



1-1975

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Recommended Citation

Holland, Del (1975) "Techniques Towards Emphasizing the Affective Domain in the Elementary School," *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 8. Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal/vol1/iss1/8>

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Techniques Towards Emphasizing the Affective Domain in the Elementary School

Del Holland

I have felt that through the subject matter we present and the manner in which we present it we give the impression that the affective domain has no place in the elementary science classroom, and hence in science.

The scientist must constantly make value decisions, both major (Upon what areas shall I focus my study? How shall I divide my time between my work and my life outside of it? Can I be certain that my work will be used legitimately? etc.), and relatively minor (Can I afford to buy this piece of equipment? How shall I preserve these specimens?). If one of our objectives in teaching science is to give real insight into the world of science, I think we must strive to change the impression that affective matters are out of place in science.

What I have tried to present below are a few examples of ways through which the affective domain may be given more emphasis in science classrooms.

A. Journals

In my classrooms I have had the students keep some sort of a lab notebook. I have tried to encourage the kids to feel that many types of entries beyond observed data are legitimate. One way I have done this is to share some of the entries from my own notebook with them. Another way has been through putting special emphasis on affective entries on certain days. At different seasons I have had the students go to a particular individually picked outdoor spot and write about it and how they feel.

B. Rank Ordering

Rank ordering is the process of positioning certain objects or concepts on a continuum from positive to negative feelings. This is a technique that can be used in many ways in all subject areas.

Significant increase in the development of the affective areas can be made by coupling discussions with the rank ordering. This can best be implemented in small groups where the chances of everyone participating is greatest. One must be careful to emphasize that there are no universal rights or wrongs and that everyone's values are equally legitimate expressions of where they are at.

A couple of simple examples of rank ordering would be to have students rank the powders in the ESS unit on Mystery Powders from least liked to most liked, or to similarly rank the primary colors.

This technique can be used as a valuable probe into students' ideas about the classroom. The teacher may use it as a feedback mechanism to help evaluate from a child's eye view (rank last week's science lessons from most liked to least liked). It can also be used for planning purposes (rank these possible topics for study from most liked to least liked).

Another way of using rank ordering on a class wide scale can be fun and will certainly produce lively discussion. Have the students collect two of a particular type of object (leaf, rock, feather, etc.). One is to be one they love, the other one they hate. In small groups the students can as a group rank order the objects in a display from the most loved to the most hated. Then the groups can come together and make a continuum for the whole class.

C. Connecting an Emotion with an Object

Have the students bring in a particular type of object (leaf, rock, feather, etc.) that makes them feel an emotion (happy, sad, love, etc.). These objects can then be used in several ways. The children can meet in small groups and share their objects and emotions. They can write poems or paint about their feeling for their objects.

D. Rogerian Listening

An important part of developing values is the ability to listen and to be open to alternatives. This technique emphasizes these skills. The students are divided into small groups. One group member is selected as monitor. A topic for discussion is introduced (alternative power sources, why the dinosaurs suddenly disappeared, strip mining) and one group member then makes a statement of his position. Thereafter, before one can make a statement of his own, he must summarize the previous speaker's point of view so that the previous speaker believes his statement is understood. The monitor makes sure this happens.

E. Brainstorming

This is a technique whereby numerous alternatives are developed. It is an important step in the process of valuing. The goal is to produce as many alternatives as possible. The basic rules for brainstorming are:

1. No evaluation of any kind is allowed in the thinking-up session.
2. Encourage every idea to get out, no matter how wild.
3. Quantity is the essence. Get the ideas to flow as fast as possible.

4. Building upon the ideas of others is encouraged.

The ideas can be trimmed down and evaluated in another session. Some possible topics for brainstorming are: How can we get an incubator; what topics would you like to study in science; how would you solve the energy crisis?

I have attempted to make my examples clearly applicable to the physical sciences. Obviously the life sciences, especially ecology, have enormous potential. I feel that the affective issues there present themselves so strongly that they inherently get more of the needed interest, and that it is in the physical sciences that we particularly need to concentrate our efforts to include the affective domain. Therefore, the aforementioned suggestions are meant mostly as stimulators to help teachers see that the affective can be used in more areas than just the life sciences.