

Caring for the Emotions: Toward a More Balanced Schooling

Clive Beck and Clare Madott Kosnik
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

THE PROBLEM: SCHOOLING'S COGNITIVE EMPHASIS

Despite all the recent discussion (much of it valuable) of the relevance to education of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and critical theory, the emphasis in philosophy of education continues to be largely cognitive. Critiques of the pursuit of universal and unchanging knowledge still focus on what *outlooks* we should or should not have. Although "intuition" and "imagination" may be stressed, these are nevertheless fairly much in the cognitive domain. Although "phronesis" may be the goal, this is still a matter of *wisdom, judgment*, and the like. Even though philosophical postmodernism is often described as an "attitude" rather than a theoretical position, it remains concerned with language, understandings, narratives, and approaches to *inquiry*.

Schooling, too, continues to be cognitive in orientation, preoccupied with intellectual skills and academic disciplines from senior kindergarten onward. Students are constantly told that they are "here to *learn*," and there are no illusions about what this means. Social and recreational activities have a very modest place in schools. Insofar as emotional and moral development is attended to, it largely supports the academic program (promoting curiosity, diligence, and neatness, for example) and anyway it is pursued by cognitive means: lessons, discussion, exhortation. School learning is thought to have *relevance* for ordinary life in the real world, and in certain ways it does; but ordinary life and school learning are kept distinct. In us this prompts a number of questions: Should so much of a child's time be taken up with pure cognition? Is there as much transfer as we assume from all this learning to what else is important in life? Is this the best way to achieve even cognitive learning?

It has long been a key tenet of philosophies of education and school board goal statements that we should attend to "the whole child." John Dewey, whose name is continually invoked by educational theorists and practitioners alike, certainly held such a view. The breach, then, has not been in the rhetoric but in the practice. What has gone wrong? Is the goal inappropriate or the practice defective? In this paper, we wish to consider whether we should include in the school's agenda an aspect of the whole child that we have neglected, namely, emotional development; and if so, how might that be done.

Fortunately for our purposes, two important books by educational philosophers -- both, incidentally, past presidents of our Society -- have recently appeared which discuss in detail the education of the whole child: *The Challenge to Care in Schools* by Nel Noddings¹ and *The Schoolhome* by Jane Roland Martin.² Of these we will refer especially to the latter because of its special focus on emotionality. We will refer to other works as well, some of which take us into other disciplines and also back in time. One has to search hard to find books on education that consider emotions seriously (or even light-heartedly!).

NEEDED AREAS OF EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The reason we tend to pay only lip-service to emotions both in our own lives and in schools is at least twofold: on the one hand, there is embedded in Western culture a deep prejudice against

emotions; and on the other, while there have been valiant efforts by academic and popular writers to show that emotions are important, we still do not understand *concretely* why this is so. We have been convinced of their importance only at a general, abstract level. In this section, we will try to go from the concrete to the general. By-passing works that deal with general theory of the role of the emotions, we have looked for ones that present specific reasons and examples in support of emotional development.

Increased Emotionality. If emotions are to play an important role in our lives we must, of course, *have* them and preferably in profusion. There is a parallel here with Northrop Frye's notion of an "imaginative world," something we build up and have at our disposal to extend thought in a variety of possible directions.³ We need to build up a rich emotional life, feeling deeply and in varied ways. Roland Martin discusses George Eliot's depiction in *Middlemarch* of Mr. Casaubon, a man who studies incessantly but has "a blank absence of interest or sympathy."⁴ Roland Martin's key quotation from *Middlemarch* we will present here because of its special relevance for our topic. Eliot comments:

It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self -- never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action.⁵

Emotion is a key component of life, a major source of enjoyment and fulfillment. Robin Skynner and John Cleese in *Life and How to Survive It* describe what they call "exceptionally healthy people" who have a wide range of emotions and as a result "are unusually alive, with fun and energy and wit and jokes and good humour." Watching them is like "watching a three-ring circus": such people "live more fully because they're able to use more of themselves."⁶

