

# Affective Factors Influence Classroom Learning

SOCIAL psychologists warn us that communication between members of different subgroups in our culture is fraught with peril. Mindful of this peril, the writer presents in this paper a review of some research on the influence of affective factors on classroom learning. A frame of reference is presented first. This is followed by a review of research on teacher-learner affective characteristics and interactions, and some concluding remarks.

Doubtless the general goal of education can be stated in many different ways. From the point of view of an educational psychologist the writer would define this general objective as the arrangement of conditions which will

promote effective and efficient student learning aimed at developing all human abilities and nourishing appropriately wholesome affective characteristics. The factors influencing student learning are numerous and diverse. To arrive at a useful conceptualization of classroom learning it is necessary to classify these variables into manageable categories.

Gallagher (1964) has proposed a model of productive thinking as a function of motivational, personality, and cognitive factors operating in different environmental situations. He sees a large number of different patterns of intellect, motivation, personality, and environment leading to productive thinking. It is suggested, for example, that an individual operating under high motivation might overcome the effects of an inadequate environment, or that negative personality factors might be compensated by a good environment.

More closely related to classroom learning, Klausmeier (1961) has presented a conception of factors affecting teaching-learning processes in any behavioral setting for learning. Six main factors are identified: learner characteristics, teacher characteristics, learner and teacher behaviors, group characteristics, physical characteristics of the behavioral setting, and outside forces. As Klausmeier uses the term, behavior implies verbalizing, doing, and feeling—the entire range of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective activities engaged in by teachers and learners.

These general formulations suggest the complex interrelationships of many factors and classes of variables affecting classroom learning. Specifically for the purposes of this paper, these formulations call attention to the important influence of affective factors. As used here, affective factors are those referring to

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personal-social-emotional behaviors of teachers and learners and to the feeling tone of the learning environment generated by their interactions.

Current emphasis centers on cognitive processes. The many curriculum reform projects are based on a cognitive approach (Ripple and Rockcastle, 1964). Piaget, whose influence is recently being felt in American education, is concerned with the developmental nature and process of cognition (Flavell, 1963). Guilford's model of intellect emphasizes the individual differentiation of cognitive abilities (Guilford, 1959). Bruner (1964), another psychologist with an increasing influence on educational practice, is mainly concerned with cognitive growth.

There are some voices being raised in warning against an exclusive concern with cognition. For example, Sears and Hilgard have written:

In these days of emphasis upon cognitive processes, it is quite possible for the pendulum to swing too far, and hence to defeat the attainment of the very cognitive goals that are being sought. . . . the teacher's awareness of the affective interaction with pupils is as important in a curriculum directed toward cognition as one with other goals, such as those of social competence or personal adjustment (Sears and Hilgard, 1964, page 197).

### Affective Characteristics and Interactions

It would seem evident that teacher behavior has an effect on student behavior. Although it is not expected (or desired) that all teachers have identical personalities, several investigations of the affective dimension of teacher behavior have yielded guidelines for fostering productive student behavior and mental health.

There is evidence from research done in classroom settings to support the notion that students react positively to teacher behavior characterized as warm and nurturant. This type of behavior can perhaps best be described as considerate, understanding and friendly with a tolerance for some release of emotional feeling by students. Reed (1962) found that teachers so characterized had a favorable influence on students' interest in science. Cogan (1958) found that students with warm, considerate teachers produced unusual amounts of original poetry and art. In a correlational study, Ryans (1961) noted strong positive relationships in elementary school classrooms between observers' assessment of productive student behavior (e.g., alertness, participation, confidence, responsibility) and identified patterns of teacher behavior, such as understanding, friendly classroom behavior; organized, businesslike classroom behavior; and stimulating, original classroom behavior. In secondary school classrooms these relationships were less pronounced, with stimulating, original teacher behavior showing a higher correlation with student behavior than the other teacher behavior patterns.

