

Affective learning: A taxonomy for teaching social work values

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Abstract

Teaching in the affective domain is required to facilitate development in the values, ethics, aesthetics, and feelings of social work students. It is arguably the most complicated type of teaching as it integrates cognition, behavior, and feelings. This paper presents an overview of affective learning as well as a pedagogical taxonomy for use in designing and delivering instruction in the affective domain. A sample lesson plan used to teach social justice and strategies for evaluating affective learning are also reviewed.

Social work educators have long recognized the responsibility to teach students in all three domains of learning: cognitive, behavioral and affective. The cognitive domain refers to learning and recalling information and is often guided by Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning (1956, 1964). The behavioral or psychomotor domain describes actual behaviors and skills that are first practiced and then mastered by the student (Simpson, 1972). The affective

domain, arguably the most complex, is rooted in the emotional life of the student and reflects the students' beliefs, attitudes, impressions, desires, feelings, values, preferences, and interests (Friedman, 2008; Friedman & Neuman, 2001; Picard, et. al., 2004).

Although social work education and practice often stress critical components of the affective domain, including values, attitudes, ethics, and self-awareness, teaching typically relies on cognitive learning strategies (Bisman, 2004). This is due in part because the affective domain is poorly conceptualized, highly individualized, and difficult to directly assess. In addition, the emphasis on standardized testing, mastery learning, limited research, the lack of a consistent vocabulary and available instrumentation to study affective learning has further contributed to its neglect (Kaplan, 1986). Further, affective learning cuts across all learning domains, incorporating cognitive and behavioral learning in addition to exploring values and feelings (Kraiger, Ford & Salas, 1993; Meyer & Rose, 2000; Picard, et. al., 2004; Shephard & Fasko, 1999; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

A value is a concept or an ideal that we feel strongly about, so much so that it influences the way in which we understand other ideas and interpret events. Values are preferences, and when the word is used as a verb, it means to prize or hold in high esteem (Rokeach, 1973). Many, if not most, social work educators incorporate content on professional values in their courses, but an overarching pedagogical framework is missing (Friedman, 2008; Tyler, 2002). Understanding affective learning processes and the taxonomy of affective learning can provide a useful framework for professional values education. This paper will provide an overview of affective learning, taxonomy of learning in the affective domain, a sample lesson in teaching about social justice and strategies for evaluating affective learning.

1. Overview of Affective Learning

Affective learning involves changes in feelings, attitudes, and values that shape thinking and behavior. Turk (2002) includes personal and aesthetic development, as well as meta-learning in the affective domain, as these relate to creating a desire for lifelong learning and an appreciation for truth, beauty, and knowledge. In discussing the professional socialization of pharmaceutical students, Brown, Ferrill, Hinton and Shek (2001) explain that, “affective characteristics such as motivation, initiative, compassion, service, accountability, empathy, honesty, advocacy, commitment, optimism, respect and self-confidence lead to behaviors that typically produce professional excellence” (p.241). The *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers (1996, 1999) is founded on a preamble outlining social work values. For social work students, internalization of professional values including service, social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity,

and competence is an integral part of the professional socialization process.

There are two aspects of affective learning. The first involves the learner’s attitude, motivation, and feelings about the learning environment, the material, and the instructor, or conditions external to the learner. Much of the research on affective learning has concerned itself with providing strategies to enhance external conditions that promote motivation, attention, and retention (Ainley, 2006; Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Keogh, 1998; Miller, 2005; Stone & Glascott, 1997). This is in part what the Council on Social Work Education intends in its discussion of the implicit curriculum that facilitates student engagement by creating a supportive learning environment (Council on Social Work Education, 2008).

However, this does not describe actual learning; rather it describes a student’s motivation and attitude about a particular learning experience. Actual affective learning relates to feelings, attitudes, and values that are identified, explored, and modified in some way because of the learning experience. It is important to distinguish between attitudes about a learning experience and actual learning, although in much of the literature on affective learning these are poorly differentiated. For any type of learning to take place (cognitive, behavioral, or affective), the student must be attentive, engaged, and receptive. For social work education, we assume that students are motivated in their course of study and explore the affective domain to develop ways of designing instruction that develops feeling and values congruent to the profession.

