

# Cultivating Heart and Character

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Educating for Life's  
Most Essential Goals

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EDITORS

Tony Devine, Joon Ho Seuk  
and Andrew Wilson

FOREWORD BY THOMAS LICKONA

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# Acknowledgements

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We are indebted to the many family and education experts, researchers, teachers, authors and community leaders who have guided our thinking and bolstered our ideas. Mary Aranha, Marvin Berkowitz, Pat Born, Yiyun Chen, Matt Davison, Cheryl Hogg, Howard Kirschenbaum, Lynn Lisy-Macan, Linda McKay, Tomasina Portis, Kevin Ryan and Lori Wiley graciously gave of their time to review the first draft of this text. We are particularly appreciative for the careful attention that Thomas Lickona has given to this manuscript. Diane Sollee and her colleagues in the marriage and family professions have been invaluable resources, as have Joe McIlhaney, Joshua Mann, Richard Panzer and Rich Tompkin in the field of sexuality education. There are others too numerous to name who gave of their time and wisdom. To them too we express our heartfelt gratitude.

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Finally, we honor our families, who supported us through long meetings and exhausting writing schedules. They, as well as our friends, neighbors and colleagues, near and far, also provided us with heart-warming anecdotes, critical reflections and personal experiences that have enriched this volume.

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# Foreword

"Parents want for their kids materially, but they don't give kids a purpose... something to live their lives for."

—A 17-year-old boy

"We've been doing character education for five years... where do we go from here?"

—Teacher at a character education conference

A CHAPTER IN A HIGH SCHOOL TEXT BEARS THE INTRIGUING TITLE, "The Goal of Life: Our Happiness." The chapter observes that everyone wants to be happy and asks: What is it that truly makes us happy?

The chapter goes on to tell the story of Boethius, a very learned man of the sixth century. Boethius held high rank in the government of Rome and enjoyed the confidence of the king. He was, however, falsely accused of disloyalty, condemned without a trial, imprisoned, and finally executed. During his long imprisonment, he gave a great deal of thought to how insecurely we hold the good things of this life: position, the favor of persons in high places, even the devotion of declared friends. What, he wondered, is perfect happiness—the perfect good that alone can completely and forever satisfy and quiet all our desires?

I thought of the story of Boethius when I read *Cultivating Heart and Character* because this is a book that asks the broadest and deepest questions about human existence: What makes for a meaningful and fulfilling life? What do human beings need to be happy? And how do we educate—in our homes, schools, and communities—so as to support people at all points of human development in their quest for meaning and authentic happiness?

Secular character education by definition can't teach any of the traditional religious answers to questions like these. But are there at least some answers to these basic questions about life that all persons could

agree on, regardless of culture or belief? Are there some life goals whose importance for human happiness can be universally acknowledged?

*Cultivating Heart and Character* answers yes. It argues persuasively that there are at least three such universally valid goals of life: (1) attaining maturity of character; (2) engaging in loving relationships; and (3) contributing meaningfully to the lives of others. In reality, as the authors acknowledge, not all people make these goals a priority. But the desire to achieve them is latent in the human personality—part of our human nature. When we pursue these goals, and thereby lead a life of virtue, we are living in harmony with our deepest selves. All persons, whatever their beliefs, can recognize this core truth. We can't be happy unless we're good.

Why is it important for educators, especially character educators, to address life goals such as these? This book's authors correctly observe that without a sustaining educational philosophy that includes a vision of life, character educators may soon run out of steam. It's been wisely said, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory." If character education is to avoid becoming a superficial activity and passing trend, it needs an adequate theory of the human person, one that asks, "Why bother to develop a good character? What does it have to do with the meaning of life? With happiness?"

Questions like these, the authors point out, are especially crucial in adolescence, when the question of the meaning of life becomes a major concern. Teens need to find a purpose for their lives and to become authors of their own "life story." They need help in avoiding the seductions of a media culture that tells them the purpose of life is maximizing their pleasure, especially their sexual pleasure. Parents and teachers, by lifting up the three life goals (personal character development, loving relationships, and making a contribution) as an explicit moral framework for life, can help young people orient to what is truly fulfilling and become motivated to work toward those worthwhile goals.

