Affective education in schools: A personal response*

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Affective education is an umbrella term/concept and it is important to be clear about its precise nature so that the many different possible manifestations found throughout the world[1] can be compared and evaluated. In the writers view[2] 'affective education' is that part of the educational process that concerns itself with the attitudes, feelings, beliefs and emotions of students. This involves a concern for the personal and social development of pupils and their self-esteem or as it is perhaps more appropriately expressed in French as regards each student, that 'Je suis bien dans ma peau' which means literally 'I feel comfortable within my skin'. A further important dimension goes beyond the individual students and concerns the effectiveness of their relationships with others, thus interpersonal relationships and social skills are recognised as central to affective education. Related to this view of the affective dimension of education are two further points: that it often involves both the provision of support and guidance for students and that the affective and cognitive dimensions of education are interrelated. Students' feelings about themselves as learners and about their academic subjects can be at least as influential as their actual ability.

Affective education operates on at least three different levels and has objectives involving different time scales, short term, medium and long term. These different levels are those of:

- The individual - attention directed to individual students, their self-esteem, emotional literacy, study skills, their life and career plans;
- The group - attention to the nature and quality of interaction within the groups in which students work and relate;
- The institution - a concern for the quality of climate and ethos of the school itself, the guidance and support it offers students, its care and concern in relation to their welfare.

Where schools seek to develop effective affective education there are some potential guidelines/priorities for this. The priorities for affective education will vary from school to

school. Thus a key consideration is the pupils' needs. Pupils should be involved in discussions which give them the opportunity to present their own concerns and the way they perceive their needs; these perceptions should form one of the bases for the planning of the programmes and approach the school will take. However there will of course be other considerations and stakes that will also contribute to this. It is important that schools decide what their shared values are. Teachers, parents and pupils need to feel comfortable with and see as appropriate the direction a school's affective work is taking. This side of the school's work is concerned with the holistic development of the pupil and ultimately what sort of person it is hoped they will become. Though it would be unrealistic to expect total consensus on this, there must be a broad level of agreement amongst all those concerned. Once a programme and related classroom approaches have been developed schools must make sure that things will continue to work. It is rare for work of this kind to be maintained at an effective level if there are not actual maintenance strategies. There should be regular evaluation and teacher professional development. Schools should be supportive of all-round achievement. Besides academic subjects, there are lots of other achievements concerned with the all-round development of pupils. The developments described above have clear implications for teacher training at both initial and in service level. This requires time and resources, where these are not provided the whole area will be down valued and teachers are less likely to take it seriously.

It is critical for not only the pupils but also all the educators to be prepared to change themselves. The educators need to be open, express their emotions and know when not to be judgmental. It is not their job to tell pupils what to think.

Models

The writer has developed a model which can contribute to our understanding of this area

A three level model of affective education:-

Reaction/Cure	doing something after the problem has arisen i.e. counselling or referring to social services. (in school, supporting a child who has been bereaved, discussing and mediating after a fight.). Telling pupils to pull their socks up as far as their work was concerned. Reacting to abuse. Exhortations in assembly about honesty after a theft.

Proaction/prevention	Doing something before i.e. preparing people - assertiveness training. Drug, Aids programmes (in school discussing the issue of death and loss with the class, perhaps in relation to pets). Providing opportunities to explore and express feelings. Study and decision making skills, problem and conflict resolution skills. Providing opportunities for moral reflection developing own code.
Enhancement	Also a positive side to this i.e. positive encouragement of development. Role play - interpersonal skills, work decision making opportunities. In class working on self-esteem, offering praise and encouragement. Encouraging a positive and effective approach to study through involvement in own learning. Providing spiritual experience in a wide sense

Another way of looking at affective education is from the point of view of the teacher's role. An initial analysis of the situation in a number of European countries shows that there are in fact a number of different roles that teachers are expected to perform in relation to the affective dimension of education. In some systems, affective education may be exclusive to one of these: in some others, several roles may be pertinent. The main roles that have been identified to date are:

- The teacher as carer, the person responsible for the support and welfare of pupils, normally a particular group or class. There is an expectation that among other things this teacher will undertake individual work with some or all pupils for whom they are responsible. In many cases it is also expected that some of the in-class and extra-curricular activities which the teacher promotes should contain an affective element.

- The teacher as subject specialist, who includes an affective dimension in her/his approach to subject/classroom teaching.

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- The teacher as deliverer of a special programme of PSE, guidance, character education etc

- The teacher in a specialist supportive role, as counsellor for example

- The teacher in a managerial role, managing others who are concerned with aspects of affective education.
- Where teachers have a significant teaching responsibility for a particular group, either because they teach them for most of the time or because they have a long term relationship with the group (or both)

The way the teachers' role is understood is affected by the perception of affective education as either an area which ought to be within the competence of the majority of teachers, or something which requires specialized skills. Where it is seen as a generalist role within the competence of most teachers it is expected that most teachers should be involved. Where it is seen as a more specialized activity much of the work is undertaken by a limited number of individuals.

Approaches

One of the problems of developing effective affective education is an over emphasis on content. Too much attention on what pupils should learn and not enough attention to how they learn it. Schools need to promote pedagogies that encourage pupils to empathize with and listen more to others. They should be encouraged to develop the skills of discovering relevant information for themselves. For example, this might be from the Internet but they also need to develop the ability to evaluate the quality of their sources. They should be involved in discussion of controversial topics such as cloning, abortion, genetically modified organisms and euthanasia. They should also get experience of deciding things themselves. Class meeting is one way of encouraging this. The school and its teachers need to provide opportunities for role-play and drama as this is an important way of encouraging the affective development of pupils.

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[1] examples of the many manifestations might be – pastoral care, personal and social education, counselling and guidance, comprehensive guidance, socio-emotional learning, emotional literacy, character education, holistic education, life education etc., etc.

[2] the definition presented here, though one that has been developed through discussion between representatives of a number of different countries, should still be seen as a working definition. It is very probable that it will be developed further