Emotion is also an important source of motivation. A thin line of philosophers from Emile Durkheim through Dewey, Lawrence Blum, Bernard Williams, and Richard Rorty have stressed (*pace* Kant) the legitimacy of and need for emotions in moral action. According to Durkheim, affective learning is crucial because "we are and always will be sensate as well as rational human beings";⁷ "we never act completely out of duty, nor ever completely through love of the ideal."⁸ Dewey maintained that morality is essentially rooted in desire, although the desired object must be "developed through consideration of its relations."⁹ And according to Rorty, Kant's rational universalism simply does not work. In practice, the affections of kinship and group affiliation are normally essential if moral action is to take place.¹⁰

Acceptance and Expression of Our Emotions. It is not enough to experience emotions. We must also acknowledge our emotions, accept them by and large, and express them as appropriate. If we do not admit that we have emotions such as pleasure, affection, desire, fear, anger, pain, they will do harm in our lives (Freud's "return of the repressed") and we will not be able to harness their positive directions and energies. And if we do not express them we will not learn *how* to have them. We need *practice* in being affectionate, fearful, and angry in appropriate ways. Further, if we do not express our emotions, people will not know what we are experiencing, a serious impediment to intimacy.

Jean Baker Miller states that emotionality is "part and parcel of every state of being." Unfortunately, however, "it has not been seen as an aid to understanding and action, but rather as an impediment, even an evil."¹¹ She describes some of the problems created for men and women respectively by the denial of emotions. Men, for example, are allowed to have feelings of vulnerability and helplessness "for only a short period in infancy; after that, they are expected to be virtually done with them for life." As a result, they develop rigid mental mechanisms to enable them to overcome such feelings, with resultant harm both to men and to the women they interact with. For their part, "most women do have a much greater sense of the emotional components of all human activity." However, because of their subordinate position they have learned to focus on the emotions of men and "have been diverted from examining and expressing their own emotions." Baker Miller regrets the "long

tradition of trying to dispense with, or at least to control or neutralize, emotionality, rather than valuing, embracing, and cultivating its contributing strengths."¹²

Courage, Boldness, Self-Love. To have emotions and express them takes courage, since we have been brought up to believe that doing so will have disastrous consequences and, in particular, will seriously displease others. The temptation is to continue on our fearful way. However, if we do not express our emotions we will not know what the consequences will really be and will not learn how to deal with the resultant conflict. In Baker Miller's view, our culture has exaggerated the harm that comes from emotionality, and so we are justified in being bolder than we have been. (Of course, it would help if the social structures which give us good reason to fear the reactions of certain other people could be changed. Can all wives really be emotionally open to their husbands, all students to their teachers, or all employees to their bosses?) As for conflict, Baker Miller (like Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice*) argues for its essential value.

All of us, but women especially, are taught to see conflict as frightening and evil. These connotations... obscure the fundamental nature of reality -- the fact that, in its most basic sense, conflict is inevitable, the source of all growth, and an absolute necessity if one is to be alive.¹³

Conflict is another thing we must "learn to do" through experience, acquiring the skill of remaining connected despite conflict.

Courage and assertiveness, of course, require a degree of self-love or self-esteem. This is where our tradition of viewing human emotions as largely suspect conspires against emotional expression. Here the work of Baker Miller, Gilligan and other feminist writers in showing the legitimacy of *women's* ways of feeling and acting is so essential. More generally, writers who emphasize emotionality can help all of us -- females and males -- to overcome our social conditioning. According to Skynner and Cleese, children in "healthy families" are able to be "direct and open and honest with each other" because, in these families,

there's a belief that people's basic needs and drives are not evil. No human feeling needs to be a cause of shame. Therefore, the children experience no need to hide things, to confuse, distort, or otherwise cloud what they experience. Sexuality, anger, envy, they're all regarded as a natural part of human experience.¹⁴

Affection, Sympathy. As with emotions in general, so with affection in particular, we are long on principle and short on practice. We have been told again and again that we should love people; but we have been so pressured to love everyone equally -- even to "love our enemies" -- that we have not felt free simply to love those around us (as Rorty has pointed out).

It is generally accepted, then, that affection and sympathy are important for human life. They are essential for the most basic human transactions and relationships and for the sort of world that virtually everyone would like to live in. The lack of attention to these emotions has been due largely to cultural and psychological barriers. Baker Miller speaks eloquently of some of the difficulties we face today in the area of sympathy for others. "In order to pursue their prescribed male identity" men have "learned to close off large areas of their own sensibilities; one important area is precisely that of responsiveness to the needs of others." Men do in fact serve others in many ways, but they are only allowed to show a limited emotional commitment to it. Women on the other hand are more committed to serving others, but they cannot value highly what they do because it is not highly regarded by men.¹⁵ Clearly, we need to find a way out of this vicious circle and give affection and sympathy the status they deserve in our lives.