This groundbreaking volume advances the theory and practice of character education in many important ways. Besides emphasizing a life-goals framework, it argues that cultivating the heart (our power to love) and conscience (the rational guide to right and wrong) are the two central tasks of character development. It helps us to see that the family is the first school of love and that a good school, one that nurtures continuing growth in character, is like a good family. It argues compellingly that the partnership of home, school, and community is the

"central axis" of successful character education. All of these ideas are richly illustrated with concrete examples from schools, families, and communities, East and West. Indeed, one of the book's distinguishing contributions is its cross-cultural dimension, reflecting the many years of diligent educational work its authors have done in countries around the world.

As a logical extension of its theme that love and familial relationships are at the center of character development, *Cultivating Heart and Character* gives careful attention to educating for marriage and educating for responsible sexual love. Social historians have observed that the declining well-being of children in many nations today is directly linked to the decline of marriage and that to fail to prepare the next generation for the responsibilities and commitments of marriage and parenting is to commit cultural suicide. Similarly, historians have documented the destabilizing and destructive effects of a sexual revolution that severed the link between sex and commitment. How can we help our children to succeed in forming happy and lasting marriages and to believe that saving the ultimate intimacy for the ultimate commitment is consistent with their highest hopes and values? Drawing on reasoned argument, real-life stories, empirical studies, and illustrative curricula, the authors offer the most comprehensive case to date for making marriage education and character-based sex education an integral part of the character education enterprise.

"Our life task," the authors conclude, "is to fulfill our humanity, and our humanity is defined by our capacity to love and to live in accord with our conscience." *Cultivating Heart and Character* thus expands the scope of character education to encompass the whole of life. It tells us why the forms of love that have their origin in family remain important throughout our lives. It anchors character education in the universal desire for happiness. And it gives us tested ways to translate all these theoretical insights into effective practice. There is nothing like this far-reaching book in the character education literature. It will, I believe, be of great value to any reader, whether you come to the issue of character as a teacher, a parent, a youth worker, a policy maker, or simply someone wanting to craft a good life.

Thomas Lickona

Author, *Educating for Character*

# To the Reader

IF YOU HAVE PICKED UP THIS BOOK, YOU ARE PROBABLY CONCERNED about character, youth, family life and society. So are we—that is why we wrote this book. Here you will find stories, thoughts and the shared desires of many individuals, including teachers, parents and students searching for a more integrated education that nourishes not just the intellect but the heart as well—an education that equips people to live fulfilling and useful lives. The content reflects extensive research and dialogue as well as the assistance of educators and experts from a variety of backgrounds and from all around the world. These ideas have been presented and discussed in hundreds of national and international conferences, schools, and meetings involving practitioners in education, youth development and family issues as well as community leaders and social workers.

Our views rely on three simple premises. First, the natural desire to love and be loved is a central motivating force in the development of character. Loving relationships create an optimal environment for human fulfillment. Hence, the cultivation of the heart is central to human fulfillment and a necessary part of education. An education in the ideals, norms, relational capacities and character traits required for altruistic love helps people live lives of moral integrity, spontaneity and beauty. It enables them to live a good life in community with others.

A second premise is that character development is integrally linked with the search for meaning in life. Young people learn and retain values in light of their sense of identity and purpose in life. When exhorted to be respectful, responsible, caring, etc., they ask, "Why?" We address this need for larger meaning by focusing on three life aspirations or goals: 1) individual maturity, 2) competence and satisfaction in personal relationships (especially familial ones) and 3) to make a valuable and lasting contribution beyond oneself to society. These life goals are universal and self-evident. Achieving them epitomizes a life well lived and provides great satisfaction to oneself and others.

The realization of life goals takes place in the family, school and community, and requires the continual cultivation of the heart and character as a lifelong process. Such a perspective necessitates a comprehensive approach to character development from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, this book includes chapters on marriage, family and community as well as school wide character education.

You may want to use this text to enhance a particular discipline of character and relational enrichment, or simply to broaden your own understanding. Our aim was to provide practical guidance for teachers, parents, and counselors or anyone involved in making a difference in their own lives and those of others. The spectrum of questions and issues include:

- \* Why does character education need to be a priority in schools and families?
- \* How do natural principles inform moral growth and healthy relationships?
- \* How is meaning in life related to character development?
- \* In what ways are family roles important for emotional and character development?
- \* How does training in relational skills and character help build and sustain a meaningful marriage?
- \* What are the aptitudes that make for effective parenting?
- \* How can schools and parents forge viable partnerships in the raising of children?
- \* What is the role of character development in addressing common challenges facing youth: substance abuse, sexual health and conflict resolution?
- \* How can various agencies and institutions in the community cooperate with parents and schools to give young people a consistent message of good character?

