The Continuing Controversy Over Affective Education

Basic issues need to be resolved if this essential aspect of schooling is to rise above ambiguity and ambivalence.

Among the general purposes of education, affective learning is one of the most important and controversial. "Affect" refers to those aspects of human nature and conduct having to do with emotions, feelings, values, attitudes, predispositions, and morals. While such definitions are relatively easy to come by, the form or substance of affective education represents perhaps the most problematic of all school issues. In fact, the debate over affective education has been brewing for some time and is apparently nearing a turning point. Beneath the surface of the controversy are fundamental questions about what affective learnings schools ought to promote and how such learning should take place.

How the debate over these questions will eventually end is unclear. Misunderstanding and misinterpretation abound. Constructive progress toward consensus about the form of affective education requires clarification of its purposes, origins, and possible methods.
Affect as a Domain of Learning

In the seventeenth century, "affect" began to be used to denote aspects of human nature that were differentiated from thought. More recently, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sterling McMurrin (1967), distinguished affective from cognitive learning by suggesting that the former had to do with emotion, feeling, and the like and that the latter focused on knowledge and thought. Such distinctions are certainly handy for developing theoretical statements and research designs but distracting when it comes to the realities of human learning for personal and social growth. Understanding or formulating individual and collective values depends largely on the use of careful thinking as does wise participation in social and political processes. Likewise, interpretive movement such as modern dance involves at least as much affect as it does activity from the psychomotor or "third domain." An education for humanness depends on an artful blend of all three domains; to ignore any one is to deny what makes us deeply and genuinely human.

Nevertheless, the distinction among domains continues to plague curriculum planning and adds fuel to the controversy over the place of affect in schooling. The misguided idea that cognitive means academic deserves some of the blame. The cognitive domain involves not only the acquisition of knowledge, but its use in increasingly complex thought processes. At its highest level the cognitive domain involves evaluation, the determination of value or worth, which obviously includes value preferences and appreciation.

Despite the clear connection among domains, those who are concerned with higher-order thinking skills frequently focus on their application to academic programs with little concern for how they might enhance personal and social purposes. Meanwhile, affective education continues to be viewed as part of the "soft side" of the curriculum. For those most enamored with knowledge acquisition, such a view might lead to a dangerous equation: cognitive/thinking education equals academic programs minus affective education. This view is both false and unproductive. Given youths' preoccupation with personal and social issues, might not higher-order thinking skills be promoted more successfully through their application to these issues, rather than limiting their application to academic subjects? On the other hand, developing relationships of thinking skills to both affective and academic areas would more adequately serve the school's goals. In short, it is theoretically and practically worthwhile for us to understand that affective education is a necessary condition for effective education.

The Roots of Affective Education

Affective education is concerned with the formation, content, and role of emotions, feelings, values, attitudes, predispositions, and morals. To determine its place in the curriculum, we must answer two compelling questions: what should be the substance of affect, and what methods should be used to promote it? Answers to these questions stem from two major lines of reasoning. The first is based on the idea that the content of affect—particularly values, morals, and ethics—is found in sources external to human experience. The second holds that such content should be derived mainly from an analysis of human experience. An examination of both positions serves two purposes: (1) to explain the fundamental ideas behind the substance and form of prevailing affective education programs, and (2) to suggest reasons behind the controversy over affective education.

The notion that the substance of affect should be found in sources external to human experience is rooted in the classical philosophies of realism and idealism as well as in deeply held religious convictions. Here, one's beliefs or values, including moral principles, are drawn from concepts such as supernatural force, divine inspiration, or assumptions about perennial wisdom. The believer accepts concepts like the "laws of God" on faith because they are beyond human explanation or experience. Similarly, beliefs that have long existed are assumed correct by virtue of their history and tradition. In both cases, differences between right and wrong are sharply defined. For example, if one accepts on faith or tradition that stealing is wrong, then statements or behaviors that vary from that tenet are unacceptable under any circumstance. From an educational standpoint, once these beliefs are identified, the school's role is to trans-
mit them to the young and insist on compliant behaviors. This kind of absolutist affective education leads to indoctrination and inculcation in whatever belief system is maintained.

