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**FEATURE**

## **Affective Teaching: A Place for Emotion in Classroom Learning**

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***Abstract:** Teaching and learning nearly always take place in a social context. Intellectual growth also brings about changes in the social and emotional facets of both teachers and students. Teaching and learning are greatly affected by the quality of relationships forged between teachers and students. Education aims at 'humanizing' people. However, meaningful education only occurs when this task is accomplished collectively, with the help of everyone involved in the process of teaching and learning. A longitudinal action research study conducted at an international college in Asia revealed that the key to successful teaching is to become a 'caring teacher.' It was found that a classroom that is adorned with 'care' is a place where students love to be for the sake of learning. When 'care' was absent, every activity in the classroom became a tedious and difficult task.*

***Keywords:** Social-emotional Learning, Caring Teacher, Affective Teaching, Engaging Teaching Methods, Relational Teaching, Action Research.*

### **Introduction**

Affective teaching is often defined as the opposite of cognitive teaching. However, since there is a strong connection between emotion and the highest forms of learning, such a sharp distinction may be inappropriate. This dichotomous viewpoint about teaching and learning is no longer seen as valid (Krishnan, 2007), however, exploration of the role of emotion in classroom learning has received extensive attention over the years (e.g., Berliner, 1995; Bracey, 1991; Brookover, 1981; Brown, 1971; Deutsch, 1949; Flanders, 1970; Glasser, 1969; Glidewell, 1976; Hentoff, 1966; Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Kohl,

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1969; Kozol, 1967; Krishnan, 2006; Lightfoot, 1983; Lippitt & Gold, 1959; McMillan, 1980; Nyquist & Hawes, 1972; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rogers, 1969; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1974, 1976; Silverstein, 1994; Thelen, 1960; Withall, 1949a, 1949b, 1977).

Rogers (1969), in his prominent work *Freedom to Learn* called for a cutback of authoritarian direction and control in schools. Around the same time, Illich (1970) proposed a restructuring of educational programs and a change in the highly structured practices of school life. Such calls were in response to the traditional rigid forms of schooling which were regarded as destructive and damaging to students' learning as well as their social-emotional states. The criticism was not against curriculum material or teaching methods. The concern was rather about the failure of schools to create favorable learning environments for students as a result of organizational inefficiency, an ineffective relationship between teachers and administrators, an ineffective relationship between teachers and students and/or parents, or a failure to change the existing norms and procedures that support a more open and supportive teaching-learning environment (Hentoff, 1966; Herndon, 1971; Kozol, 1967).

The need for affective growth of everyone (students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc.) in the school system became the focus of many humanistic psychologists and educators in the early 70s and 80s. In addition, advocates of innovative teaching methods and procedures focused on human interaction in schools and a concern for emotion and self-concept in classrooms. With the proposal of a new curriculum by Brown (1971) known as 'Confluent Education for Elementary Students,' the imbalance between the cognitive and affective aspects of teaching finally began to be addressed.

*Confluent education* (Brown, 1971) is crucial because it deals simultaneously with academic content and students' feelings. Glasser (1969) shared similar sentiments and promoted the importance of emphasizing the human and feeling side of classrooms. This is accomplished by applying knowledge and principles about 'infants--learning in unstructured settings' to students learning in classroom settings, stressing individual differences (in characteristics, needs, and aspirations), caring for and nurturing students' feelings, and encouraging active participation of students in learning.

Studies by Edmonds (1979) and Rutter (1979) indicate that the social climate for academic learning varied among schools and that different school cultures resulted in different student achievement levels. In other words, social-cultural variables such as the amount of support, the type of interpersonal relationship, and individual and collective morale are significant predictors of success or failure in teaching as well as learning. High achieving schools are the ones that possess a supportive social climate where every member of the institution experiences social support, is given positive reinforcement, feels that it is

possible to obtain and exercise power, and achieves significantly (Kanter, 1983, 1989 & Schein, 1985).