To encompass this range of topics, the book is divided into three parts:

**Part I** offers a discussion of character education, covering historical, theoretical and practical aspects. Section 1 surveys the recent history of moral education, makes a case for universal values, and defines key educational concepts such as heart, conscience and life goals.

Section 2 gives a broad description of the process of character development in the three dimensions of personal growth, relationships and civic contribution. Section 3 utilizes these three dimensions as a framework for the comprehensive integration of universal values in character education initiatives. Here are methods, anecdotes from schools and teachers, and elements of successful programs for developing individual character, a caring school ethos, and partnerships with parents and the community.

**Part II** sketches a portrait of moral growth through familial roles, namely, those of child, sibling, spouse and parent. The chapters in Section 4 render each role as a "sphere of love," which offers unique opportunities for the expansion of heart and conscience that remain important in adult moral development. Section 5 confronts modern culture's ubiquitous confusion about marriage and family norms by first addressing concerns about the efficacy of marriage. Next, the support that educators can give to marriage is explored through discussions of marriage preparation, marriage enrichment and parenting education. The feasibility and desirability of a lifelong marital relationship is supported with character-based insights and proven relational skills for sustaining love. Authentic narratives and strategies from marriage and parenting experts sketch the connection between character and family functioning.

**Part III** tackles the most urgent challenges facing young people—sexuality, drug abuse and dealing with conflict. Written with teenagers in mind but especially for the adults who guide them, Section 6 sketches a positive ethic of love and sexuality, founded upon principles of character development and fulfillment in family relationships. This same perspective underlies Section 7, which also discusses drug abuse prevention and conflict resolution. Research has shown that negative behaviors tend to be clustered where character formation is weak and protective family influences are absent. Here are valuable insights that can be incorporated into already existing character education initiatives, as well as useful guidelines for designing and implementing curricula with the cultivation of heart and character as a guiding principle. Parents, too, can find greater confidence to deepen the dialogue with their children, supporting them to successfully resist high-risk behaviors that are detours on the road to personal maturity.

Finally, this book represents a collaborative dialogue; we wrote it as a team. The cross-fertilization of ideas, research, prose and much “putting our heads together” allowed for an integration of themes and concepts across several domains. It was a challenging yet enriching experience for all of us. Through several years of arduous critique, analysis and reflection, we sought to balance individuals’ intellectual integrity with group consensus. Although specific authors were responsible for sections and chapters, each of us can recognize his or her imprint on every page. Thus, in spite of vast differences in personalities, editorial opinions, academic and even cultural backgrounds, we came to speak with a common voice on the issues so close to our hearts.

Tony Devine  
Josephine Hauer  
June Saunders  
Joon Ho Seuk  
John R. Williams  
Andrew Wilson

## Advance Reviews of Cultivating Heart and Character:

"A poignant character education message for everyone that has a comprehensive and respectful approach encompassing all aspects of life. This provocative dialogue encourages personal reflection."

**Mary C. Aranha**

Director, Maryland State Department of Education,  
Character Education Office

"*Cultivating Heart and Character* is a beacon of hope, a blueprint for ethical living and decision making in confusing times. This book is a higher, expansive look at character, which offers hope for the people of the world IF we can open our eyes and hearts to the wisdom it contains. I commend the editors and authors for a helpful, inspirational guide to meaningful living."

**Eleanore Childs, Esq.**

President, Heartwood Ethics Institute

"Caring parents and educators will benefit enormously from this insightful, responsible, research-based analysis."

**Stephen R. Covey, Ph.D.**

Author, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

"At a time that youth, families and couples face so many challenges to build individual strengths and connect with love, this book offers practical ideas, solid facts, and a strength-based model... Schools, parents and community agencies too easily keep their own 'turf' and think they can work alone to build character, educate our youth, and support families. What is clear (supported by facts in this book) is that only our working together will make a difference for families in the 21st century. And this book offers a map of ways to do this and partnerships that already exist. A book for couples, families, educators and therapists."

**George Doub, M. Div., L.M.F.T.**

Co-founder, Family Wellness Associates

**Flo Creighton, M.S.W., L.C.S.W.**

Partner, Family Wellness Associates

"*Cultivating Heart and Character* is one of the most comprehensive and practical guidebooks to renewing character and character-shaping institutions. No one can read this volume without concluding that the central challenge of our time is reviving the ethical foundations of freedom by encouraging the widest possible embrace of personal responsibility."

