Rapport with children depends very much on taking a personal interest in them. Work on being approachable and friendly even for the shyest boy or girl in your class. Words of encouragement from someone admired have much more lasting character impact than directions and reprimands from a task master.
- Every activity is an opportunity to teach character. Misbehaviour is a problem of the boy or girl manifesting itself; it should not be a huge emotional issue for the teacher. Detach yourself. It also helps the child not to take it personally if you don't get angry. Moliere wrote:

*That with a smile we should instruct our youth,
Be very gentle when we have to blame,
And not put them in fear of virtue's name.*

Follow up misbehaviour with diligence and perseverance. In particular get students to do whatever is necessary to put things right after they do something wrong, e.g., catch up on work missed while sent out of class, clean up mud from their shoes, apologise if they are impolite. Punishment, following this principle, will always fit the crime. As we are fostering in students a sense of responsibility, individuals need to personally confront their misbehaviour. Sanctions appropriate to the misdemeanour should be applied; public sanctions if a misdemeanour were a public action. The essential purposes of sanctions are to make good any effects of the student's misbehaviour, and to facilitate the student taking to heart the lesson involved. Ensure that all negative behaviour is followed up personally after the lesson. Help the child to see your genuine concern that he does not let this negative habit grow in his character. Whole class punishments and time wasting punishments usually do not communicate the right message. Be optimistic. The underlying attitudes in a person are of far greater consequence than instances of misbehaviour. If anything, misbehaviour throws underlying attitudes into clearer relief so that remedies can be applied.

- Foster a strong peer group. The negativity of *The Nurture Assumption* need not become reality if the peer group is positive.

7. Fostering the four cardinal virtues (from Stenson)

- Sound judgement. Teach critical thinking. Insist on respect for intellectual activity. Teach students to reflect on the causes and consequences of their actions. Teach discernment: sacrifice v drugery; friends v acquaintances; heroes v celebrities; truth v opinion; conscience v feelings; office v the person in the office; love v eroticism; shrewdness from cynicism...
- Responsibility. Teach students to recognise basic human rights, to see duty as a necessity, to recognise and aspire to professionalism in all they do, to respect lawful authority, to refuse to see themselves as victims, to keep their word, to mind their own business, to recognise gratuitous curiosity, and to refrain from gossip.

- **Self mastery.** Head should guide heart. *The life of children, as much as that of intemperate men is governed by their desires* wrote Aristotle. Teach children self restraint, how to enjoy food and drink in moderation, to say “no” to oneself, to see happiness less as an end in itself, and more as a consequence. Habits of “please”, “thankyou”, “I’m sorry”, and “I promise” are important as is the habit of courtesy despite the behaviour of the other person.
- **Courage:** an acquired ability to endure difficulties and setbacks. So we should help children learn not to give excuses, to form practical plans instead of falling into a paralyzed anxiety, to recognise escapism and denial, and that “anticipation” can be worse than reality. Also they need problem solving abilities, and the determination to overcome shyness, impulsiveness, laziness, etc.

8. Building virtues in younger children

- Always speak very highly to a child of his of parents, and of his other teachers.
- The early years are the best for building virtues. *We (human beings) always like best whatever we first experience* wrote Aristotle. The Roman Quintilian taught that first impressions can be indelible:

“And we are by nature most tenacious of childish impressions, just as the flavour first absorbed by vessels when new persists, and the colour imparted by dyes to the primitive whiteness of the wool is indelible. Further it is the worst impressions that are most durable. For while what is good readily deteriorates, you will never turn vice into virtue.”
- We have duty to provide inputs which reinforce love for the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Shall we just carelessly allow children to hear casual tales which may be devised by casual persons? We cannot... Anything received into the mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young hear first should be models of virtuous thought.

Plato

We always like best whatever comes first... and therefore youth should be kept strangers to all that is bad, and especially to things which suggest vice or hate.

Aristotle

Banish indecent speech, and indecent pictures and speech from the stage, from the sight and hearing of the young.

Aristotle

A young person’s character is like wax for the growth of bad habits.

Horace
- Foster charitable intention in all that children do. Make the classroom atmosphere as charitable and as happy as possible. Teacher needs to stay calm and be positive. Model the strengths of character you wish to see in younger children.
- Reinforce key virtues with affirmative positive messages: *The more I help others the happier I am. Order enables me to fit more in and to get more done. I don’t talk badly of others. I do my work before I play.*
- Reinforce key principles of choice. eg *I plan my reading and my television viewing.*
- Have clear classroom routines and timetable. Realise that homes that do not have a clear skeleton for orderly living will make it hard for children to build habits.
- Be aware that there are windows of opportunity to build certain virtues: eg a child who does not approach the small amounts of homework in primary school with self discipline will have trouble coping in secondary, a child who does not manage emotion well in primary can be at risk in secondary.
- Apply principles of virtue education to ADD etc. All children will need good habits in adult life.