A different line of reasoning is that affect should be formulated largely on the basis of human experience and be open to question and change. This view is rooted in the philosophy of pragmatism, illuminated mainly by Dewey (1933, 1939), as well as in concepts related to twentieth century American democracy. Here, individual and collective values develop through a cyclical process. The individual or group (1) interacts with the environment, (2) reflects on the meaning of that interaction, (3) formulates values or beliefs through reflective thought, and (4) applies those values or beliefs to new situations. Reflective thinking about those new situations may then lead to affirmation or revision of the original beliefs.

For example, if one were to apply this process to the belief that stealing is wrong, one might eventually come to value that belief universally, or might recognize situations in which stealing could be justified. In either case, however, the value would be open to continuing examination. Contrary to accusations by some absolutists, most proponents of this view do not envision a society of entirely autonomous values (Raths, 1975). Instead, they believe firmly in collective values, including the right to human dignity, the need to be concerned about others, the right of free choice within a framework of social justice, and the capacity of human intelligence to engage in meaningful reflective thought. They prize the process of valuing as a human endeavor rather than the assumption of values on the basis of faith or tradition.

From an educational standpoint, this line of reasoning leads to developmental affective education, whereby the school helps young people formulate values or beliefs through experience and reflective thought while promoting fundamental values. This kind of affective education forms the basis for procedures found in Raths' values education (1978) and Kohlberg's moral education (1975). Proponents of this view believe that if these processes are really learned and legitimately used, young people will logically affirm fundamental values. Further, by virtue of their societal role, adults have a right to interfere in value deliberations where there is evidence that the process has been corrupted or where fundamental values are not recognized (for example, where the right to individual dignity is ignored). Such interference, though, primarily consists of asking the individual or group to reconsider their beliefs or decisions. This view of affective education is similar to the "telenomic" position described by Phenix (1969), who suggests that schools promote a lifelong search for values through rational thought.

Again, these two lines of reasoning lie behind prevailing concepts of affective education. Certainly some persons reject all standards with the nihilists or believe in complete individual autonomy with the existentialists, but they do not appear to significantly influence the development of affective school programs.

Another concept is pertinent to any discussion of contemporary affective programs. While the developmental affective view was evolving, a related theme was emerging from the psychological theories of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Earl Kelley, and Arthur Combs (1962), among others. Their work concerned the central role of personality and perception in learning and was highlighted by proposals to place greater emphasis on self-concept, interpersonal relations, and the search for personal meanings in the curriculum. They also proposed that the school enhance personal growth by becoming more humane and less custodial. Programs and practices derived from these ideas have generally been labeled "humanistic education," a term which while distasteful to some critics, accurately describe the human purposes that advocates seek. The fact that the thinking of developmental and humanistic educators overlapped is illustrated, for example, by Raths' (1972) work on emotional needs and Combs' (1972) concern for value development. In terms of emphasis, however, Dewey's followers were concerned mainly with social development, and the humanistic psychologists focused on personal growth. It is the combined work of these two groups that underlies develop-
opmental affective education as we know it.

Many variations might exist between the absolutist and developmental positions, determined largely by the degree to which any number of values or beliefs are considered fixed or open to examination. From an educational and political standpoint, though, both positions and those in between are certainly affective education as that concept is broadly understood.

Contemporary Programs
The school version of affective education is conveyed in both the hidden and the planned curriculum. Regarding the former, it has become increasingly apparent that young people learn a great deal about themselves and others from the institutional features that govern day-to-day life in the school—the methods of decision making and control, systems of rewards and punishments, the nature of interactions, patterns of grouping, rituals of grading, and other procedures used for labeling, sorting, and processing students (Beane and Lipka, 1984). Institutional features are often described as unplanned arrangements of experience embedded in school tradition. The self-concept and value content these features suggest to learners are powerful lessons, frequently more consuming than those from the subject curriculum (Snyder, 1970; Overly, 1970; Giroux, 1978). Clearly the more custodial institutions reflect the absolutist position and the more humanistic ones reflect the developmental view. Under these conditions, the hidden curriculum is more likely to be a living example of intentional affective education than an unplanned accident of institutional convenience (MacDonald and Zaret, 1975; Sarason, 1982).