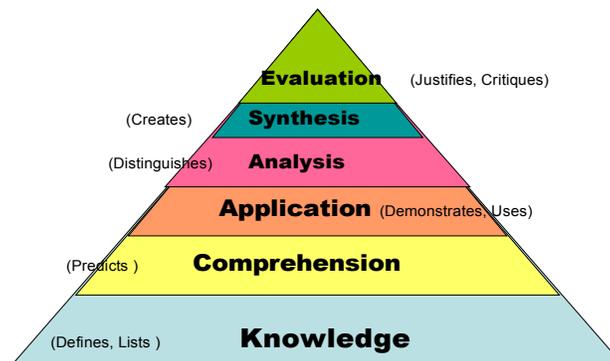
2. Taxonomies of Learning

The tripartite conceptualization of learning as cognitive, affective, and behavioral is particularly useful in social work education

as we strive to teach students the knowledge, skills, and values of the profession (Ediger, 2007; Menix, 1996; Yorks & Kasl, 2002; Zimmerman & Phillips, 2000). While focusing on affective learning, for a comprehensive discussion, we review existing taxonomies of learning in all three learning domains. These taxonomies are also hierarchical, as each successive level of learning builds upon and expands the previous level. We then compare and contrast the traditional taxonomy of affective learning developed by Krathwohl (1964) with a revised taxonomy.

Many educators are familiar with Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1956, 1964) in which a hierarchy of learning outcomes is portrayed for the cognitive domain. Using the taxonomy, students are guided through successive stages of learning through simple recall, comprehension, application of the material, synthesis with other ideas, and critical thinking and evaluation. Although later models inverted the fifth and sixth levels (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), we present Bloom's original hierarchy of learning in Figure 1.

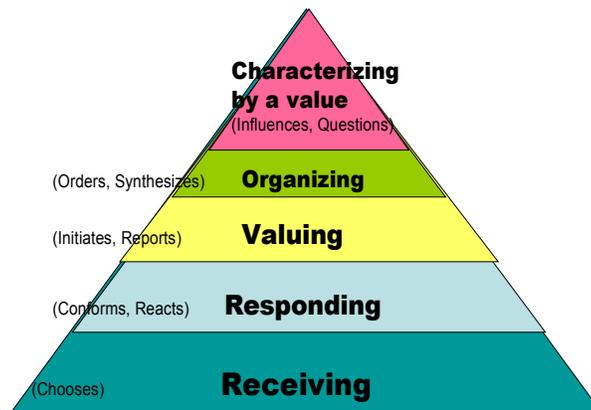
Figure 1. Bloom's Hierarchy of Learning



Bloom's seminal work also included a hierarchy of affective learning (Bloom, 1956; Bloom, 1964; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). David Krathwohl is credited with the model that includes five levels: receiving,

responding, valuing, organizing, and characterization. Figure 2 presents the taxonomy of affective learning.

Figure 2. Krathwohl's Taxonomy of Affective Learning



The first two levels confuse the learner's attitude, responsiveness, and attentiveness to the learning material with actual learning or changes in the student that are the result of instruction (learning). It is not until the third level, valuing, that students actually begin the process of learning as they compare and contrast new material with their existing ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Students at this level can articulate a value, defend it, and describe its origin and rationale. They can also make judgments on the basis of this orientation. The fourth level that Krathwohl identified, organization, describes the learner's process of conceptualizing and organizing their value systems in light of the affective learning that has taken place. A suitable metaphor might be to consider the way in which a constellation is reconfigured when a new star is discovered. The fifth and final level of the taxonomy, characterization, refers to the way in which an individual is now characterized by a generalized, comprehensive set of values and a philosophy of life and learning. This is what Turk (2002) was, in part, alluding to when he referenced meta-learning and personal and aesthetic development.

At this level, the individual's world view, the way in which he or she explores,

learns, and builds understandings, has been changed rather than just isolated attitudes and beliefs. We think of it as the character of the individual is now different. Individuals who are characterized by an integrated, tested, and justified system of attitudes and beliefs seek out evidence before reaching a conclusion, follow a systematic process of inquiry, value lifelong learning, put effort into enriching their understandings, and are often leaders because they value contributing to others.

Bloom and his colleagues were not originally concerned with behavioral or psychomotor domain believing that as college educators they had little experience in teaching manual skills. However, evaluating any learning requires observing behavioral changes in the student and most learning objectives are behaviorally based. Simpson's (1972) taxonomy of psychomotor learning describe behavioral changes from 1) perception and observation; 2) readiness and preparation to respond; 3) guided response through practice and demonstration while supervised; 3) mechanistic or automatic responses; 4) complex organization in which behaviors are linked together into more intricate responses; and finally, 5) adaption in which the learner is able to appropriately modify what has been learned for use in novel situations.

