Affective Education: The State of the Art

Arthur L. Costa

Can affective learning be assessed with the same instruments used to gauge cognitive development? Are observations of student behavior reliable? Does language itself place limitations on one's ability to deal with values and feelings?

Educators who espouse affective teaching and learning principles have been somewhat reluctant to agree on what is meant by affective evaluation. In an era of accountability and competency-based performance, the analysis and dissection of affective abilities have yielded few agreed upon identifiable behaviors.

While most authors define the affect in terms of feelings and of emotional responses to experiences, the Taoistic imperative, "Don't analyze it," has allowed humanists to speak in parables of emergent "peak experiences," "self-actualization," and "good vibes." Visions of the affect range from "touchy-feely" encounters through right-hemispheric brain waves to an absence of direction in a "What-do-you-want-to-do-today, children?" type of classroom structure.

The humanistic movement has been further hindered by behavior-oriented educators who claim that if you can't define it, you can't measure it; therefore, you can't teach it because it doesn't exist. Affective evaluation, claim the technologists, is a figment of fuzzy thinkers' imaginations.

The confused state of the art of affective evaluation is due largely to this philosophical polarity, the lack of agreement on definition, and the lack of measures, strategies, and vocabulary to conduct evaluation with consistency.

What follows is an attempt to interpret a range of affective evaluation practices, with a brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of each. Ideas for some new directions are then explored.

Standardized Measures of the Affect

Self-concept, self-esteem, and attitudes are probably the only facets of the affect for which standardized measures have been developed with any degree of reliability and validity. Such instruments as the *School Sentiment Index*, the *Self-Concept and Motivation Inventory*, and the *Self-Esteem Inventory* are examples of instruments that have achieved standardization with any degree of usefulness.

Wright and Shaw, in their book, *Scales for the Measurement of Attitudes* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), list over 200 examples of evalu-

ation instruments that are helpful in assessing a person's attitudes and belief system. While certain affective attributes are fairly constant and measurable, they are found to be largely influenced by the degree of love, acceptance, and trust received from parents; by the conditions of poverty, language, and mobility; and by significant others who model relevant behaviors. It is doubtful, therefore, if these measures respond to the effect of educational practices in attempting to change a person's self-esteem or attitudes over a limited time period.

Observational and Inferential Measures

Bloom, Krathwohl, and Masia's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the Classification of Educational Goals, Cognitive and Affective Domains* (David McKay Company, Inc., 1956), Kohlberg's hierarchy of moral development, and Mager's book, *Developing Attitude Toward Learning* (Fearon Publishers, Inc., 1968) have provided descriptions of observable behaviors that can serve as indicators of affective response.

Such observations of behaviors as indicators of the affect are subject, of course, to misinterpretation due to low inter-observer reliability and faulty inferences about the observed behavior's value-antecedents in a particular situation.

Other commonly used observable indicators of change in affect include increased attendance; decreases in dropouts; and prevalence of school vandalism, drug use, and other problems. Because of the many variables of home, peers, and situation, it is impossible to draw direct cause-and-effect relationships between school practice and such behavioral indicators.

Yet another way to assess affective learning is to ask the student directly through interview, questionnaire, survey, opinion poll, Likert-type scales, or semantic differentials. These forms of evaluation are influenced by the interviewer her/himself, student interest, the emotional set of the student, and other factors. The reliability of such forms of evaluation, therefore, is questionable.

Climate Studies

Viktor E. Frankl stated that: "An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior." [1] This statement supports the need to focus on the assessment of the *conditions* in which behavior is performed rather than on the individual behavior. Since human behavior is idiosyncratic, perhaps it is the interaction of the human *with* the situation that must be assessed rather than either the human *or* the situation.

Recurring throughout the literature are several themes by which school climate may be evaluated. Following is a synthesis of only a few environmental conditions that are thought to promote affective growth.

Freedom and Structure: Freedom may be misconstrued by many who think it means allowing children to do whatever they wish. That condition would be anarchy, not freedom. Freedom in the humanistic sense means freedom from fear—freedom from being ridiculed, freedom to experiment, to take risks, and to explore personal meaning.

Because the school is a place in which many people live and work together, there must also be structure, limits, and purpose. Children need honest feedback about how others perceive them so as to examine the consequences of their own behavior when limits are tested and the rights of others are infringed upon. Along with freedom goes responsibility.

In other words, children must be free to experiment with ideas, values, and behaviors. They must also be given feedback about the results and consequences of their experimentation.

The desirable degree of freedom might be assessed by searching for an atmosphere in which adults accept and try to understand students' feelings, values, and emotions. Freedom is diminished when students are made to feel failure, unworthiness, or degradation. Structure might be assessed in the description of meaningful tasks, fair ground rules, and constraints; and the communication of honest feedback. Such structuring conveys to students a concern for their growth and an interest in their learning.

Decision Making: Search the human condition for the locus of decision making. The more

[1] Viktor E. Frankl. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy.* Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1965. p. 18.

the student can decide for her/himself, the more humanistic the situation. Too often, adults decide for students what will be learned, what materials will be used, what learning strategies will be employed, and when the learning will begin and end. This is not to imply that children should make all decisions. Teachers and students may structure the learning environment *together*, deciding on tasks to be accomplished and agreeing on ground rules for working together.

Life Problems: The humanistic learning environment provides for the confrontation, investigation, and resolution of many meaningful problems, conflicts, and discrepancies. In an atmosphere of freedom and decision making, problems will emerge. Alternative solutions may be explored without risk, and action may be undertaken with participation by all those involved. As students solve problems, they discover the power of their intellects and learn that in ideas, wisdom, and truth, there is influence.