Today's schools also include myriad planned programs designed to transmit affective education, covering concepts like human growth and development, family life, citizenship, substance abuse, peace, and moral or value development. Intentional affective education also occurs where teachers transcend the simple knowledge-of-facts level in standard subjects or skill areas: they encourage learners to consider personal-social meanings in literary works, historical incidents, mathematical problems, scientific advancements, artistic works, industrial technologies, and so on. Whether embedded in subjects, offered in mini-courses, or addressed in separate parts of the program, all of the examples cited represent affective education inasmuch as they attempt to influence values, morals, beliefs, self-feelings, and other dimensions of affect. Like the hidden curriculum, intentional programs found in schools reflect both absolutist and developmental persuasions. Some emphasize the fixed rules of character education, while others stress the dialogue of open valuing. Advocates of both are concerned with affective education; neither one owns the term.

In the school context, affective education suffers from several shortcomings, attention to which is necessary if this aspect of learning is to reach a more mature level.

1. Inconsistency among components of the affective school program. Most intentional programs claim to follow developmental theory, but, depending on the complexity of an issue or the extremity of student views, many teachers and other adults end up insisting on specific conclusions through gentle coercion or systematic persuasion. This is particularly the case where student value expressions conflict with institutional or community customs.

2. Inconsistency in the comparison of institutional features and intentional programs. The former are usually custodial; the latter attempt to be humanistic. Educators must clarify the nature of their affective goals and strive for planned consistency among all components of the total program.

3. An absence of clear direction or purpose. Too often affective programs are based on hazy phrases like "developing self-worth" or "understanding others." While these may serve as broad goal statements, they require careful clarification to ensure that general and specific aspects of a program reflect overall unity and purpose (for example, see French, 1957; ASCD, 1980). Where confusion exists, both observers and participants may be unsure of the program's purpose. Further, the selection of activities, resources, and methods may be confusing and difficult. When consist-

4. A lack of thoroughness in program planning. Too often affective programs have been based on bandwagon fads, canned or borrowed approaches, and misunderstood methods. As a result, implementation at the local level is frequently a-historical and a-theoretical. The use of values clarification is an excellent example of this problem. Originally intended as one method within a values education program based on the developmental approach, this technique involves the use of clarifying questions to encourage young people to examine and clarify values or personal meanings associated with any problem or content. To help teachers understand values clarification, Raths and his associates (1966) developed various activities to illustrate the technique. Unfortunately, many people think of the exercises as an end rather than a means to values education. Not only is this a misinterpretation of theory, but research suggests that its implementation in separate courses or time-blocks has little effect on values (Lockwood, 1978). Further, most critics and even some advocates of the approach assume from its basis of questioning that it is value-less, either forgetting or ignoring the fact that it reflects the values associated with the developmental approach (Kirschchenbaum and others, 1977). The confusion over values clarification illustrates that those who would undertake affective education—developmental or absolutist—need to engage in careful planning, including an understanding of the theoretical and historical concepts behind the approach they choose.

5. Inadequate measurement and evaluation. As a result of unclear direction and problems inherent in assessment procedures, affective education programs often suffer from inadequate measurement and evaluation (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, 1964). Measurement instruments often reflect the
values of the developer or of purposes unrelated to local programs. The use of behavior observation is similarly complicated since behavior may not reflect persistent attitudes, particularly if it is observed only in the school setting. Program evaluation based on student affect is an even more complicated issue because goals are usually directed toward long-term effects, meaningful data would not emerge until young people are adults. Unfortunately, our willingness to engage in long-term studies, and methods for doing so, are severely limited. The patience of accountability advocates is notoriously short, and their goal is mainly academic progress. Stills others hold the view that affective education and growth are not measurable. Despite the problems, the refusal to use the procedures available only adds to the controversy and confusion surrounding affective programs.