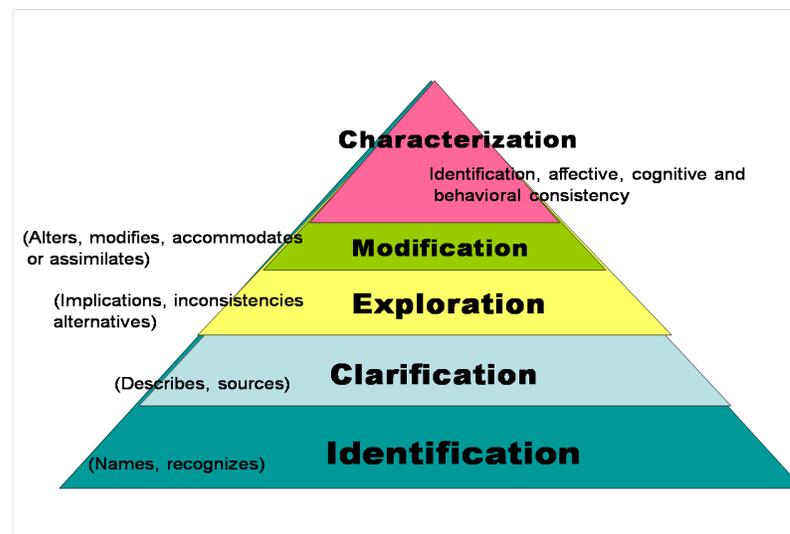
3. An Alternative Affective Learning Hierarchy

There is much here for educators in Krathwohl's model. However, to our way of thinking there are limitations in its usefulness for designing instruction largely due in part, to a failure to distinguish between the learner's attitudes about the learning experience and actual affective learning. Further, the model does not directly suggest teaching strategies to facilitate movement through the sequence.

Therefore, we propose an alternative taxonomy developed by Neuman (Neuman &

Friedman, 2008). This model, presented below, assumes that the issue of gaining attention and assuring receptivity and motivation is a separate teaching concern that occurs in any and all learning situations. Whether teaching for cognitive, behavioral, or affective change, the teacher must employ strategies to get and maintain the students' motivation and attention. We have removed this from the taxonomy of affective learning altogether and present it in Figure 3. In our experience, this model more easily lends itself to designing instruction that moves through successively more complex levels of affective learning.

Figure 3. Neuman's Taxonomy of Affective Learning



The first level, identification, requires students to begin to identify and articulate their own beliefs, values, and attitudes. According to Haynes (1999), the development of values starts when students begin to critically examine their personal assumptions. Therefore, it is necessary to teach students to distinguish between ideas, cognitions, proofs, and feelings and to recognize the uniqueness of their perspective as contrasted with others. At the second level, students clarify their feelings and values and consider their sources and implications. At these first two stages of

affective learning, it is appropriate to reexamine earlier work in values clarification at this stage, which were prominent in the 1970s and 80s.

Values clarification is a process originally described by Simon, Howe, and Kirschenbaum (1972, 1973). According to the authors, to have fully expressed and internalized a value an individual must: choose it freely from alternatives, prize and affirm the choice, act upon the choice, and behave consistently with the choice repeatedly over time. Krathwohl's hierarchy does not

specifically address the identification and clarification of values, implying that this process is implicit in the learning process, perhaps occurring at the higher levels of valuing, organization and characterization. However, if we consider identification and clarification as discrete steps in the process, teaching strategies are easily suggested.

In the third level, students explore the implications and limitations of their viewpoints and compare and contrast them with others. For example, if a student acknowledges that they might have difficulty working with an individual who behaves in a certain way, we explore the sources and implications of this position. How does this fit within the profession's value of respecting the dignity and worth of the person? Will the student be able to treat this individual in a "caring and respect fashion mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity" while working to "promote socially responsible self-determination in the client"?

In the fourth level, modification occurs. Either the student alters in some way their beliefs, values, or attitudes or they modify the alternative position in such a way as to be acceptable to them. Piaget (1952) described these two processes as assimilation and accommodation. In assimilation, new or external information generated in the environment is modified to fit an existing internal, cognitive structure of the learner. In accommodation, the internal structure itself is modified to accept the incoming information.

Working with the example above, if the student is to assimilate the profession's values regarding the value of the inherent dignity and worth of each individual, s/he must interpret this new material so that it is consistent with ideas already held. S/he may interpret the Code of Ethics to suggest that as long as the client is treated with respect and dignity, s/he may continue to work with the client in making more socially responsible choices. If the student accommodates, s/he

modifies their original attitudes and beliefs about this type of client and the behavior so that the student feels more positively toward the client and is more able to treat them with respect and dignity. Which is preferable – accommodation or assimilation? Although some interpretation and personalization occurs in professional education, the standardization, consensus and regulation that defines a profession set real limits to the extent to which an individual may assimilate and modify defining principles of the discipline.