The outcome of any learning experience is determined by the extent to which the learner enjoys his/her interaction with the substance of learning within a particular external environmental niche. Whether it is learning about self, learning about the living environment (both physical and social), or abstract concepts, the quality of learning—mastery of knowledge and/or skills—is dependent on the setting within which the learning is experienced (Baek & Choi, 2002). In other words, the classroom climate, which implies the emotional tones associated with interactions, attitudinal responses, and the motivational satisfaction of both teachers and students significantly affects learning and all other related experiences of the individuals. Therefore, it is not an understatement to say that classroom environment is a good predictor of students' motivation, satisfaction, and academic achievement (Anderson & Burns, 1989; Borich, 1988; Fraser & Walberg, 1991; Walberg, 1968).

### ***Methodology and Procedures***

A longitudinal action-research design was used to explore and investigate the effects of affective teaching on the social-emotional status and academic achievement of students. The research was conducted with tertiary students with an interest in improving the quality of actions relating to them. The data collected from student participants were used to solve problems relating to classroom experiences, action planning, action taking, and for evaluating consequences of the actions.

The primary data consisted of reflective-participant-observation reports completed by the researcher. These data consisted of anecdotal records of the experiences of both the teacher/researcher and the students for a period of two years. Classes were predominantly attended by sophomore, junior, and senior students in the Education/Psychology Department at an international college in the Asia-Pacific region. Students came from a variety of backgrounds and represented different nationalities. These students also differed in their general English language proficiency and overall academic achievement (before and during the time of research). The researcher played the role of introducing a particular program, treatment, or intervention (based on the principles of affective teaching) in the form of teaching methods, interpersonal communication patterns, disciplinary techniques, assessment orientations, inside/outside classroom activities, modeling, and discussions of personal experiences.

Students' academic achievement and their feedback about affective teaching were also recorded during the time of research. The feedback obtained was in the form of verbal and non-verbal messages, comments by students toward

articles posted by the researcher about affective teaching and its principles in the researcher's blog ([www.affectiveteaching.com](http://www.affectiveteaching.com)), level and frequency of participation in the classroom, performance in various required and optional assignments, performance on the mid-semester and final examinations. Finally, the researcher engaged in content analysis by looking at emerging themes and patterns from narrative field notes that were collected and collated during the two-year time period. These themes and patterns were then coded and categorized to be presented as findings of the study.

### ***Results and Findings***

The study confirms the results and findings of many other research studies in the area of social-emotional teaching and learning (e.g., Haertel, Walberg, & Haertel, 1981). The results and findings are divided into two major categories: one enumerating some of the most effective ways of implementing affective teaching in college classes, and another enumerating the experiences and performances of students across areas of function in the classroom.

The price one pays to celebrate and promote affective teaching practices is high. However, the teacher/researcher experienced a personal sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from upholding and implementing various practices that relate to social-emotional learning. The following tools/interventions were found to be effective in translating the principles of affective teaching into college classroom practice:

1. Two-way communication patterns where students are allowed to negotiate, participate in, and contribute to any major decision making relevant to learning or life in the classroom with the teacher.
2. Engaging Teaching Methods (Krishnan, 2006) were employed to make learning personal, stimulating, challenging, and involving. The teacher constantly encouraged and invited students to move beyond knowledge acquisition to knowledge creation. The engaging methods employed to teach each lesson helped in setting an unstructured classroom environment in which students could explore and learn without fear and anxiety (as compared to a highly structured setting in which students may become inhibited to learn).
3. Leadership was shared with students. Students were allowed to feel in control of their own learning, they were given responsibilities that they were accountable for, and they were allowed to influence each other in a positive manner. There were times when negative influences became strong among groups or the whole class. In such cases, the teacher confronted the groups or the whole class with the issue, which was then collectively resolved.