9. Ideas for pastoral care tutors.

- Draw up a program focusing on specific virtues, and over time, on the full range of virtues. Develop a common vocabulary of virtue.
- Brainstorm practical applications for a particular virtue each week on the blackboard.
- Students make up posters, or write jingles, or act out role plays on the theme. Have students write stories illustrating the virtue in action. Break into groups to come up with ideas to pool to put the virtue into practice in the classroom. Hold two minute per speaker debates, eg: *That self control brings happiness; That a happy person is not short of friends, etc.* Keep drawing the connection between personal effort and realistic goal setting, and happiness.
- Activities appropriate to specific virtues e.g., make timetable, tidy classroom, list responsibilities, roleplay situations requiring courtesy or patience, put jobs in priority list, Kris Kringle week.
- Fill out a personal questionnaire, helping children reflect and know their own strengths and areas to improve in.
- Use the diary. Get students to write daily suggestions for the specific virtue each day. Have students write a virtue for the week in their student diary and list beside it (or daily) practical resolutions.
- Make use of stories. Encourage appropriate reading and draw attention to good role models. Bring in a guest with an appropriate story to tell (a parent or another teacher).
- Bring in an article regularly about someone who exemplifies a particular virtue. Follow up with discussion afterwards. Ask students to research great lives & report to class.
- Student lecturettes. Have students write 15 minute mini essays. Publish one each day. Publish the best in the school newsletter.
- Have older students compose children's stories with a moral & organise for them to read the best to groups of Years 2 & 3 students.
- Virtues across the curriculum. Liaise with teachers of other subjects, e.g., art, religion, asking them to link their program to particular virtues.
- Bring in some discussion starter readings for older students.

10. Conclusions

When we embrace this pedagogy of virtue, there is a flow on to ourselves. In our hearts we all want to be the best people we can be. Once we start to consciously focus on building virtue; we start to focus more keenly on our own example. Simply, you can't give what you haven't got. Our example of seeking to be better persons is crucial; it is possibly the greatest gift we can pass on to a child.

Ultimately it is virtues that empower us to love, if love is understood as the capacity to give of oneself, to respond to others. Without virtues, loving relationships are difficult... for the students in our care and also for ourselves. It is worth recalling the words of the mystic, John of the Cross: *In the twilight of our lives we will be judged on love*

And when it all seems too hard, and there is already too much to do bring to mind Aristotle's praise for the vocation of the teacher: *Teachers who educate children, deserve more honour than parents, who merely gave them birth; for the latter provided mere life, while the former ensure a good life.*

Appendix III

LEADERSHIP IN BOY'S EDUCATION NATIONAL FORUM

Newcastle – May 12-13 1999

SPEAKER :

Andrew Mullins

Headmaster Redfield College

Schools can help parents be better parents.

I'm going to talk now about our experience in working with parents and, in particular, working with fathers at Redfield College, a 2-12 boys' independent boys' school in the north of Sydney.

There are many opinions we've heard over the last few days, not only *about* working with parents, but whether or not schools *should* work with parents. Well I'm certainly of the mind that we ought to work with parents if we can. Don Edgar this morning spoke of partnerships with parents and I was very enthusiastic about what he was saying. Redfield is one model of how a school can support parents. There are many other approaches but this is one model that has led to success.

My school started as the initiative of parents. We opened our doors in 1986 and our aim was twofold: to create a very successful academic school (because we figured we'd better shut our doors if we couldn't do that); and secondly, to provide as much support as we could for parents. Parents come to us looking for a school that will give them as much support as possible, in values through staff example, active mentoring and so on. I will touch on these topics as I talk.

The effectiveness of fathers has been questioned in some literature. You might have read some prominent articles in the last six or twelve months about *The Nurture Assumption*, a book that's come out of the United States. The point of that book is to say that the peer group is more influential than parents. That is a little scary, and while it's partly the angle of the book to draw publicity, I don't think it has to be that way. What we can try to do as educators is to make sure that we reflect parent's values in the schools and to ensure that those other inputs which are in our control in the school reflect the parents' values as much as possible. So my policy at school for example is not to put a book on the shelves in the library which I think the great majority of parents in the school wouldn't be happy having on their own home shelves. Sometimes that clashes with what does happen in other schools. I know because I taught in five other schools. But I think it's quite important as educators that we realise we are given our duty by parents and we don't have a right to usurp the moral education of the children in our care.

There is also current literature suggesting that boys raised in a single parent family, or without their father present, show no longitudinal disadvantage compared with the normal group. I dispute that as a general rule, and many studies show just the opposite. Yet there can be little doubt that parents, and fathers in particular, can be very ineffective at this present time. There is an urgent need to increase the effectiveness of fathers.