The final level, characterization, is similar to the last two levels in Krathwohl's model. The student has developed an understanding of their attitudes, values, beliefs, and feelings, and has organized them into a coherent structure that now characterizes the learner. The extent to which behavioral consistency is demonstrated is a reflection of the extent of internalization as well as maturity.

5. Teaching in the Affective Domain

The revised taxonomy easily lends itself to guiding instruction to create learning experiences. We used the revised taxonomy for affective learning to create a learning experience around social justice. In the second session of a social welfare policy class, junior students were asked to define what social justice means to them. This is the first step of the taxonomy – identification. They were asked to explore where they learned this notion, the sources of this orientation, how they came to believe it, and how strongly they feel about it. This is the second level of the taxonomy – clarification, which often includes "sourcing" where and how beliefs and values developed. Students were then given articles on the topic, providing formal conceptualizations of social justice such as distributive and restorative justice. The instructor facilitated a discussion to identify, clarify and explore key concepts. They then

wrote a new definition. This is the fourth level – modification. The students then worked in groups to compare and contrast the various definitions (Level 3 – Exploration). They concluded the exercise by discussing their beliefs and values about social justice and how these beliefs and values are important to social work and influence practice (Level V- Characterization). To highlight this exercise we present two definitions from two students.

Student A: Definition One

“Social justice, overall to me would mean that people have the ability to be free to say and feel anything they want about society but if they took action towards someone or something then having laws about actions or word would be nice because people need boundaries so people can’t go too far with something.”

Student A: Definition Two

“Social justice is advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all people, no matter what race, ethnicity or gender. It is connected to social work because social workers fight injustice, not because they expect to eliminate it but simply because it is wrong and should not be tolerated.”

Student B: Definition One

“Social justice means (to me) correcting and eliminating all

forms of oppression for persons who face hardships.”

Student B: Definition Two

“Social justice is advocating for and obtaining for disadvantaged groups and persons equal access to resource, both monetary and otherwise by challenging, working with and working to change the power structures and institutions that through their very existence create and perpetuate various forms of injustice and inequality. As a social worker, it is my desire to nullify these forces.”

These examples provide tentative definitions of social justice. One set of definitions describe characterizations of social justice, one can see that affective learning is still being measured through cognitive means. The problem with affective learning is that it is difficult or nearly impossible to outright measure it without using either cognitive or psychomotor means.

6. Evaluation of Affective Learning

We recognize that it is easier to evaluate cognitive and psychomotor learning domains than it is to evaluate the affective domain. Affective learning cannot occur absent ideas of cognition and cannot be known except by observing behavior. We also believe it is the most complex and deepest kind of learning. Like cognitive learning, the most effective way to evaluate affective learning is through assessing objective, observed behaviors and expressions of the learner. However, the difference is that one

evaluates within the context of a particular values orientation (in the case, that of social work) rather than just looking at performance of a specific skill.

Educational assessment typically begins with the articulation of learning objectives or outcomes (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956; 1964; Greenland, 1991). Behaviorally-based objectives for affective learning can be written. Possible verbs to use when writing affective learning objectives include: defends, justifies, advocates, argues, accepts, challenges, promotes, rejects, shares, subscribes, verifies, and disputes. For example, "Upon completion of the course, students will dispute the claim that poverty is always the result of character flaws or moral failings." Another example is, "Upon completion of the course, students will advocate policy changes that assure a mechanism for financing affordable health care for all individuals."

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) identified four components necessary to evaluate learning in the affective domain. The first component is the emotional quality observed in the student. For example, does the student's tone of voice convey compassion? When advocating, is the student forceful? Does the emotional quality of the student's verbal expressions convey dismay when confronted with an injustice?

The second component is the student's willingness to attend or sensitivity and awareness to the concept. For example, does the student consistently and quickly recognize empathy or insensitivity? The third component involves the increasing automaticity of responses. Students at this stage have incorporated the concept and skills into their schema of practice and are beginning to internalize the concept. For Krathwohl, the fourth and most essential dimension for evaluation of affective learning is internalization. He defines internalization as

"the consistency with which one's behavior matches an internal code of conduct or schema."

This is a critical notion for social work. When considering the extent to which a novice is socialized to the profession, we are, in essence, evaluating the consistency in which their behavior matches an established code of conduct (Bisman, 2004; Haynes, 1999).