**Don Eberly**

Director, Civil Society Project

"*Cultivating Heart and Character* is a clear, concise, comprehensive review of what character education is, the benefits for youth and society and the resources available to teach it. It is critical reading for every school administrator who desires their graduates to succeed in life and love and contribute towards a saner, safer, more loving world."

**Seth Eisenberg**

President and CEO, PAIRS International, Inc.

"With an unusual a blend of East and West it comes down squarely on the side of the family and of the fundamental virtues while bringing the student through a very comprehensive overview of the themes of love, character, family and sexuality."

**Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.**

William H. G. FitzGerald Fellow in Family and Culture Issues  
The Heritage Foundation

"For family educators and parents interested in values based education, *Cultivating Heart and Character* is a comprehensive, clear and articulate guide through the morass of complicated family issues facing our society."

**Terry D. Hargrave, Ph.D.**

West Texas A&M University

Author, *The Essential Humility of Marriage:*

*Honoring the Third Identity in Couple Therapy*

"Nothing is more important than character education for both personal and social good. *Cultivating Heart and Character* makes the case compellingly, with argument and statistics, and in addition offers practical guidance to parents, schools and the community. This book is an important contribution to a growing national consciousness. It should be read by everyone, for their own sake and for the love of children."

**Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.**

Author, *Getting the Love You Want*

"If you are a parent, educator or youth specialist concerned with character education (and you should be!), then buy this book. Filled with practical and insightful information, this book is sure to strengthen your ability to help children and youth develop the skills and knowledge they need to develop into persons of character."

**Wade F. Horn, Ph.D.**

President, The National Fatherhood Initiative

"*Cultivating Heart and Character* is an important contribution to the field. In addition to all its other virtues, it breaks new ground in at least three ways: It takes an international and cross-cultural perspective on character education; it places love at the center of character development, and it deepens our understanding of character development as a partnership between the home, school and community."

**Howard Kirschenbaum**

Frontier Professor of School, Family and Community Relations, University of Rochester

"Of all the books on character education today, this book is clearly one of the most comprehensive in its approach. Drawing upon a wide range of scholarship, the authors make the case that character education must take place not only in the schools, but also in the home and community. The insightful analysis, well-researched rationale, and comprehensive approach to character education all make this an eminently useful contribution to the field. Teachers, parents and community members alike should find *Cultivating Heart and Character* to be an indispensable source for the development of thoughtful and effective character education programs."

**James S. Leming, Ph.D.**

Southern Illinois University

"The book does an excellent job of delineating the foundations of good character, and then explaining how schools, parents and communities must work together to develop good character. There is a wide range of information provided—including attention paid to the current topics of conflict resolution, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, abstinence, as well as a unique look at various levels of relationships. This book provides a much-needed framework for comprehensive character development that spans a lifetime."

**Lynn Lisy-Macan**

Assistant Superintendent, Niskayuna Central Schools,  
Niskayuna, New York

"An excellent resource for parents, educators, members of the business community and anyone interested in overcoming our national crisis of character."

**Sandy N. McDonnell**

Chairman, The Character Education Partnership  
Chairman Emeritus, McDonnell Douglas

"*Cultivating Heart and Character* is a rich compendium of state-of-the-art programs and research in abstinence education, character education, and marriage and family education; its analysis of the important interrelationship of these areas is particularly insightful.

"Healthy, loving relationships are key to happy and productive lives—and to solving many of our most devastating social problems—but historically adults have dropped the ball when it comes to teaching our youth the essential social and emotional skills. It's a whole lot easier to teach children to walk and talk, to drive a car and even to use a computer than it is to teach them how to develop strong personal ideals and to love well. But we've got to get our priorities straight. *Cultivating Heart and Character* will be a very valuable resource for families, schools and communities as we collaborate in this movement. Let's get going!"

**Nancy McLaren**

Co-director, The Loving Well Project

"A well written and wide-ranging look at character education. Read it and you'll understand the status of the movement, its history and importance, and what many of its proponents have to say."

**Ann Medlock**

Founder and President, Giraffe Heroes Project

*"Cultivating Heart and Character: Educating for Life's Most Essential Goals*, edited by Tony Devine, Joon Ho Seuk and Andrew Wilson, is not 'just another book on character education.' It is a book which makes a unique contribution to establishing the theoretical base of the field. Its emphasis on cultivating the heart as the core of character education and its main tenet that the source of all character education lies in the fundamental context of the family give new understanding to the life-long process of character formation. The theoretical principles of the book are clearly illustrated with moral stories of actual people and with examples from character-building schools both in the United States, Europe, Japan and China, giving a truly cross-cultural perspective to the field. Devine, Seuk and Wilson have found the true source of remedying today's moral problems by basing their answer in a renewed commitment to family values. I highly recommend this book for anyone seriously interested in character education and making our society more caring and loving."