In an exploratory study of relationships between selected teacher and pupil characteristics, Christensen (1960) found warmth of teachers significantly related to student vocabulary and arithmetic achievement. Teacher warmth and the directiveness-permissiveness of the teacher in teaching subject matter were studied as separate dimensions. Results are interpreted as supporting the contention that the teacher's affective response is more important for growth in achievement than permissiveness.

In order for productive learning to go on, teachers must maintain a sense of

order and decorum in the classroom. The way the teacher manages students' behavior in classroom settings is another form of teacher behavior having affective consequences. A series of studies of classroom management by Kounin and Gump (1961a, 1961b) is revealing in this regard.

It was found that the teachers' techniques of handling a misbehaving kindergarten child had different degrees of socializing success on other children in the classroom. Control techniques high in clarity (defining the misbehavior and specifying how to stop) were most successful. Control techniques high in firmness (e.g., standing closer to the child and looking at him until he stopped misbehaving) were successful only for audience children who were misbehaving at the time. Control techniques high in roughness (showing anger and physical handling) were least successful and tended to be followed by behavior disruptions, decreased involvement in school work, and overt anxiety. A study conducted with first graders yielded the conclusion that children with punitive teachers, as compared to children with nonpunitive teachers, manifest more aggression in their misconducts, are more unsettled about misconduct in school, and are less concerned with learning. Similar results were found with eighth and ninth grade classes.

Research by Anderson and Brewer (1945, 1946) was also addressed to the nonintellectual concomitants of teacher dominance. Dominance referred to restrictions on the spontaneous behavior of children through authoritarian control, disapproval and threat. High teacher dominance was associated with undesirable student behaviors such as whispering, failing to carry out requests, etc. The researchers cited the tendency

of teacher dominative behavior to produce student dominative behavior.

Flanders (1949) investigated how learning and achievement are influenced by the nature and quality of teacher-pupil interactions. Students experienced two different learning situations. Social-emotional differences between the two situations were created by the role of the teacher. In one situation teacher behavior supported the teacher first, the problem second, and the student third. In the other situation teacher behavior supported the student first, the problem second, and the teacher third. In the first teacher role, student behavior reflecting interpersonal anxiety took precedence over behavior oriented to the learning content. Also, it appeared that demanding, deprecating teacher behavior resulted in aggression, hostility and apathy toward learning. Teacher behavior oriented toward supporting the learner elicited less interpersonal anxiety in students, more problem solving behavior, and a greater degree of emotional integration.

Several research reviews suggest that the role of anxiety in the learning situation is exceedingly complex (Bronfenbrenner and Ricciuti, 1960; Ruebush, 1963). While a mild degree of anxiety appears to facilitate learning, Symonds (1958) proposed that teachers should not deliberately arouse anxiety in learners. Most learning situations are sufficiently anxiety producing in themselves and the better approach is to reduce anxiety. This is in accord with the recommendations of Sarason and his associates. On the basis of several years of research on anxiety in elementary school children they write:

From our observations we have concluded that one of the most important dimensions on which teachers vary is the

degree to which they establish an atmosphere in which the child's sense of security and level of self esteem are very much determined by the adequacy of his performance (Sarason *et al.*, 1960, page 273).

And a bit later on:

In the case of the anxious child, we feel that the teacher's response to an inadequate performance must avoid reinforcing the attitude that failure and being personally liked and accepted are in any way related. (Sarason *et al.*, 1960, page 273).

Jules Henry (1957) sees the elementary school classroom as a powerful instrument in organizing the attitudes and feelings of youth. He contends that different teachers organize the same underlying emotional characteristics of children to achieve different organizations of the emotions. On the basis of observational research, Henry finds that the skill in being a teacher is one of a learned capacity to keep shifting states of order intelligently as the work demands—not the traditional you-can-hear-a-pin-drop type of order but rather the “. . . kind of order in which the emotions of the children are caught up and organized toward the achievement of a specific goal” (Henry, 1957, page 132).

