

Are Educators Prepared to Affect the Affective Domain?

Dr. Kimberly G. Griffith
Associate Professor
Lamar University

Anna Dimy Nguyen, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student
Dept. of Educational Leadership,
Counseling and Development
Lamar University

ABSTRACT

Because of their motivation and compassion, educators believe they can significantly influence the development of their students' personal and emotional growth. Unfortunately the focus that most educators find in today's classroom is not how we can positively affect our students, but rather the intense focus on the acquisition of minimum levels of academic skills. We are so intent on meeting the No Child Left Behind act that we don't make the time to address the affective domain. This study conducted on pre-service teachers completing their clinical semester of student teaching found their "real life" practices pushed accountability at the risk of minimizing or ignoring the affective domain. We focus on diversity, but we do not focus on the diverse needs that include the affective domain.

Working with individuals seeking educator certification, we have had the opportunity to ask them their rationale for entering the profession. Besides a need to have similar schedules that coincide with their children and families, one significant theme expressed by many is their desire to positively affect children. Most of those currently entering the profession feel that they can make a significant contribution through the affective domain. Because of their work, motivation and compassion, these individuals believe they can significantly influence the development of their students' personal and emotional growth (Eggen & Kauchak, 2005).

A contrasting focus that most educators find in today's educational setting is not

how we can positively affect our students but rather the intense focus on the acquisition of minimum levels of academic skills. To meet the expectations of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a large number of states have mandated a specific curriculum consisting solely of academic criteria for each grade level and/or subject (P.L. 107-110, sec. 2402(b)). In Texas, the state has mandated the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) outlining what to teach, when to teach it, how to teach it and what level of mastery per grade level or subject (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2005a).

Contract renewals for many superintendents, district coordinators, principals and teachers are contingent on the level their students master these skills on the state-based proficiency exams. This fear of non-renewal due to the performance level of their students fuel educators to keep their absolute focus on the cognitive domain. Little time or energy is focused on the receiving, responding, valuing, organizing and value characterizing aspects of the affective domain (Santrock, 2003).

Accountability, based on minimum skills proficiency exams, is the center of the educational world. For many, the end results of our efforts are test scores and the mastery of academic skills. The original purpose of education in this country was to prepare children for citizenship. The Common Schools defined citizenship as being an educated individual that could read, write, perform mathematical operations, be an independent thinker, an effective employee and possessed an overall sense of social responsibility.

The biggest critics of today's educational efforts have been business and society. They have both focused on their displeasure with our finished product (Johanns, 2005). Even with our focus on the acquisition of academic skills we are still producing many students that fall short in this area. What good is the acquisition of a vast range of academic skills if we are unable to integrate them? Students need to be able to communicate, value, organize and characterize to effectively utilize and make sense of what they have learned. It is difficult to achieve even the highest levels in the cognitive domain if we don't teach and develop those complementary skills in the affective domain. To effectively utilize and integrate the skills mastered, students must become critical thinkers. Although we relate cognitive development to critical thinking, we can only reach those higher levels if we concurrently address the affective domain.

Emotions and feelings are critical to how students feel. These emotions and feelings are a great part of the interactions and relationships that form within the classroom. Data indicate that relationships in the classroom directly effected the learning environment (Russell, 2004). Learning is essential for students to master skills but if the affective domain is ignored, the cognitive areas are greatly affected. If one feels threatened, sad, stressed, etc., the learning process can break down. Respect of individual differences is also an important characteristic of a healthy classroom environment that supports learning (Williams, 2003).

The three domains of cognitive, psychomotor and affective are tightly integrated aspects of human learning. Many institutions focus only on the skills and knowledge domains. Many trainers of educational professionals have shied away from the affective domain because of its complexity (Adkins, 2004). Unfortunately, the cognitive domain is like a skeleton without the skin if we forget to nourish the affective domain.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose in conducting this study was to determine the effectiveness of the educator preparation program in the College of Education and Human Development. In the state of Texas, accountability drives the educational preparation of students in grades K - 16. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) governs the curriculum for K - 12 (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2005b). Educator preparation programs are also governed by a state-adopted exam known as the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES). These exams, which cover several different areas, stress competencies in standards which educators apply critical instructional skills in educational environments. Although we are to have an understanding of the needs of the diverse learner, we seldom look at the diverse needs of each child we teach. We focus on diversity, but we do not focus on the diverse needs that include the affective domain.

Summary of Procedures

Seventy students, who had recently finished their clinical semester of student teaching, were asked to complete a Student Teaching Needs Assessment during the last week of their educator preparation program. These respondents had returned to the university to complete the final requirements of their educator preparation program and provide feedback for program improvement. Students were asked to complete a Likert based survey evaluating their student teaching experience. The Student Teaching Needs Assessment was used to measure their feelings of preparation in the areas of communication and addressing the affective domain in their instruction.

Summary of Findings

The data provided insight into the current trends in public schools. Though students entering the education profession thought they had the knowledge to teach the affective domain, many student teachers did not find the time to teach affective skills. Before starting student teaching, sixty-eight percent of respondents felt they had the knowledge and skills necessary to teach affective skills. After the ten-week student teaching period, only thirty-nine percent of respondents actually had the chance to teach those skills. In addition, respondents felt that principals and teachers focused the most attention on TAKS testing in the cognitive domain, rather than the affective domain. For example, character education time is usually used for teaching additional TAKS skills.

Conclusion

As knowledgeable educators, we know that students need to be taught in the three domains,

cognitive, psychomotor and affective. Results of this study suggest that having this knowledge and utilizing the knowledge are two different things. With the heavy emphasis on teaching every student to minimize educational gaps and accountability, the time allotted for character education has been pushed aside and often time forgotten. Some future research is needed to determine how the lack of teaching affective skills affects students, test scores, and the final education product.

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