Kaplan (1986) elaborated on Krathwohl, combining with Bloom's cognitive and psychomotor domains to develop the Taxonomy of Affective Behavior or TAB. He modified the levels of affective learning slightly and created a complex set of worksheets in which to evaluate the extent to which students were demonstrating affective changes. For each of Krathwohl's levels, behaviors indicative of affective learning are identified and checked off when demonstrated. For Kaplan, affective changes involved cognitive and behavior components and also the frequency and intensity in which students demonstrated the desired behavior. Boyd, Dooley and Felton (2005) modified this approach by doing a content analysis based on Krathwohl's levels to evaluate students' reflective writings after participating in an online simulation about global poverty.

Although Krathwohl and Kaplan were primarily developing their models of affective learning for use in teacher education, their approaches have considerable applicability for social work and we pull from both models to create our own system for assessment. Given the complexity of affective learning, assessment must involve evaluating cognitive, emotional and behavioral demonstrations or expressions on the part of the student. Because this is a professional degree program, we can look at the degree to which the student comprehends key concepts of a professional value, the way in which they feel about it (Krathwohl's compassion and sensitivity) and the recognition that professional behavior is

determined in specific ways by this understanding.

Returning to the example provided above on the student’s conceptualizations and feelings about social justice, we can create a general rubric that can be used for assessment. If we compare the first and second definitions (particularly those of Student A), we can see that the second definitions more fully reflect an understanding of advocating for equal opportunities and resources for populations at risk – key concepts in social work’s approach to social justice. This is the cognitive component. Both of the students' second definitions incorporate an affective or, in this case, moral component. Student A talks about “fighting injustice because it is wrong,” while Student B strives to “nullify” the forces of injustice. Both definitions connect social justice to the profession and indicate that advocacy behavior is expected on the part of the social worker. Whereas we might not be able to objectively “score” such an exercise, we could generally assess it by looking at the extent to which the student correctly identified key concepts and principles (cognition),

demonstrates compassion, sensitivity and/or other appropriate expressions of affect, and identifies professional behaviors that are consequently expected.

Buchard (1991) used a Likert scale to assess nursing students’ attitudes before and after instruction as measured by performance on affective learning objectives specified for the course. Because we think affective learning includes cognitive and behavioral elements in addition to affect, we are experimenting with a simple rubric for assessment. The student is assessed on the quality of the cognitive content of their writings and comments, the extent to which a course of action or behaviors are suggested or demonstrated, as well as the identification of feelings, values, ethics and moral obligations. Students are assessed as being weak, fair, or strong along all three dimensions. Like Bucher, we recognize the real limitations of this kind of scale but are finding it helpful in encouraging students toward a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of the material. We are currently piloting the use of the following grading rubric.

Table 1. Affective Learning Assignment Grading Rubric

Domain	Minimally meets expectations	Meets expectations	Exceeds expectations
Quality of cognitive component			
Course of action, behaviors identified			
Articulation of feelings, values, ethics and/or moral obligations			
Congruency with professional ethics and values.			

Another example in social work that involves the affective domain is the teaching of empathy listening skills, which also includes cognitive and behavioral dimensions. When we teach empathy, we explain the concept, as well as the research and theory

behind it. We explain the importance of being supportive and accepting of our clients, while working to promote positive changes. We review research studies evaluating the results of empathetically-based interventions and expect students to be able to list and define the

key characteristics of empathy. This is teaching in the cognitive domain. We explore the affective component of empathy. We can begin by asking students to reflect on times when people were empathetic and not empathetic or supportive to them. What did it feel like? What behaviors made them feel this way? How did they know the person was or was not being empathetic? How do they show empathy in their lives? What does it feel like when they are being empathetic? We ask students to reflect upon and describe their feelings about the client and expect them to identify areas where they have difficulties. Finally, we teach a set of behaviorally-based skills that include the use of open ended questions, verbal prompts, and nonverbal behaviors that help students demonstrate their ability to listen empathetically to their clients. Thus, the application of learning taxonomies can guide instruction and facilitate the assessment of learning outcomes, particularly when teaching complex material such as values, ethics, and aesthetics.

7. Conclusions

To help with socializing students to the profession, it is important to address a comprehensive approach to education. To accomplish this, the educator cannot solely focus on cognitive knowledge, but needs to incorporate all the learning domains into learning. Affective learning is consistent with social work principles of conscience use of self, recognition of the art and science of social work practice, the importance of therapeutic relationships, and the integration of values in the profession. More fully appreciating affective learning helps to understand problem students who may understand cognitively social work principles and may be able to demonstrate some of the skills, but fall short when demonstrating full affective learning. Optimum social work education necessitates achieving competence

in all three domains: cognitive, behavioral, and affective.

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