

Teaching for Affective Learning

CONCERN for the affective dimension of the learning process is not a new issue in education. What is new, however, is the specific emphasis defined by the social and psychological malaise of our times. From our view of man's estrangements in modern life, implied by preoccupations with the problems of alienation and anomie, we draw certain ideas about the importance of teaching for affective learning in today's schools.

Automation vs. Humanization

In the face of such dehumanizing influences as automation, expanding bureaucracies, mass production, and other efficiency oriented operations, we must ask the schools more insistently than ever for help in rediscovering and maintaining the dignity of the individual. For if modern man, and hence the modern learner, is subjected to external and internal pressures which obscure his identity and threaten his integrity, then the implications for teaching are clear. Our educational efforts must focus primary emphasis on the human denominator of learning. We cannot afford, in our approaches to education, to equate men with machines. Schools must be humanizing centers for learning, and all planned

activities must reflect an intrinsic valuing of the learner as a person.

Close inspection of some existing instructional practices shows the disturbing extent to which we are already caught in the tentacles of mechanization. Fast and slow groups, for example, are machine concepts. Some curricular approaches, such as grade-level placement of content ideas, have much in common with packaging processes; both are designed for quantity consumption and mass conformity. An illustration of this practice appeared in one college student's paper which indicated:

So many times teachers made me feel like a factory doing two chapters a week. If I misunderstood a concept introduced in one chapter I was out of luck because I didn't have time to spend on it.

Recent investigations in the area of cognitive functioning tell us that modes of thinking vary and learning styles differ from one person to another; yet we persist in allocating the study of concepts on a grade-level basis. In the frenetic post-Sputnik efforts to avert man's self-destruction, we often have lost sight

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of affective elements in learning. As we have poured energies and resources into cultivating a crop of scientists and technicians, we have overemphasized intellectual and cognitive tasks. In meeting the problem of the so-called culturally disadvantaged learner, today, we assert the central importance of sensory experiences in the preschool years as prerequisites to later successes with academic tasks.

Educators cannot afford to take a corporation approach to learning, with priorities placed on homogenized products which are prefabricated and machine-assembled to diminish the amount of human involvement in the "finishing-off" process. But such mechanized trends make it hazardous to leave things to chance or to postpone action. To take immediate steps in humanizing schools through deliberate planning of experiences which give adequate consideration to the individual's affective learning is the educational imperative of today.

Affective Elements

Should there be doubt about the significance of affective elements in the educative process, the experiences of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, as reported in the popular book *Teacher*,¹ provide eloquent testimony. In describing the reading program, she observes that the source of the first words and first books must be the child himself. She attempts to find what is in the mind of the child and to use that as a basis for her first teaching.

She uses the child's expressions, regardless of the respectability of their content, as her starting point. Thus the learner finds security in the familiarity

of the material and enjoys his introduction to reading. This rewarding encounter with words provides an emotional bridge to reading materials which are not direct outgrowths of the child's experiences. He is able, then, to transfer his joy in reading and extend his reach to other cultures.

This illustration represents one teacher's experiences in her "infant room" in New Zealand. The account identifies, however, some of the basic ingredients in affective learnings which have importance for most teaching situations regardless of the cultural setting. These ingredients may be stated in the form of principles:

1. When the teacher and students interact in a context of openness, the emotional base of each person is honored and accepted without judgment or bias.
2. When the learning situation dignifies the uniqueness of each person, it frees the growth forces within the individual for self-fulfilling pursuits.
3. When teachers and pupils share their feelings, thoughts and actions in an atmosphere of mutual trust, their behavior becomes spontaneous, flexible, open and authentic.
4. When the teacher provides warmth, acceptance and empathy, the learner is free to regard his emotions and personal meanings as legitimate content in learning.
5. When the learning has personal significance for the learner, he can see use for it and will want to venture into new realms of meaning.

The emphasis in these principles, on the emotionally supportive functions of teaching, is worth noting. Every statement, in some way, characterizes the teacher's behavior as facilitating, liberating, assisting and encouraging the learn-

¹ Sylvia Ashton-Warner. *Teacher*. New York, N. Y.: Bantam Books, 1963. p. 31-32.

er's responses. The teacher is never pictured as "making children do things," "granting permission," "allowing or preventing actions," and "making judgments about behavior." Despite the stress on affective components, there is no loss of learning; in fact, the opposite appears to take place. Learning is more encompassing; it includes not only factual content but the pupil's positive feelings about what is learned. It seems, moreover, that the affective elements, such as the learner's delight with what he is doing, actually establish the basis for meaningful and autonomous learning.