The underlying principles of our work with fathers.

1. The great part of character development should take part in the home. Programs which ignore this are somehow usurping parental rights and, in any case, are likely to be ineffective.
2. To better educate boys, we need to facilitate the effectiveness of fathers. *"If you want to be the father of a good boy, be a good father."*
3. Much time and effort needs to be dedicated into working with fathers. (We find that the results are forthcoming ... a culture is developed and a positive peer group amongst the fathers is established which facilitates the work of the school.)

4. We have to be very “receptive” as fathers, open to doing our job better. And in fact what the father would not wish to be the best father he can be? But the reality is that many fathers lack the experience, the knowhow and the requisite skills to do their job very well.

Let me illustrate the first point I raise. The draft Federal Strategy for Drug Education, which has been put out in the last couple of months, has created an Advisory National Committee which is made up of maybe twenty people, and, at least in the draft version, that Advisory Committee had no dedicated parental representative. I couldn't believe it! How are we educating kids despite the family? Most character development, at least in theory, takes place in the home. The question we should be asking is “What can we do to reinforce the work of parents?”

A further example. So much effort to help prevent teenage suicide is addressed at the adolescent level, but not at the early intervention level. Yet that would seem the logical place at which we could have a long term impact on the statistics and on turning the whole thing around. What can we do to help parents, of younger children particularly, raise resilient children, children with greater self control, greater optimism before difficulties, and with better problem solving skills?

To educate boys we need to facilitate the effectiveness of fathers. Several years ago now I went on a study trip to Europe. I visited schools working very closely with parents. I met there a very sick teacher, an elderly man who had a debilitating illness. He had a lot of wisdom about him and the morning I left he gave me this note which he felt summed up everything he wanted to tell me about education. It said:

Tell the parents, tell the fathers at Redfield, if you want to be the father of a good boy, be a good father.

At Redfield we repeat this message in many different ways. You can't expect the kids, the boys, to be the best people they can be if we adults who are their examples, the parents and the teachers, aren't trying to be the best people we can be.

Much time and effort needs to be dedicated to working with fathers. We put a lot of work into this at my school and we have a member of staff who is in charge of parental programs.

We can't underestimate the fourth point. What makes my school different from many is that we already have very receptive fathers. A culture has been established. Applicants come to the school looking for this. I'd suggest one way of implementing some of these things in your own schools, if they appeal to you, is to start to run up that flag: “we're a school where we try to give parenting support”. More and more you will bring in families that are looking for this. You can create a positive peer group amongst the parents as well as amongst the children.

My school has a number of structures already in place whereby we work closely to support parents. The most important one is a mentoring program. We work individually with the children and the mentor meets with each couple each term in a sit-down interview. It's very labour intensive but the principle beneath this is we want to make education as personal as possible.

Father-son camps, mentoring and parenting talks.

We have developed many specific approaches to giving input to fathers. In addition to the mentoring program, we hold father-son camps and various types of talks and seminars on parenting. We've had two father-son camps so far this year. The turn out was about 90% on the younger of the two camps. On the Years 5 and 6 camp the response was about 70%. On these camps there is specific input for the dads. A classic story from the last father-son camp: the theme for the camp was “pirates” so everyone dressed up with eyepatches and galahs on their shoulders. When one of the dads couldn't get his boy to go to bed at the right time, he said 'You tell him, you're a teacher.' It's interesting isn't it, what you learn about parents close to the action in a camp setting like that?

The mentoring program gives a number of our trained staff the opportunity to talk regularly and in depth with fathers about parenting in their family. For example, I remember one graphic example some time ago where a distraught mother rang me because her son had sworn at her in a fairly coarse sort of way. He was a Year 9 or Year 10 boy at the time. A few weeks before when I had been over at the family's house I had

thought that the father, unintentionally, was too demanding with his wife. We were sitting around having a cup of coffee and the wrong cakes came out or something and he was fairly abrupt in the way that he spoke to his wife about it. After the phone call I went to see the father and I suggested to him that his son was mirroring the sort of behaviour he witnessed in his father... but in a far more exaggerated way. (Don't kids seem to do that? They pick up on an almost innocent fault in a parent, but for the child it becomes a veritable achilles heel.) He got the point. If we can get that message through, it can help the father to be much more attentive to the constant impact of his example in the home.