Intimacy. Beyond simple affection and sympathy, which can occur in a rather ad hoc manner, we need to establish enduring relational structures -- families, friendships, and other social groupings -- within which a variety of emotional and other needs are met. Emotions need to become "educated" so that without losing their affective force they form patterns that are life supporting.

Lawrence Blum helps clear the ground for acceptance of special relationships as morally legitimate. In *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* he argues that morality has an essential affective dimension such that impartiality cannot be seen as defining "the moral point of view."¹⁶ Indeed, "a friendship which involves a very deep and genuine regard for the friend's good is a morally excellent relationship."¹⁷ We must overcome the traditional suspicion of special affection for someone, an emotion most of us feel from time to time.

There is a need today for greater intimacy in relationships. It is possible to have a busy "social" life but never get beyond superficial conversation about the weather, sporting events, our children's ages and sizes, and so on. There needs to be a willingness to share deeper problems, achievements, interests, so we can receive support and insight from others across the whole range of our lives. This requires, however, that we learn to have the kind of trust, honesty, and emotional openness discussed above.

EMOTIONS GO TO SCHOOL

We have tried to make the case that emotions are crucial for human well-being. Assuming this is so, we have a basis for emphasizing emotional development in school. It might be objected that schools, with their square rooms, desks, and chalk boards, are designed for cognitive learning, not emotional learning. But in our view, the traditional school environment presents as much of an impediment to cognitive learning as to emotional learning: *all* learning is hindered by a mere "chalk and talk" approach and is enhanced by "lived" and "hands-on" activities. And further, if emotional learning is as important as we have suggested, we must *find* ways of fostering it in schools, whatever the past practice has been.

Another possible objection to emotional education is that teachers are not qualified for it: they are not trained counselors or emotional therapists. Their efforts would be ineffective or even do harm. But while this is certainly a legitimate argument in specific problem cases, in general we feel it is not valid. On the one hand, teachers are *already* teaching emotions in all sorts of ways (through their attitudes toward school subjects, their reaction to people and situations, and so on). Better that they do so in an open, reflective manner. And on the other hand, we teachers (like others in our society) are in need of emotional development ourselves. What better way to pursue it than in partnership with our students: we can all grow, emotionally, together.

How, concretely, might this take place in schools? We will begin by discussing the curriculum and then go on to consider an even more influential factor, namely, the culture of the classroom and school.

A Broad Curriculum. In *The Schoolhome* Roland Martin describes how the Ibo curriculum depicted by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* "encompassed myth, ritual, and custom and initiated the young into ways of perceiving, feeling, thinking, acting, behaving toward others and toward nature itself." She contrasts this with the situation in the United States, "where school is thought of as an instrument for developing children's minds, not their bodies; their thinking and reasoning skills, not their emotional capacities or active propensities."¹⁸

Roland Martin criticizes contemporary "recommendations for improving American schools" because they "give little or no curriculum space to the enormous range of ways of acting and forms of living that the young of any nation need to learn."¹⁹ She describes her own efforts at raising emotionally charged gender issues in a university classroom, and argues for the importance of "teaching boys to share the emotional labor both in the classroom and in the world."²⁰ She concludes:

All this means that while boys in the Schoolhome are learning to replace violence to others and themselves with positive acts of courage and self-assertion, the girls will have to learn to speak their minds and stand up for themselves.²¹

Roland Martin is concerned that the whole area of what she calls "domesticity" is left out of proposals for school reform. On reading the reports on American education issued in the 80s we note that

Dewey's insight into the relationship of school and home is ignored. One finds repeated demands for proficiency in the three Rs, for clear, logical thinking, and for higher standards of achievement in science, mathematics, history, literature, and the like. One searches in vain for discussions of love or calls for mastery of the three Cs of care, concern, and connection.²²

Roland Martin proposes a curriculum which takes seriously the whole range of domestic tasks and experiences, including food preparation, eating together, household chores, and provision of a secure and emotionally warm environment.²³