Examples of Affective Learnings

Further substantiation of the importance of affective learnings was found in some statements gathered from teacher candidates who were taking a course in educational foundations. The students were asked to describe the most liked and the most disliked teacher. Their comments, in either form, indicated the extent to which the emotional impact of the teacher's behavior influenced their learning. Some of them said:

"... took a deep interest in each student as an individual and was concerned with how he was doing in and out of school."

"... showed a personal interest in me as a person."

"... created a challenge for me which I enjoy meeting."

"... seemed to understand the anxieties I felt."

"... respected our opinions and never made embarrassing comments about any of us."

"... didn't give us a chance to get bored because we became self-motivated."

"... ability to instill in his classes a love for the subject he taught."

"... made me feel guilty because sewing wasn't the most important thing in my life."

"... only my failures were pointed out, never said how well I did in anything."

The students consistently took the position in these statements that the authenticity of the teacher's feelings and actions transcended scholarship and subject matter competencies. Carl R. Rogers seems to share this view when he talks about "congruence" as an honest expression of the full range of feelings, thoughts and actions that are evoked in interpersonal relationships.² Within this concept, it seems necessary to view knowledge and the presentation of the subject as only a fraction of a larger domain of teacher behaviors that are involved in the learning situation.

If an implementation of the congruent approach to teaching were more widely attempted, certain revisions in traditional definitions of appropriate classroom behavior would have to be made. In the conventional view, for example, it is generally considered improper and undemocratic for the teacher to express certain emotions and show personal preferences. The college students' replies clearly indicate, however, that favoritism was not only apparent but prevalent. Most of us could supplement their accounts with examples from our own school days.

The mere mention of the caption "teacher's pet" unleashes a host of vivid memories. We could probably recall as readily the subtler ways the teacher communicated his wishes to the class. The often used pronoun "we," for example, did not necessarily imply a cooperatively based decision. More likely than not, this plural noun was drawn into service by the teacher to cover up an arbitrary position. Thus, the real message that it conveyed to the class probably went

* Carl R. Rogers. *Client-Centered Therapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951.

something like this: "In this classroom the teacher calls the shots."

Implications for Teacher Education

In the face of such traditions, some teachers may encounter major difficulties and frustrations in attempting to achieve a one-to-one relationship between their awareness and their experience. If the same conditions of congruence were fostered among the pupils, the problem for some teachers would be enormously magnified. Several facets of the problem were identified and explored in a seminar-type professional education course for prospective teachers.

The major facets revolved around the students' readiness to present themselves in open terms. The majority expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to explore their feelings and distrusted their capacity for coping with the honest expressions of pupils. When they considered examples of positive teacher models presented in films and current literature, they were inclined to intellectualize the problem and to render a superficial treatment of the issues. In this context, for example, they tended to polarize all external authority as manipulation and propagandizing.

Their criticisms reflected tendencies to conceive of autonomy and freedom in nearly anarchistic terms. While the concept of a teacher as a facilitator of the students' learning was intellectually acceptable to them, the implementing behaviors were rejected as offensive and undemocratic. These ambiguities may be suggestive of the phenomenon of alienation. This characteristic seems to be especially relevant to the conditions of distrust and lack of faith in established adult authority.

The same pattern of responses was evidenced in the earlier phases of the semester's work in which the subject of alienation provided an orienting theme for study. The feelings of alienation were far more readily admitted as a culture-wide phenomenon than as a personal condition. Peer pressures tended to support the intellectualization of the conditions of alienation. This support was the students' best protection from the conflict they felt when their personal involvement was expected to justify their intellectualizations.

Concrete activities, such as school visits and participation in community agency programs, were used to supplement the cognitive explorations of these problems. Through these firsthand encounters, students were helped to confront themselves as individuals. They brought examples from their own experiences back to the college classroom for discussion. As they studied their own functioning in various relationships, they began to formulate a picture of themselves based on an assessment of their capabilities and limitations in these roles.

From this appraisal, they gradually gained perspective on themselves as catalysts in the teaching role. They were ready, then, to develop diverse approaches to teaching which were compatible with their unique and personal styles of functioning. They formulated a variety of techniques and procedures for involving audio-visual materials, lectures, authority positions, non-authority positions, and technological aids as resources for learning. As emerging teachers, they began to show inclination and ability to plan for many types of cognitive and affective learnings without losing sight of the central criterion of the pupil as a unique individual.

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