4. Cooperative learning activities were frequently provided. However, inter-group competition was incorporated occasionally to encourage participation and develop a sense of belonging to a smaller group. A balance among cooperative, competitive, and individualistic classroom structures was ensured.
5. Focus was put on building students' confidence in mastering a particular knowledge and skill (mastery learning). To accomplish this, the teacher used the strategy of cognitive scaffolding where individual students work closely with the teacher or another peer to master a challenging learning task.
6. Performance based assessment tools were predominantly used to grade students. This alleviated the anxiety factor and allowed students to be at their best when demonstrating how much they had learned and mastered during a particular learning experience (regardless of its difficulty level).
7. Positive, unthreatening conversations were carried out between the teacher and students, and among students in the classroom. This communication allowed the development of healthy interpersonal relationships among the individuals in the classroom.
8. Passion and enthusiasm accompanied teaching, every activity, and every discussion in the classes. These emotions were added to elevate the level of motivation and interest that students possess about a particular class.
9. The teacher constantly communicated high but realistic expectations to the students. This was done from the first day of instruction until the semester was over. These expectation-messages were given in the form of verbal statements and non-verbal gestures or cues.
10. Teaching and everything that took place in the classroom was embedded in the relational dynamics that were established between the teacher and students. In other words, the teacher did everything possible to build friendships with students and also encouraged each student to build friendships with others in the classroom (motivated by the realization that we are first and foremost 'humans' and then teachers and students).
11. The teacher employed a blended democratic-permissive disciplinary approach where students were not condemned for their mistakes or misunderstood for their being difficult. Rather, the teacher took the time to explore reasons for a particular conflict or problem and helped students to overcome it. Resolution was possible because the teacher

strongly believes that given sufficient time and exposure to appropriate opportunities, people will change.

12. No one was forced to learn. Desire for learning was encouraged by the creation of a positive classroom climate which was necessary before learning could take place. This was accomplished by beginning each lesson with a stimulating, fun, attention-grabbing activity, thought, or discussion.
13. The teacher did not hesitate to admit any mistake committed and amend things when he knew he was in the wrong. The teacher avoided unnecessary battles by consciously allowing students to question and challenge him without becoming defensive or offended by students.
14. Creativity was incorporated in every learning activity. Students were also encouraged to push their limits and come up with creative ideas, products, or actions.

The implementation of affective teaching principles in action brought about the following changes and experiences in students:

1. The achievement of a greater level of cohesiveness among students.
2. The experience of personal and collective satisfaction toward learning in the classroom.
3. A sense of direction to fulfill academic and non-academic goals.
4. Frictions were reduced among students and between students and the teacher.
5. Progress in academic achievement (average percentage score of a class: 80 to 82%).
6. A sense of control and power were felt and this eliminated fear, frustration, and the tendency to rebel.
7. Learning was viewed as stimulating, exciting, interesting, and progressive.
8. Critical and creative thinking skills were developed and enhanced.
9. Confidence was built through mastery of different knowledge and skills (reduced the effects of learned helplessness).
10. The teacher was approached with academic and non-academic problems; students did not hesitate to share their difficulties, fears, and uncertainties. Help was sought whenever required.
11. Students became more responsible for their own learning, were accountable for their actions and decisions related learning and non-learning tasks.

12. Boredom was significantly removed and students were highly motivated in classes.
13. Students often felt inspired and became more focused on what they wanted to do with their lives now (at the time of the study) and in the future.
14. Active participation of almost every student was demonstrated in class discussions; students did not hesitate to make mistakes because they were highly motivated to learn, even from their mistakes.
15. Imitation, adoption, rehearsal, and internalization of affective teaching practices by students in their own presentations, micro-teaching, etc.
16. A change in attitude, feelings, and behavior toward the experiences of teaching and learning in the classroom.