Similarly, Noddings in *The Challenge to Care in Schools* suggests that at least half of the school curriculum be organized around "centers or themes of care: care for self, care for intimate others, care for strangers and distant others" and so forth.²⁴ She proposes that, arising out of "an ethic of care's great emphasis on motivation," schools should "concentrate on developing the attitudes and skills required to sustain caring relations and the desire to do so..."²⁵ Responding to R.M. Hutchins's aphorism, "The best education for the best is the best education for all," she says: "I am not convinced that liberal education as it has been traditionally defined is the best education for anyone."²⁶

An Emotionally Rich Class and School Community. Even more important than the curriculum, in our view, is the impact of the life of the classroom and school on the emotions of students. Students are deeply affected by the way teachers interact with each other and with students, and by the assumptions about life and values that are built into rules and practices. To foster emotional growth, components such as the following are necessary.

CONVERSATION

Today there is growing recognition of the importance of discussion and dialogue in schools. However, Ralph Peterson in *Life in a Crowded Place* argues that much more is needed: we must also have genuine *conversation*. Caring talk, story talk, discussion, and dialogue all play a valuable role, but "they cannot match the contributions of conversation when it comes to strengthening a community's social fabric."

Caring talk and discussion can occur between strangers, but a good conversation can only come to life between people who take delight in each other's presence...we enter into a conversation specifically for the delight of it...there is no "thing" to be given specific attention; there is no purpose beyond the lively participation and enjoyment of those involved. Oakshott (1959) believes the excellence of conversation springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness....The participants as play fellows are moved "...only by their loyalty and affection for one another."²⁷

Despite the relatively spontaneous nature of conversation, however, it is crucial in the life of the school. It not only adds interest and enjoyment to daily experience but also increases the depth of learning, nurtures tolerance, and extends "the circle of people with whom (students) find it enjoyable to converse."²⁸ Roland Martin also emphasizes the importance of conversation, noting that it is one of the "exercises of practical life" included by Montessori in the Casa dei Bambini but a skill or art "not often nurtured in the American schoolhouse." She sees conversation playing a key role in creating an environment "in which children of all races, classes, and cultures feel at home."²⁹

CELEBRATION, JOY, OPENNESS

According to Peterson, another key component of the school learning community is "celebration, festivity, and fantasy." These are "integral parts of human experience" and so should be there in the school experience.

When we celebrate in the learning community, we recognize that people have the power to incorporate the joys and achievements of other people into their lives. Celebration not only dignifies the lives of individuals and the group, it contributes to a sense of belonging.³⁰

One child has a birthday, another gets a new baby sister, another finally masters long division, another composes a poem, a class play is a great success, Spring finally arrives: all these can be the occasion for celebration. Celebrations "need not last long": what is important is "the dignity with which the event is treated."

When a student in Linda Sheppard's kindergarten...begins to write a book, Linda draws attention to the fact and reads the opening sentence after saying, "Here is his first sentence." The celebration is short but it nonetheless sets the writer's efforts apart from others for a brief time and acknowledges the growth that has occurred.³¹

Celebration is one way of expressing happiness or joy. Expression of joy should be a constant feature of classroom and school life. It affirms that there is cause for happiness, and gives students permission to pursue a joyful approach to life. Roland Martin notes that joy is an "ingredient of the Casa dei Bambini that I expect to see the Schoolhome mix into its brew."

Celebration and the expression of joy in the classroom assume that there is an openness about feelings. As noted earlier, Skynner and Cleese see emotional openness as a key to overcoming fearfulness and learning to express emotions fully and appropriately. We often talk about the importance of a trusting environment in the classroom, but this cannot be achieved if students do not know what is going on in the hearts and minds of others, and especially of the teacher.

TENDERNESS, SECURITY

"Spare the rod and spoil the child": this saying captures a common sentiment about child rearing. But of course, so many children are "spoiled" by harsh, insensitive treatment by adults. Michael Apple in *Ideology and Curriculum* documents how much of the joy and excitement of young children is typically squeezed out of them within a few months of entering kindergarten.³² In one relatively progressive classroom he studied, "the teacher made it clear...that good kindergartners were quiet and cooperative." Once, two large stuffed dolls were mentioned as examples to emulate: "Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy are such good helpers! They haven't said a thing all morning." In general, children were forced to "adjust their emotional responses to conform to those considered appropriate by the teacher," rather than being warmly invited to express their true feelings and desires.