Each month I give a talk to the parents of the younger children in the school. At the school, we also hold regular parenting evenings, often featuring input by fellow parents. Getting fellow parents to give these sorts of things does require having prior planning evenings, gearing up the speakers, making suggestions for content and letting them put their own ideas and thoughts into it as well. What we're creating, or what we're seeking to create in the school, is a climate where all of the collective wisdom that we've gathered over these last fourteen years keeps getting recycled. So that more and more parents benefit from the experience of other parents. I say at the start of every year in the major parent function we have then 'Listen, everyone has strengths as a family and we want you to put your strengths into play here and learn from other people's strengths. So when you go on a father-son camp, if you are one of the dads, watch what the other dads do, how they interact with their children.'

Some essential messages for fathers.

Unity with one's wife. I have an active interest in reading classics and last year I came across a quote by Odysseus in Homer. He says,

'There is nothing better in this world than that a man and wife should be of one mind.'

Isn't that beautiful? That was written three thousand years ago and yet when you read much of today's best parenting literature is saying the same thing. Of course single parents can raise their children well but it's harder, and it's not meant to be that way. Father and mother can be a tremendous reinforcement for each other. Their child will witness the love that, in turn, will give him or her stability in adult life.

Time dedication. That means being home, and being concerned to be an example in everything one does.

Readiness to teach right and wrong. I think that's an important one. I'll quote Homer again: Odysseus' son, Telemachus blurts out at one stage,

'Mother I'm no longer a child, I know the difference between right and wrong.'

This is what the Greeks thought. And today, it will certainly help a boy to plot the right course in life if he's got that sort of measure.

Sex education I believe this is a very important task for dads. If a boy doesn't learn a positive attitude to sexuality from his father, then he'll learn it from somebody else and it won't be as positive. We educators don't do parents a favour when we run comprehensive sex education programs. Far better, I would say that we run comprehensive programs to prepare parents to talk to their own children. Otherwise some of the most intimate truths of a child's life are given by a virtual stranger and what potential for damage there is in this.

Readiness to ask a great deal. You've got to have affection and you got to have challenge for kids. And if you don't have both those things, if it's all affection or if it's all demand obviously you're going to fail. Time is short, parents shouldn't do the thinking for their children. Virtues, good habits, are best learned early. When we teachers have a line into the parents of infants and primary so much the better. It's harder to do very much at the secondary level in terms of building habits. Sometimes you just have to shut the door on the messy room!

Have fun as a family. Parents need to be happy and calm before life's challenges. Children must see that the values you're often talking about do make you happy. If dad always comes home whinging, why will his children want to adopt his values... they patently don't lead to happiness. We must model the values we want children to adopt. Conversely when children reject their parents's values, how often is this because the father and the mother were not finding happiness in those values?

Require adolescents to think, and often to make their own decisions, rather than just tell them what to do. We've got to get them thinking when it's a relatively safe environment to do so, otherwise as adults they won't be ready to make sensible decisions. The parameters you set are to protect from moral and physical danger, and explain this is the case... then within these boundaries give as much freedom of decision making as possible.

In conclusion, may I invite to contact me anyone who has a particular interest in providing parenting support through school networks to get in touch with me. I will be happy to share with you our own programs and resources. I may be emailed at this address: andrew.mullins@redfield.pared.edu.au

Appendix IV

The Spalding Method for teaching literacy and the experience gained by Redfield College in its use with boys in Years 2-6.

The *Spalding Method* is a total language arts approach providing explicit, sequential, multisensory instruction in handwriting, spelling, writing, listening, reading decoding and comprehension, punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary. Starting in infant school, it develops critical thinking skills applicable across the curriculum, and it enables teachers to plan lessons based on continuous assessment of individual needs.

The Spalding Method is taught in the PARED infants schools in K and Year 1. Boys continue in the Spalding program through Years 2 to 6 at Redfield.

In 1996, we committed ourselves to the program after we concluded from the international research that it would be a more effective program with boys. Well-documented testing shows that school districts in the USA that have adopted Spalding have exhibited consistently high standards of student literacy. And converging international cognitive research over the past 3 decades (e.g. a 30-year US government study released in 1997) shows that Spalding imparts all of the teaching strategies considered essential for imparting basic literacy skills. Spalding's highly structured, step-by-step, research-based approach seems particularly suited to boys' ways of learning.

We have not been disappointed. K and 1 boys (at Redfield feeder infants schools) began in the program in 1997 and since 1998 we have implemented Spalding in each primary class. Teachers all agreed that the method was the most effective one for imparting foundational literacy skills that they had met. In-house testing of Spelling, Reading Decoding and Comprehension showed that students progress maintaining reading and spelling levels well in advance of their age cohorts, and that every targeted learning-disabled child had improved in critical areas, beyond the improvement generated by other remediation programs. Parents showed nearly unanimous approval of the initiative, as did many visitors from NSW and out of state who observed classes and talked with staff. Initial research into Australian effectiveness is provided in Dr Susan Moore's 1997 DEETYA-funded *Spalding in Australia. A Pilot Research Study*.

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