Research by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) on interpersonal interactions of children in differing social climates created by group leaders signaled a train of studies on the social-emotional climate of group situations. Three boys' club atmospheres were artificially created. In one situation activities were determined by an autocratic adult authority figure; a second situation employed democratic group discussion processes in which the adult leader acted as one of the group members; in the third situation, designated as *laissez faire*, the group leader was highly non-directive and the boys were free to do as they

pleased. Among the many conclusions it was noted that group members in a democratic social climate were more friendly to one another, showed more group-mindedness, were more work-minded, showed greater initiative, and had a higher level of frustration tolerance than members in the other groups.

A more recent investigation by Lippitt and Gold (1959) inquired into the socio-emotional structure of the classroom. One of the most influential environments for the child is his school classroom. Two major aspects of his classroom environment are his relations with his teachers and with his classmates. These relations develop a stable pattern referred to by the researchers as the classroom socio-emotional structure. The student's position in this structure becomes an important determinant of his mental health and his motivation and ability to participate in classroom interaction.

Evidence is presented to substantiate the view that the interpersonal social structure of the classroom forms rapidly and maintains a high degree of stability throughout the school year. Children with high positions in this classroom structure show fewer behavior problems, greater social adjustment, and more stable emotionality. Children in low positions in the socio-emotional structure tended to have mental health difficulties. This was reflected in interpersonal relationship difficulties and in behavior patterns which disrupted the life of the classroom group.

Further, the on-going processes of the classroom tended to aggravate the mental health problems of these children. They had continuing experiences of social failure and rejection in their relationships with classmates. Teachers contributed to this emotionally unhealthy state of affairs by paying attention to the

social behavior, rather than the performance behavior, of low status pupils more often than of high status pupils. A host of questions are raised relating to an appropriate role for teachers to play in improving the socio-emotional structure of the classroom for all pupils. Current research by these investigators is exploring these questions.

Though not exhaustive, this brief review of some of the research regarding the influence of affective factors in classroom learning is sufficiently impressive to reinforce the warning of Sears and Hilgard cited previously.

As teachers and learners vary in their affective characteristics and behaviors, so the feeling or affective tone of the classroom setting for learning varies. Whatever the specific goals of classroom instruction might be, the classroom affective tone can facilitate or interfere with their attainment.

Research results suggest that the attainment of these goals will be facilitated if the affective qualities of teachers and classrooms are characterized by: (a) a feeling of general warmth; (b) tolerance of moderate expressions of emotion and feeling by students; (c) democratic group decision making leading to stimulating activities; (d) the use of nonpunitive control techniques high in clarity and firmness; (e) reduced frustration and anxiety in learning situations; and (f) shifting states of order based on organizing emotions toward the achievement of goals.

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## Human Interaction—Stewart

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pupils "seemed to have a better concept of their rich heritage." A teacher of Negro children did not have available a unit, or even a chapter, on the history of Negro contributions. Her class also wrote a play entitled, *All About Us* (later published as a book), but their effort required much cooperation from librarians, community groups and scholars having knowledge of the Negro in our history.

Implicit in the foregoing discussion are ways in which children improve their feelings about others while improving their feelings about self in interaction with peers, school people and other community adults. Another potential for pupil-pupil interaction is the *interschool* pupil exchange, including that of public and parochial pupils. Examples range

from "one time" visits between safety patrols or an exchange of school assemblies, to a year-long program of exchange between fourth graders of two schools—one white, the other Negro. Pupil evaluations of the latter example emphasized changes in their beliefs and feelings about each other.

Our disadvantaged children must be given the technical competence required for productive service in today's world. They need also the human values required to direct and enrich their technical competence. Improving the quality of human interaction in school and community will contribute directly or indirectly to both. Nor will the disadvantaged be the only instruments for transmitting the benefits of human interaction. School people too will find themselves changed in the process, and the total community will be the better for it.

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