

## Character Education

During the 2016-2017 school year, Children's School educators have been exploring character education, beginning with our own understanding of the key elements of character, together with important dispositions for lifelong learning. We compared our concept maps of character with multiple existing descriptions from diverse educators, including those developed by the Pittsburgh-based Heartwood Institute. In January, we continued the dialogue with our practicum students from Duksung Women's University to begin reflecting on our existing practices for fostering character development and making plans for being more intentional about them.

So what is character? "The Heartwood is the strong inner core of the tree trunk that keeps the tree upright through storm and drought. Children also have a core called 'character' that can grow stronger and support them as they deal with the challenges and stresses of life." Based on this principle, the Heartwood Institute developed the following mission:

***To promote the understanding and practice of ethical values that are the foundation of community among all people, with particular emphasis on children and families and the understanding of seven universal attributes: Courage, Loyalty, Justice, Respect, Hope, Honesty, and Love. These attributes constitute a holistic framework for strong community among all people. Heartwood offers powerful literature-based ethics education resources to children, school, and families.***

To create this PreK to 8<sup>th</sup> grade spiraling curriculum, the developers chose quality literature from around the world with human characters to act as fictional role models, with values presented in a positive manner, in stories that reflect diversity of culture and gender, together with exceptional illustrations. For each of the stories selected for each of the grade levels, the educators developed companion activities so that the character education could be woven throughout schools' existing curriculum, much in the way that our Extended AM educators choose a theme-related focus book for each week and then plan related activities to help deepen children's understanding.

Though we have not used the Heartwood curriculum in its entirety, we share the seven core values and have collected many of the early childhood books into our library, along with numerous others that similarly emphasize character building. We aim to model these values in our interactions with all of the diverse learners in our laboratory school environment, and we explicitly discuss them as they relate to the situations that arise from day to day so that the children become familiar with values vocabulary and learn to identify opportunities to be respectful, fair, caring, honest, etc.

The Heartwood curriculum is now out of print, so the developers asked the Children's School to develop a web site whereby we could help them disseminate the materials free of charge to any interested families and educators. Thanks to the hard work of Miss Zhu, our educational intern, and Tyler Farren, one of the Psychology Department computer support professionals, we now have a user-friendly site with all of the resources posted. We hope you will peruse the site and consider sharing some of the books with your family as you partner with us in building your child's character.

