

THE PERFECT MARRIAGE

(Blending Affective and Cognitive Principles)

Donald Mar—California GEAR UP Program—June 08, 2010

“Can’t see the forest for the trees” “Can’t see the woods for the trees”

The relationship and the importance of cognitive and affective principles and their effect upon learning are critical, but often overlooked, minimized, and sadly, not well practiced. As a whole, our education system is so focused on cognitive details that we can’t see the forest for the trees when it comes to addressing the overall educational development of our students. We have failed to see the total picture because we may have been looking too closely at cognitive details deep in the woods to the demise of understanding the role of Affective principles.

None of what I will be discussing is new scholarship and this article is written from a perspective that reflects my training in Behavioral Psychology.

Think Engine and Transmission and think Cognitive and Affective within the same context—each set requires a special relationship with each other for movement and growth. An instructional program, a curriculum, and an educational system that are one-dimensional short change our students and teachers. Sadly, affective principles seem to be playing second fiddle to that of cognitive learning.

Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives in the domain of Cognitive skills is definitive and powerful, but many educators feel “Bloomed out,” because of the continuously changing standards for many educational and developmental reforms. Conversely, Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives in the Affective domain is seldom discussed with substance in today’s teacher training and in-service programs. Although Bloom’s affective domain categorically isolates feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivation, and attitudes into subsets, the model reflects a more pedagogical context approach. It does not, in my opinion, focus on the attitudinal changes that are the prerequisites for motivating people to embrace and effectuate changes vital for developing intrinsic learning. Perhaps no single piece of literature has inspired me more to understand better what learning and education are “about” than this quote from the late San Francisco Chronicle columnist, Charles McCabe:

“Learning and education are not about acquiring and collecting a set of facts, figures, and concepts, but rather they are [about] the cultivation of an attitude for embracing and applying those principles and norms that are learned.”

Be it an individual, a faculty, a group of students, a school, a community, a corporation, or a government, changes are deep, internal, and progressive if an “I want to do it” attitude is in place long before the latest “findings” or “I have the answer” solutions.

Zeroing in on *either* Affective or Cognitive norms to the exclusion of the other would trivialize the importance of how these two variables work together to instill an attitude of educational rigor throughout our instructional program. In the final argument, growth, reform, improvement, and learning are about relationship. Without this relationship and interdependency, as with the engine and transmission in your car, forward movement in our education system stalls. The key element here is you, the “DRIVER.” (I think you know what I am talking about.)

“It starts with the right attitude.”

About California GEAR UP Regional Coordinator Donald Mar: Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh; M.A., San Francisco State University; B.S., Lewis and Clark College.

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