

Linking Character Strengths and Key Competencies in Education/Arts

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Positive education, as a method for the positive development of students' personality, embodies the 24 character strengths that Peterson and Seligman developed in their studies and that are necessary for new professional profiles. This new social and work landscape inspired supranational institutions, such as the European Union, to develop theories for new educational systems. These Key Competencies seek the comprehensive training of students, on not only the cognitive but the socioemotional plane, as occurs with arts education.

Keywords: positive psychology ; positive education ; arts ; skills ; education ; arts education ; character strengths ; values in action ; systematic review ; competence

1. Introduction

Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that studies optimal human functioning from a scientific basis ^[1]. This trend, driven by Seligman, promotes research and the fostering of the positive aspects of the human being as the basis for happiness.

Seligman bases his study on three pillars: positive emotions; positive traits, which are personal virtues and strengths; positive institutions, which should facilitate the development of the other two pillars. Furthermore, he proposes two premises as foundations: that cultivating virtues and strengths will make us happy and that a happy life is a pleasant life, but one that must have meaning ^[2].

Research on personal strengths within positive psychology materializes in trait theory. Seligman refers to good character as that which is constituted by positive traits, which he calls strengths.

The distinctive qualities that, according to Seligman ^[2] and Park and Peterson ^[3], this good character should comprise a family of positive traits that are manifested in individual differences and that allow the strengths that people possess to be distinguished. These traits are manifested through thoughts, feelings and actions; can change throughout life; are measurable and are influenced by contextual, proximate and distal factors, so that character and its strengths are educable.

The six universally accepted positive traits, which are also called virtues, are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, moderation and transcendence. As these virtues are very general and abstract, but are concretized through 24 personal strengths, which are defined as morally valuable styles of thinking, feeling and acting, which contribute to a life in fullness ^[4].

Seligman ^[2] differentiates three aspects that are present in the concept of happiness: pleasure, commitment and meaning. For people to be happy, they must guide their lives towards the balance of these three aspects, especially the last two ^{[5][6]}. Subsequently, he added two more aspects to this model of well-being, achievements and interpersonal relationships, to create the PERMA model ^[7] of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievements. These aspects give happiness an internal and social nature.

Happiness, in the scientific approach of positive psychology, is considered "subjective well-being", which includes two components: the emotional and the cognitive ^[8].

Happiness or well-being and personal improvement are inseparable processes. Seligman ^{[2][7]} states that to be happy, people need to develop personal strengths and capacities with which to enjoy things and achieve the necessary balance

and satisfaction in life. Fordyce ^[9] was the first to develop a project for teaching happiness; based on the scientific literature, he recognized 14 qualities associated with happiness.

The counts and definitions of the virtues and character strengths, according to Seligman and Peterson are listed in **Table 1**:

Table 1. Virtues and strengths of character according to Seligman and Peterson.

VIRTUES		STRENGTHS	
1	Wisdom and knowledge	1	Curiosity, open to experience, interest in the world
		2	Love of learning
		3	Open-mindedness, judgement, critical thinking
		4	Creativity, originality, practical intelligence, insight
		5	Perspective
2	Courage	6	Bravery
		7	Persistence, industry, perseverance
		8	Integrity, authenticity, honesty
		9	Vitality, enthusiasm, energy, passion, zest
3	Humanity	10	Kindness, generosity, compassion, altruistic love, kindness, caring
		11	Love
		12	Social intelligence, personal intelligence, emotional intelligence
4	Justice	13	Citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork
		14	Impartiality and equity
		15	Leadership
5	Temperance	16	Forgiveness, mercy
		17	Prudence, discretion, caution
		18	Humility and modesty
		19	Self-control
6	Transcendence	20	Appreciation of beauty and excellence
		21	Spirituality, purpose, faith, religiosity
		22	Gratitude
		23	Humour and playfulness
		24	Hope, optimism, foresight

Positive psychology encourages education professionals to become better able to help people increase their well-being and flourish. This translates into improving people's quality of life and subjective well-being and developing their competencies ^[10]. According to this author, common elements of positive psychology, such as well-being and the development of strengths, among others, should be integrated into the mandatory academic curriculum.

Different programmes and experiences of positive psychology are applied in education, such as "Bounce Back!" ^[11]; the "Celebrating Strengths Programme" ^[12]; "Strengths Gym" ^[13]; the "Affinities Programme" or "Strong Planet" ^[14] and "SMART Strengths" ^[15] in the United States and the "Programa de promoción del desarrollo personal y social" ^{[16][17]}, the "VIP Programme" ^[18] and the Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools ^[19] in Spain.

Because it is practically impossible to develop all of a student's strengths, as many characteristics as possible should be improved, as should others that are less innate, when possible. As indicated by Reivich et al. ^[20] and Seligman ^[2], by improving personal qualities and skills and social contexts through the fostering of resilience and well-being, character strengths are cultivated, and positive emotions and relationships are experienced.

Education in the arts seeks to encourage the student's autonomy in their learning process and connect them with the world through its affective and cognitive components ^[21]. Its affective component makes the arts different from scientific thought and its influence on curricula, thereby adding value to general education. In addition, a work of art in itself can evoke perplexity, mystery or confusion that creates enormous cognitive demand and encourages intellectual research ^[22].

There is a body of literature that links the arts in education with positive psychology, demonstrating that it develops fundamental strengths for achieving eudaemonic happiness and subjective well-being ^{[23][24]}. There are countless antecedents of studies of artistic projects that seek eudaemonic happiness and the well-being of their participants, such as the Sing Up Programme in the United Kingdom ^[25] and studies in educational centres in Canada ^[26], in youth orchestras in Argentina ^[27] and in the Venezuelan system and the projects it has inspired ^{[28][29]}.

Thus, recognizing a confluence of positive education with emotional education in the arts that contributes to the personal and social well-being of the individual and develops students' integral personalities, enabling them to face daily challenges by working with values ^[30]. Additionally, training autonomous individuals who can adapt to the changes and needs of the new labour market has led to concerns about education at the international level. This is how the OECD came to create the DeSeCo project ^[31]. In this project, school curricula are reformulated around the concept of competencies. A series of Key Competencies are created that serve as a reference for the educational systems of the member countries and through which the individual is responsible for his or her learning, moving from being a consumer of knowledge to a builder of it, a process that strengthens students' overall development ^[32].

To clarify this relationship, the Key Competencies of the European Union and the character strengths that could be included in and/or developed through them are compared (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Comparison between the Key Competencies of the European Union and the character Strengths described by Seligman and Peterson.

Key Competencies of the European Union	Character Strengths
1. Communication in the native language	1, 3, 12, 20
2. Communication in foreign languages	1, 3, 12, 13, 20
3. Mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 13, 14
4. Digital competence	1, 2, 4, 12, 13
5. Learning to learn	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 19, 24
6. Social and civic competencies	3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurial spirit	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24
8. Cultural awareness and expression	1, 3, 4, 5, 12, 13, 20, 21

Research, such as that of Miller, Dumford and Johnson ^[33], provides evidence that the arts are fundamental and foster the acquisition of professional competencies that students will use in their day-to-day lives and that are necessary in social settings.

The connection between emotion and attention is vital, and it seems that art is one of the most reliable and interesting methods for developing competencies, since it has been demonstrated that there is a relationship between attention and the emotional world ^[34].

2. Linking Character Strengths and Key Competencies in Education/Arts

It can conclude that a relationship between Key Competencies and the Character Strengths can be defined, as well as outlining the nature of these relationships.

In the analyzed studies, certain patterns of combinations of strengths were repeated in the Key Competencies.

The mechanism has found the link between Character Strengths and Key Competencies is derived from **Table 3**, as explained in the results, there were two virtues, 1 (wisdom and knowledge) and 3 (humanity), in which all of the competencies developed by the arts in positive education employ all of the strengths that compose these two virtues.

Table 3. Links between Key Competencies and Strengths.

Virtues	Strengths	Key Competencies							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1								
	2								
	3								
	4								
	5								
2	6								
	7								
	8								
	9								
3	10								
	11								
	12								
4	13								
	14								
	15								
5	16								
	17								
	18								
	19								
6	20								
	21								
	22								
	23								
	24								

Note: Color means less overlap between Character Strengths and Key Competencies.

Through all the Key Competencies, the arts in positive education encourage the fundamental curiosity, love for learning, open-mindedness, critical thinking, creativity, originality, perspective, kindness, generosity, love, social intelligence, personal intelligence and emotional intelligence in students, who will be able to transfer them to the changing professional world.

From **Table 3**, there are three other Virtues, 4 (Justice), 5 (Temperance) and 6 (Transcendence), in which not all the strengths have been linked to the Key Competencies.

With respect to Virtue 4 (justice), it was not possible to find a clear link between Competency 1 (communication in mother tongue) and Strength 14 (impartiality and equity).

For Virtue 5 (temperance), Strength 19 (self-control) was barely linked to the Key Competencies, with the exception of Competencies 5 (learning to learn) and 7 (sense of initiative and entrepreneurial spirit).

For Virtue 6 (transcendence), no links were found between Strength 21 (spirituality, purpose, religiosity) and Competency 4 (digital competence) or between Strength 24 (hope, optimism) and Competency 3 (mathematical competence and basic

competence in science and technology).

The weaker presence of the strengths associated with Virtue 2 (courage and temperance) is noteworthy. Specifically, no links were found with Strengths 6 (courage), 7 (persistence, industry) and 9 (vitality, enthusiasm). Thus, it can conclude that the competencies that can be worked on in positive education through the arts would hardly develop these strengths.

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