

The Case for Affective Teaching

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Over the past fifty years, researchers in the cognitive sciences have been building a strong empirical case in support of the existence of emotional intelligence and its teachability. These researchers have demonstrated that attitudes, beliefs, values, and the other emotional and social skills can be successfully taught in schools in very much the same ways that science, mathematics, and English are taught. Furthermore, the researchers are suggesting that the sharp distinction some teachers continue to make between cognition (knowledge) and affect (emotion) is in fact much more blurred than has been accepted in the past. Yet, many of our teachers continue to teach only for knowledge outcomes, that is, the facts, concepts, principles, and procedures of mathematics, English, science, and so on, and in so doing, it can be argued, continue to place the holistic development of many of their students at risk.

This tension between the respective roles of knowledge and emotions in students' holistic development is well rooted in the historical development of western pedagogical thought, from Plato, through Thomas Aquinas, Locke, Rousseau, Descartes, and Mill, to Piaget, Bloom, and Goleman. Plato, in the dialogue *Phaedrus*, for example, describes the human condition as analogous to a chariot being pulled headlong through the sky by two horses—a dark horse pulling the chariot downwards and, at the same time, a white horse with a natural tendency to ascend towards the heavens. Plato suggests that our students, too, are constantly caught in that tension. Their bodies, through their emotions, pull them in one direction, while their minds, through their ability to think and reason, direct them to more “lofty things.”

Though this idea, that emotions and thought are two independent forces in our conscious lives that are often in conflict, has persisted through the ages, recent work in the fields of cognitive psychology and brain science has led to a major paradigm shift. Teachers now know from the works of educators like Bloom and Piaget that there is more than one type of learning and that they are not independent of each other.

Bloom, for example, identified three domains of educational activities: cognitive – knowledge; affective – growth in feelings, emotions, and attitudes; and psychomotor – skills. Bloom's taxonomy of learning behaviors can be thought of as the goals of the education process in Trinidad and Tobago. The hope has always been that after a minimum of seven years of primary schooling, the learner should have acquired new skills, knowledge, and, most significantly, new attitudes, with a fairly well-developed value system. Hence, there is an expectation that our teachers are teaching for both cognitive and affective outcomes.

However, the truth of the matter is that most teachers ignore the affective dimensions of the curriculum altogether. The result is that those students who come from homes or communities where affect matters develop these affects at home, whereas those who come from homes and communities (a growing majority) where affect does not matter, do not. If the purpose of teaching is to change attitudes and behavior rather than to simply

transmit or process information, then more of the instruction to which we expose students while in school should be structured to programme students to progress through the five levels (from receiving through internalisation) of the affective domain.

Doing this, of course, is a challenge, and may account partly for why many of our teachers shy away from teaching for affective outcomes. Teaching to them, however, is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, as Piaget has pointed out, affectivity and cognition are indissociable, that is, it is impossible to find behaviours arising from affectivity alone without any cognitive element, and vice versa.

Secondly, both cognition and affect have crucial though different roles to play in the learning process. Affectivity plays the role of the energy source on which the functioning but not the structures of the thought would depend. The students' emotions would be like gasoline that activates the car (thought) but does not modify its structure. The great medieval thinker Saint Thomas Aquinas embraced the idea that without emotional charges, our thoughts alone would be incapable of moving us into action. "Thought without emotion," says Robert Swartz, "is dormant; emotion without thought is blind."

However one might feel about the connection between thought and action, there are two fundamental tenets about our students' emotional life that most contemporary thinkers embrace. First, teaching to the affect matters. The research clearly shows that students' willingness to receive leads to an internalisation of values. Second, affective learning cannot be separated from cognitive learning. The sooner more of our teachers accept this and begin to consistently include affective outcomes in their teaching, the more worthwhile the learning will be for our students. If the learning is worthwhile, it should have an impact on the learners' lives; an impact that should make them more understanding, more caring, more tolerant, and more communicative.

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