Verbal Interaction: A humanistic condition is one in which people talk with each other about ideas, personal problems, interests, and emotions. It means listening to each other with empathy, understanding, and respect.

To assess the verbal interaction in a humanistic condition, search for the degree to which ideas, values, and feelings are listened to, clarified, accepted, and extended.

It should be noted that research has repeatedly demonstrated that in such an environment, both affective and cognitive learnings are higher. (A further indication of the poor status of affective evaluation is that we often feel compelled to justify the effects of humanistic conditions by measuring higher attainment in such cognitive areas as reading and math rather than simply valuing affective conditions for their own sake.)

Affective Curriculum and Teaching Strategies

Several curriculum programs have as their purpose the development of affective learnings. For example, the Center for Global Perspectives' curriculum on *Conflict* examines human emotion using a personal through an international scale. Holt, Rinehart and Winston's *People in Action* (1970) explores human values; while Educational Development Center's *Man: A Course of Study*,[2] asks the pervasive question, "What is human about human beings?"

Values Clarification, Confluent Education, "Left-Handed Teaching," and Self-Enhancing Education are all examples of teaching strategies intended to enhance and maintain the affect. The literature is full of descriptions of humanistic teaching methodologies.

The goals of such programs imply that the content, activities, and teacher behaviors suggested can produce students who think critically,

---

"As we have an emotional experience, we react in its emergence. We then look back upon it to describe what senses it stimulated, what meanings it created, and what feelings it elicited."

---

who become aware of feelings within self and others, and who make decisions based on those feelings. The few evaluation strategies described in these programs primarily involve gathering data from students through observation, interviews, and questionnaires, along with the teacher's interpretation of verbal, written, behavioral, and artistic products.

Cognitive Measures Applied to Affective Outcomes

Education is still perceived largely as an intellectual endeavor. Instruction is conducted mainly in a verbal/cognitive manner. It is not surprising, then, that our major forms of affective evaluation are borrowed from and are mere extensions of instruments used in cognitive evaluation. Yet the two domains are different and, therefore, demand differences in evaluation style.

Cognitive measurement assumes stability over time. While there may be age variables, variance should stay about the same while mean values increase. Feelings, however, are highly situational and vary from one moment to another. The intent of affective education is to have stu-

[2] *Man: A Course of Study*, developed by the Social Studies Curriculum Program of the Education Development Center, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, is distributed by Curriculum Development Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.

dents responding to several variables rather than to strive to hold variables constant.

Using behavioral objectives, employing teaching strategies, and collecting data to quantify outcomes are common practices of cognitive evaluation. Because affective behaviors are idiosyncratic, spontaneous, and unpredictable, evaluative procedures that rely solely on predetermined outcomes are not satisfactory. While we might accept as desirable the prescriptive and conforming practices of "getting all students to grade level" in reading or math, should the same practice prevail with emotions, attitudes, and values?

Toward a Language of Affect?

Cognition is closely related to language, and oral and written language is often the carrier of thought. The fact that we elicit verbalizations to express feelings and values is manifest in all the evaluative designs, techniques, and strategies described so far. While our language may be the carrier of thought, it may not, however, be the major carrier of feelings and values.

Our dependence on language is further evidenced by the relative ease of communicating goals, objectives, teaching strategies, and evaluative measures in the cognitive domain. It is more difficult to communicate about the qualitative outcomes of affective instruction. The cause of these problems may lie in the fact that the use of language places severe limitations on one's ability to deal with values and feelings.

One alternative to the use of language in affective evaluation may be the sharing of mutual experiences. Experiencing feelings, eliciting emotions, evoking the senses—these alone may be evaluation enough. When we verbalize and describe these qualities, we probably express feelings that were already sensed or communicated in other ways in the past. To talk or to write about feelings is far different from experiencing them. This notion has great implications for further development of affective evaluation.

In Conclusion

The late Ole Sand of the National Education Association defined teaching as "an art based in science." Educators have made great progress in evaluating that portion of teaching which is scientific, but little development has been devoted to evaluating the artistic side.

We have become skilled in dissecting teaching and learning into their component parts, experimenting with alternative teaching strategies, classifying behavioral outcomes into taxonomies and hierarchies, and assessing efficiency.

The aim of scientific inquiry is to describe, predict, and control. Affective interpretation, however, is reflective, not predictive. As we have an emotional experience, we react in its emergence. We then look back upon it to describe what senses it stimulated, what meanings it created, and what feelings it elicited.

While our terminology is replete with words borrowed from fields of science and technology, we still have no acceptable concepts and capacities that express and capture the sensuous—the texture, rhythm, and vibrancy of teaching and learning. We count interactions, but are insensitive to patterns. We diagnose and prescribe, while our untrained senses miss the climax of spontaneous insight. We plan and predict with such accuracy as to obscure the emergent.

Have you heard anyone describe the crescendo of a lesson recently? What evaluator judges teaching as he/she would judge a vintage wine? Are we as moved by an educational rendering as we are by Van Gogh's?

We should not be critical of scientific educational evaluation. It is a strategic cog, which extends our mechanistic educational schematic to a still higher degree of efficiency. It is, however, an attempt to apply scientific rationality to a conceptualization of education that is only a pseudo-scientific endeavor.

We should be critical, however, of our naiveté and of the abysmal void inherent in any attempt to develop our metaphorical and epicurean capacities to produce humanistic evaluation processes consistent with affective teaching and learning. ☐



Arthur L. Costa is Chairperson, Department of Educational Administration, California State University, Sacramento, California.

Copyright © 1977 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.