Warmth and tenderness toward students need not lead to "permissiveness" or to a chaotic classroom which threatens the teacher's mental health. On the contrary, it can result in strong self-discipline in students (as Roland Martin argues) and a friendly, relaxed atmosphere in which the teacher also can flourish. Firmness and realism can co-exist with love and tenderness, like two programs running side by side on a split screen.³³ To maintain such a balance requires considerable care and skill on everyone's part, but the results are worth it for students and teacher alike; and the skills, once acquired, are invaluable in family, work place, and other life settings.

Roland Martin links tenderness to a deep, pervasive feeling of security in the school and classroom. Such a sense of security is not easily attained; it requires more than a few token gestures such as a "family corner" with rugs and easy chairs. In all aspects of classroom life and relationships one must feel "safe, secure, loved, at ease -- that is, 'at home.'"³⁴ Teacher and students show tenderness because they love and respect each other at a profound level, and the sense of being loved and respected is the basis for feeling secure.

FRIENDSHIP, MUTUALITY

As we saw earlier, emotionality must go beyond ad hoc expressions of affection, joy, and so forth to enduring *structures* of friendship; to what Judith Jordan, Janet Surrey, and other researchers at the Stone Center in Wellesley College, Massachusetts call "relational living" or "mutuality" -- ongoing relationships in which we continually affect and are affected by each other.³⁵ Friendship tends not to be strongly supported by schools: we often stop friends from sitting and working together, discourage teachers from being friends with their students, and generally do not provide the time or the settings for developing friendships. But what could be more important for students and teachers than to experience friendship in school and "learn how to do it" in a way that also deepens our relationships outside the school and in later life?

Teachers, then, should work to establish structures in the classroom that in turn foster structures of friendship and mutuality. It is not enough that the teacher care; the students must care about each other and about the teacher. There should be a network of friendships within the class. In the Reggio Emilia System of schools in Italy, "relationship is the primary dimension of [the] system, however, understood not merely as a warm, protective envelope, but rather as a dynamic conjunction of forces and elements interacting toward a common purpose."³⁶ The emotionality of classroom and school must be expressed in patterns that are enduring, satisfying, *and* instructive.

CONCLUSION

A rich emotionality is essential to well-being -- and even to academic learning -- for both students and teachers. The time has come for schools to give up the artificial and damaging separation between emotion and cognition. As we attempt to engage in "emotional education," however, it would be a mistake to try to do so by means of academic courses and units of study which reinforce the idea that cognition is the gateway to the good life. We need to create classrooms and schools which are genuine communities, within which students and teachers quite naturally experience the joys and learn the skills of emotional living.

-
1. Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992).
 2. Jane Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).
 3. Northrop Frye, *Words with Power* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1990/92), xxii.
 4. *The Schoolhome*, 88-89.
 5. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1965), 314.
 6. Robin Skynner and John Cleese, *Life and How to Survive It* (London: Methuen, 1993), 27.
 7. Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), 113-14.
 8. *Ibid.*, 88.
 9. John Dewey, *Theory of the Moral Life* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1932/1960), 56.
 10. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190-92.
 11. Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 38.
 12. *Ibid.*, 37-39.
 13. *Ibid.*, 125.
 14. Skynner and Cleese, *Life and How to Survive It*, 25.

15. Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 69-72.
16. Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 4-5.
17. *Ibid.*, 68.
18. Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome*, 85-87.
19. *Ibid.*, 93.
20. *Ibid.*, 106-8.
21. *Ibid.*, 112.
22. *Ibid.*, 121-23.
23. *Ibid.*, 12-15, 120-29.
24. Noddings, *The Challenge to Care*, 70.
25. *Ibid.*, 21-22.
26. *Ibid.*, 30-31.
27. Ralph Peterson, *Life in a Crowded Place* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic Canada, 1992), 50.
28. *Ibid.*, 51-53.
29. Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome*, 43.
30. Peterson, *Life in a Crowded Place*, 39.
31. *Ibid.*, 43.
32. Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 50-60.
33. This image comes courtesy of Dr.V. Gulens.
34. Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome*, 12.
35. See for example Janet Surrey's "The `self-in-relation': A theory of women's development," *Work in Progress* (Wellesley, Mass.: Stone Center, 1984).
36. Loris Malaguzzi in Carolyn Edwards et al., *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1993), 62.

©1996-2004 PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION SOCIETY
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED