

legacy



The guardian of character

Tribute to Thomas Lickona





by Ana Moreno Salvo

At a time when technology is advancing by leaps and bounds and artificial intelligence is transforming every aspect of our lives, education plays an essential role in shaping ethical and responsible citizens. Thomas Lickona, PhD, is a developmental psychologist, a leading advocate of character education and professor emeritus at the State University of New York at Cortland.

He was the founding director of the Centre for the 4th and 5th Rs - Respect and Responsibility - at the same university from 1994 to 2022, and has received

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national recognition for his work in teacher and parent education. As a pioneer of character education, he has been the most influential voice in the development of an educational model that combines intellectual with character development. His bestseller, "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility", is a seminal text in the field of character education.

Published in 1991, this book has not only been crucial in designing educational programmes around the world but also set forth the principles that guide educators and parents in the task of forming citizens of integrity. Lickona is recognised as the father of modern character education. As the president of the Association for Moral Education, he has lectured around the world and played a key role in training countless educators on how to develop moral virtues and character in schools, families and communities.

His books have been translated into more than a dozen languages, among them: "Educating for Character, Raising Good Children, Character Matters: Smart & Good High Schools" (with Matthew Davidson), "Sex, Love and You: Making the Right Decision" (with his wife Judy Lickona and William Boudreau), "How to Raise Kind Kids: And Get Respect, Gratitude, and a Happier Family in the Bargain" and "Narnian Virtues: Building Good Character with C.S. Lewis" (with Mark A. Pike).

His article 'Teaching Johnny to Be Good' made the cover of New York magazine. He has also received awards such as character.org's Sandy Award for lifetime dedication to character education, the University of San Francisco's Award for Excellence in Moral Education and the Christopher Award for 'affirming the highest values of the human spirit'. He has been a special guest on Good Morning America, Larry King Live Radio, Focus on the Family and National Radio.

He and his wife Judy have two children and 16 grandchildren and live in Cortland, New York.

A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION FOR AN ETHICAL SOCIETY

Lickona's phrase 'educating the mind without educating the heart is not to educate at all', reflects his conviction that education cannot be limited to academics but has to also include values and character education. In his view, character education is fundamental to creating a fair and compassionate society, especially in times of complex ethical and social dilemmas. Through his decades of research, writing and teaching, Lickona has convinced thousands of educators that 'character is not simply innate; it is a skill to be nurtured and developed'.

THE INSPIRATION FOR HIS WORK

Much of Lickona's inspiration for character education came from his experience as a parent. While raising his two sons, he became aware of the enormous responsibility of guiding young people on their path to moral maturity. This personal experience, coupled with his training as a developmental psychologist, motivated him to write "Raising Good Children", a book that explores the challenges and rewards of instilling strong values in children. Thus, Lickona has appealed not only to educators but also to parents, whom he sees as the primary agents in children's moral education.

In his lectures, he often reminds his readers and

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listeners: 'Raising good children is the most complex and challenging job in every parent's life'. Indeed, he insists that the family is the first school of character values and virtues.

MAIN COMPONENTS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

In "Educating for Character", Lickona presents a number of practical strategies for implementing character education in the classroom. These principles have become benchmarks for many educational institutions around the world and have inspired organisations such as the Josephson Institute of Ethics, the Developmental Studies Center and character.org, which use his methods to promote ethics education in young people.

Some of these key principles include:

- 1. The Educator as Model and Mentor:** Lickona argues that teachers should not only teach values in the classroom but also be living examples of what they teach. Ethics and respect cannot be transmitted solely through theoretical concepts but have to be present in every daily interaction between the educator and the student. He recounts an example of how in the midst of a classroom dispute, a primary school teacher demonstrated to his students the process of apologising and forgiving. For Lickona, this type of exemplary teaching is essential, as students learn by observing how their authority figures handle and resolve conflicts.
- 2. Creating an Ethical Community in the Classroom:** According to Lickona, the ideal classroom should be envisioned as an 'ethical community' where every student feels valued and heard. Activities such as class meetings offer students the opportunity to express their opinions and participate in democratic decision-making. The result is a culture of mutual respect, tolerance and a shared sense of responsibility for everyone's well-being.
- 3. Moral Discipline and Conflict Resolution:** Instead of arbitrary punishment, Lickona advocates discipline that encourages reflection and self-control. This discipline helps students to value the impact of their actions and teaches them peaceful ways of resolving disputes, developing in them a deep sense of fairness and respect for others.

A clear example of this strategy is 'restorative discipline', an approach promoted by the author that enables students to repair the harm they have caused, understand the consequences of their actions and learn to solve problems effectively.

4. Moral Reflection and Discussion of

Controversial Issues: Lickona believes that character education should include the analysis of moral dilemmas and controversial issues so students question their own beliefs and develop a critical mindset. He found that addressing complex issues, such as social justice and ethics in technology, helps young people to grapple with multiple perspectives and understand the complexity of issues. In this way, education not only prepares students to face today's challenges but also empowers them to take responsible decisions in the future.

INFLUENCE OF HIS WORK

Lickona's contribution to education goes beyond his books and lectures. His methods have been adopted by character education programmes around the world, from Character Counts! in the United States to ethics education programmes in Asia and Europe.

Lickona has worked with the Josephson Institute of Ethics to help school districts and local governments to develop values-based curricula. This institute, founded in 1987, is largely based on Lickona's principles, and its Character Counts! programme has reached millions of students in more than 60 countries. His influence has also extended to the corporate sector: aware of the need for ethics in the workplace, many companies have adopted his methods to create a values-based organisational culture. At a conference in California, Lickona explained how a tech company in Silicon Valley used the character education model to develop more supportive and responsible work teams.

'Integrity and ethics are essential in all walks of life', said Lickona, 'and the sooner we start developing them, the better prepared we will be to meet the challenges of the modern world'.

CHARACTER EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

With the swift development of artificial intelligence

We need to develop ethics and integrity to be better prepared to face the challenges of the modern world

We need citizens who not only know how to do things but also why and for what purpose they should do them

and the emphasis on digital learning environments, Lickona's approach is now more relevant than ever. Technology is not neutral, and the impact it will have on society depends directly on the values that guide the way it is applied. According to Lickona, artificial intelligence poses new ethical challenges that require clear moral guidance. Thus, his legacy not only prepares students for life but also empowers them to be responsible citizens in a rapidly expanding and increasingly complex world.

In his own words: 'Knowledge without goodness is a danger to society. We need citizens who not only know *how* to do things but also why and for what purpose they should do them.'

AN ENDURING LEGACY

Thomas Lickona has left an indelible mark on the world of education, and his influence will continue to resonate in classrooms and homes around the world for a long time to come. His emphasis on character education is a powerful reminder that true education is about more than academic knowledge; it is about shaping individuals who can contribute positively to society. In this age of constant change and challenges brought about by technology, Lickona reminds us of what education should be geared towards: developing competent but also compassionate, responsible and ethical learners.



Thomas Lickona (New York) has a PhD and is a developmental psychologist, character educator and professor emeritus of Education at the State University of New York at Cortland. He is regarded as 'the father of modern character education'. He has lectured worldwide on the promotion of moral values and character development in schools, families and communities. He has written ten books on moral development and character education including "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility" (1992, Bantam), "Raising Good Children; Educating for Character" (1994, Random House Publishing Group), "Sex, Love and You: Making the Right Decision" (2003, Ave Maria Press), "Smart and Good High Schools" (2005, Center for the 4th and 5th Rs) and "How to Raise Kind Kids" (2018, Penguin Books).