### **Discussion**

All of the above indicate that affective teaching is truly a practical working model to enhance social-emotional learning in the classroom. Studies by Fraser and Fisher (1982) and Walberg (1979) show that classrooms where students and teachers support one another facilitate the development of self-esteem and satisfaction of fundamental motives. They also provide opportunities for students to use their intellectual capacities to the fullest.

The interpersonal power that students feel with their classmates and the levels of skills and competence students see in themselves also encourage positive feelings about school and increased involvement in classroom tasks. The relevance of positive classroom climates for optimal school adjustment of students is now commonplace for most educational practitioners (Argyris, 1976; Benham, 1980; Bowman, et al., 1999; Brookhart, 1997; Brookhart & DeVoge, 1999; Calonico & Calonico, 1972; Chen, et al., 1999; Dorman, 1996; Duck, 1986; Fyans, 1980; Howes, 2000; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992).

Affective teaching entails two major educational practices. Both however, are things teachers do to ensure maximum learning in students. Both are initiated by teachers who care enough for the holistic development of learners. The first one is the act of creating a positive classroom climate. The second has to do with having the right type of orientation toward teaching and learning. An affective teacher remembers and teaches using the 'learning-centered' approach (compared to teacher-centered, subject-centered, or even student-centered approaches). The learning-centered approach to teaching takes into account the actual ways in which our brain works and functions when we engage in an act of learning. In other words, affective teachers know for a fact that it is impossible to teach any subject devoid of emotional experiences. Hence, an affective

teacher does everything possible to break down the structure that is inherently existent in a regular classroom setting and makes it a place where it is safe for students to explore, make mistakes, and learn by doing (Krishnan, 2007).

### **Recommendations**

This section of the paper will focus on suggesting pertinent recommendations to encourage teachers to learn, adopt, and internalize affective teaching as a means to enhance academic achievement as well as improve the social-emotional conditions of learners in the classroom. One of the major challenges among teachers that continues to be a hurdle in spreading the use of affective teaching alongside cognitive teaching is attitudinal in nature. Behavioral changes are relatively easier than attitudinal changes. However, it is the changes in the attitude that will effect permanent and positive alterations in teaching practices (Di Martino & Zan, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Hannel, 2005; Kouladis, 1987; McDermott, 1991; Moreira, 1993). Teachers who are reluctant to learn, adopt, and internalize the principles of affective teaching will not be able to create the positive classroom climate necessary to uphold learning-centered teaching.

Although it is well known that teachers are a difficult-to-change group of people (though they constantly expect students to change to fit into their requirements), there is still reason to be hopeful and optimistic about them. According to Tiberghien (1993), teachers, like students, learn the best when they are constantly exposed to good role models. The researcher saw an evidence of this in his own students. They slowly but surely began using affective teaching in their own classroom presentations, micro-teaching, and other assignments. Hence, the researcher recommends that teachers be provided with role models who will demonstrate the principles and practices of affective teaching. This can be done in the form of classroom observation of already existing affective teachers, participation in seminars and workshops on affective teaching where presenters demonstrate (rather than merely presenting or teaching) different aspects of affective teaching.

Increasing awareness about the impact of affective teaching on academic achievement and the social-emotional conditions of students is also useful and necessary. This can be done by exposing teachers to relevant literature, films, and lectures on affective teaching. The school administrators should take an interest to provide teachers with these resources and constantly encourage them to adopt and use the principles learned in their own teaching. Further, the school administrators should plan a sustainable supportive program to motivate teachers to learn, adopt, and internalize affective teaching.



Teachers learn new things better when they have the appropriate support from their colleagues. Teams should be formed to make sure that teachers get continual micro-support and technical-expert-support required to continue learning affective teaching approaches to enhance their own practices. As teachers gain competency in certain aspects of this new approach to teaching, they will be motivated and inspired to master other more challenging areas of affective teaching and succeed progressively. Teams will also serve to help teachers address and discuss difficulties, issues, and complications involved in employing the techniques of affective teaching in their own classes.

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