

# Ideas to Implement the Comprehensive Model

## Linking Character Education and Social-Emotional Learning

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Character education and social-emotional learning are two distinct movements that educators are embracing with the hope of promoting positive student behavior in schools. Each movement is distinct from the other; however, they share common program elements and great promise if implemented together. Recognizing the risk of oversimplifying both fields, the following overview is suggested as an outline to encourage a linkage between advocates of character education and social-emotional learning.

Character education promotes the recognition of shared community values such as respect, responsibility, and caring. Definitions of these values are translated into observable behaviors that can describe positive character. Strategies to teach shared values and character at home, in schools, and within communities include an ethical/moral dimension. Character education thus acknowledges the existence of good and bad behavior and ethical choices. Character education challenges students, parents, and teachers to live up to agreed upon moral standards that model good character. Moral motivation is widely recognized as a strong support for character development, which also can include personal and social rewards.

Social-emotional learning also represents the understanding of shared cultural norms and how those norms translate into observable prosocial behavior. Prosocial behaviors include respectful listening and speaking skills, cooperative work skills, and peaceable conflict resolution. These skills are taught by demonstration, role-modeling and practice with the reward of social affirmation. The motivation to develop social-emotional skills is often represented to include personal success and social harmony.

Social-emotional learning minus character education can miss the benefit of ethical and moral motivation. Character education minus the emphasis of skill instruction (a strength in social-emotional learning programs) misses the opportunity to practice prosocial behaviors (good character).

One strength of many character education programs is the focus on the cognitive activities such as the integration of character lessons into academic curricula and ethical reflection which support positive character development. These cognitive lessons create an ethical and moral motivation which can have a strong affective link to the behaviors and skills so well taught by social-emotional learning programs. Together, social-emotional learning and character programs can help motivate personal and group success and the development of positive skills and character.

The linkage of character education and social-emotional learning strategies creates a powerful teaching and learning model that engages the cognitive (head), affective (heart) and behavior (hand) of a child or adult. We should encourage the integration of character education and social-emotional learning as a great way to put ethics in action.

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## Relevant Quote from

Nucci, L. (July 26, 2016) Character: A multi-faceted developmental system. Draft of keynote address for the workshop on Character Education for the National Academies of Sciences, Washington, D.C.

Character is not reducible to emotional development or the development of skills associated with emotion recognition or emotion regulation. Thus the research on SEL and related educational programs is a component of character and character education, but does not encompass or include character within its definition. For historical reasons associated with the contentious political meaning of character and morality within the United States political environment, SEL has become the brand that has been used to further a broader agenda. While one can applaud the success of this agenda, it is a conceptual error to subsume moral development and character formation as components of SEL. [pg 27]