**Madonna Murphy, Ph.D.**

University of St. Francis

Author, *Character Education in America's Blue Ribbon Schools*

"All of us who are invested in character education for the youth of this age owe a debt to Tony Devine, Joon Ho Seuk and Andrew Wilson for the compilation of information found in this book. Parents, educators and youth workers cannot afford to miss out on the wealth of knowledge that is waiting for them on these pages."

**Les Parrott, Ph.D., and Leslie Parrott, Ph.D.**

Seattle Pacific University

Authors, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*

"*Cultivating Heart and Character: Educating for Life's Most Essential Goals* represents a monumental move toward whole learning based upon character development. It provides a comprehensive set of methods and strategies linking teachers, families and communities to teach children the rich value and potential of moral, ethical and intellectual character development. Devine, Seuk and Wilson are to be commended for this great work."

**Thomasina M. Portis**

Founder and CEO, Portis and Associates, Inc.

"This book offers a comprehensive and carefully researched diagnosis of what our problems are and what parents and teachers can do to help children forge strong characters. The authors provide a mix of sound principles, practical solutions and vivid examples. It is a very impressive book and should be widely read."

**Kevin Ryan, Ph.D.**

Founding Director, Center for the Advancement  
of Ethics and Character, Boston University  
Author, *Reclaiming Our Schools*

"It made me think of the song, *MacArthur Park*: 'Someone left the cake out in the rain... and we'll never find that recipe again.' Marriage and family seem to be melting down around us, but this book gives us the recipe. It gives step-by-step instructions about what to do, how to do it and the research about why to do it. A guide for parents, teachers, kids, clergy, all of us who care, about how to rebuild trust, love, commitment, intergenerational loyalties, responsibility, character and confidence. We can remake the cake, and decorate it with renewed hope in ourselves and our institutions. A great contribution. A workhorse of a book. Beautifully written."

**Diane Sollee, M.S.W.**

Founder and Director, Coalition for Marriage,  
Family and Couples Education

"This is a terrific resource in character education—valuable for teachers, families and individuals. It's thorough and well researched, yet practical and easy to read. It's also full of useful ideas. You'll find yourself turning to it again and again."

**Hal Urban**

Author, *Life's Greatest Lessons*

"*Cultivating Heart and Character* represents the best effort in presenting a comprehensive approach to character education and a well written call to action on the important role that schools, communities and families can have in positively shaping the lives of our children. It also offers a blueprint on how we as educators, community representatives and parents can begin taking the needed steps in helping children develop habits of the heart and mind. Every page is informative and perhaps best of all, appealing to our common sense. If I could recommend one book of common reading for parents, educators and youth workers, this would be it. It will remain a valuable resource for years to come."

**Philip Vincent, Ph.D.**

President, Character Development Group

"I give my highest endorsement to *Cultivating Heart and Character*. The authors present a well-developed comprehensive approach to character education, and provide practical examples for effective home/community/school approaches only briefly mentioned by other authors. I've put it on my shortlist of recommended readings to educators, parents and graduate students!"

**Mary Williams, Ed.D.**

Co-founder and Co-director, International Center for Character Education, University of San Diego

**"Caring parents and educators will benefit enormously from this insightful, responsible, research based analysis."**

**Stephen R. Covey, Ph.D.,**

Author, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

**"This book is an important contribution to a growing national consciousness. It should be read by everyone, for their own sake and for the love of children."**

**Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.,**

Author, *Getting the Love You Want*

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**In *Cultivating Heart and Character*, you'll find ideas and practical ways to foster character and emotional intelligence, good relationships and social responsibility.**

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**"An excellent resource for parents, educators, members of the business community, and anyone interested in overcoming our national crisis of character."**

**Sandy N. McDonnell, Chairman, The Character Education Partnership**

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**James S. Leming, Ph.D., Southern Illinois University**

**"Marriage and family seem to be melting down around us, but this book gives us... step-by-step instructions about what to do, how to do it and the research about why to do it. A guide... about how to rebuild trust, love, commitment, intergenerational loyalties, responsibility, character and confidence."**

**Diane Sollee, M.S.W., Director, Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education**

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**Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., President, The National Fatherhood Initiative**



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