An analysis of contemporary affective education programs reveals a range of characteristics and problems. Certainly, these programs will display the same diversity and uneven quality found in other areas of education. However, without more careful planning, implementation, and evaluation, this part of schooling will remain at its present level of ambiguity and ambivalence. Although a few pressing issues are cited here, giving them attention will put us on the path toward better affective education.

The Continuing Controversy

The most obvious result of the debate over form and content of affective education has been the establishment of private schools based on one or another type of absolutism. Recently, however, the continuing debate has been compounded by a worldwide fundamentalist movement that has attracted increasing numbers of followers. While the content of such religious fundamentalism has many versions, adherents regard the "rightness" of their beliefs with a fervor common to all. Curiously, those groups often demand that school districts remove affective programs, although they actually want the school to change from one form of affect-developmental-to another-absolutist. Their power has also been increased through the political and media techniques of the Moral Majority and unprecedented support from the federal government, including sympathetic expressions from the Department of Education and congressional passage of the Hatch Amendment.

In an effort to keep the peace and satisfy their many publics, school officials have expended time and effort to listen to fundamentalists and establish procedures to respond to their demands. In some cases they have also heard from People for the American Way, a national group that reflects the developmental view. The goal of these forums is presumably to reach some sort of compromise or consensus about how affective education should be handled. This goal is impracticable for what may seem to be a terribly simple reason: absolutists believe in a particular brand of affect and think everybody else should, too, and developmentalists believe that many types of affect are possible, even desirable, in the forum of public valuing. In the school context, absolutists believe in the indoctrination and inculcation of their beliefs; developmentalists emphasize the process of continuous questioning of beliefs. In the sense that each position represents an entirely different view of the world, they are irreconcilable.

Make no mistake about it, though; developmental affective education has fallen on hard times. Increasing criticisms from inside and outside the profession have beleaguered both the form and methods used by its advocates. How might efforts to save it proceed? Clearly, the developmentalists must explicate their place in schooling and improve their procedures.

Public schools are provided for the education of "all of the people." Obviously, all of the people do not share a common set of values or beliefs. What they do share is membership in a "public" society that theoretically accepts diversity within a context of basic assumptions about human and civil rights. Further, among the basic rights is the guarantee of freedom from governmental or other intrusion upon values that extend beyond those that reflect a public democracy. Public schools, and other public institutions, are intended to promote and protect both civil rights and public values.

Those holding absolutist views have the legal right to establish private schools in which their views may be expressed, but indoctrination or inculcation of absolutist ideas is antithetical to the purposes of public schools. The developmental version of affective education most nearly reflects the civil rights guaranteed in our democratic society. I believe, therefore, that the public schools have not only the right, but the responsibility, to embrace the developmental view. Likewise, private schools have the right to express their versions of absolutism and the responsibility to publicly announce their beliefs.

Public schools also have a responsibility to improve their use of developmental affective education. The issues noted earlier are only part of the problem. Several issues have been avoided and need to be addressed as part of an evolving theory of developmental affective education. For example, if research suggests that young children do not have the capacity to think authentically at higher cognitive levels, what methods of affective education would be legitimate in working with them? If genuine valuing finally leads to action, what happens when carefully formulated values and actions conflict with traditional school norms? Also, what public values may be promoted legitimately by schools so that the rights of both society and the learner are protected? Although answers to these kinds of questions do not come easily, we should try to answer them.

Finally, it is crucial that the relationship between in- and out-of-school value sources be clarified. The school neither should nor can assume full responsibility for affective education. Parents, churches, courts, youth agencies—society as a whole—have a stake in the affect of the young. However, the schools bear the brunt of much criticism. Just as the affective is a necessary component for genuine learning, so too are the coordinated efforts of the whole society necessary to provide a full and worthwhile education.

References

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