

Education of the Affect

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Education of the Affect - The Unexplored Domain

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The purpose of this paper is to present in summary form some of the basic theory and practice that has developed out of my work in exploring education of the affect over the past ten years or so. I take it that a person educated in emotions would (A) have some working hypothesis or conceptual map about emotions - a map that guides and illumines daily life, and is also open to revision by it; (B) have a range of skills in managing emotions in self and others in a variety of different situations; (C) be proficient in a range of educational methods that make the acquisition of such skills possible. I will use these as the three main section headings of this paper.

(A) A conceptual map of emotions

The following map is based on study, reflection, experience of my own personal development, facilitative work with the emotions of others both one-to-one and in groups over the past decade; and on co-operative inquiry (Heron in Reason and Rowan, 1981) with co-counsellors both formally (Heron and Reason, 1981) and informally (Heron, 1977, 1979). It claims to deal only with certain basic emotions, not all. And it is in principle conjectural, open to revision and review. For convenience - because there is a limit on the length of this paper - I will present it in an excessively assertive and dogmatic form, without definitions, clarifications, caveats and qualifications, supporting evidence and arguments. I can deal with these in discussion at the Conference (the paper was presented at a conference on education, University of Surrey, 1982).

(A.1) Human capacities Persons have certain distinctively human capacities that are irreducible to physiological drives, instincts or other somatic impulses. Three of these that I regard as central are: the capacity to love (and be loved), to understand (and be understood), to choose (and be chosen). In any valid prescription for personal development, I regard these capacities as democratically interrelated, not hierarchically. No one of them should on any permanent basis rule over, control or dominate any other. Rather in healthy development they are co-equal elements in a mutually interdependent, reciprocally supporting system. They need

to be unfolded concurrently. I reject the traditional, hierarchical, controlling role classically ascribed to intellect (see below (A.8)).

(A.2) Positive emotions The developing fulfilment of these capacities - through individual behaviour, personal relationships, in organisational settings, and so on - involves certain basic satisfactions, positive emotions. The capacity for loving when fulfilled involves a whole cognate family of affect: adoration, affection, care, concern, joy and delight in, appreciation, respect, and so on. Understanding fulfilled involves emotions of interest, fascination, passion for truth, excitement of intellectual discovery, pleasure in clear communication, and so on. The capacity for choice fulfilled involves emotions of zest, exhilaration, of pleasure in authentic (non-oppressive) power, and so on. Just as the basic capacities are parts of an interdependent system, so too these three sets or families of positive emotions are interdependent: they can be separated out in analysis, rather than in experience.

(A.3) Distress emotions The interference with, blocking and frustration of, these capacities generates certain basic distress emotions. Such emotions, at their point of origin, I regard as entirely healthy, valid responses to the thwarting of human development, of the emergence of a person from a potential to an actual state. Thus loving blocked generates sadness and grief; understanding blocked is evident in fear, fear of the unknown, of loss of identity through overpowering ignorance; choice restricted and thwarted generates anger. Some degree of grief, fear and anger may be regarded as enabling: a shock or spur that precipitates personal and cultural growth and achievement. But more extreme degrees, especially those occurring at the beginning of human life, and systematically recurring thereafter, I regard as disabling. From my work over the past decade, I believe that the behaviour of most people in our sort of society shows evidence of a good deal of disabling distress. Much of this becomes rigidified in social and institutional norms, and so becomes apparently invisible - because it is accepted as normal behaviour.

(A.4) Denied distress Distress emotions or grief, fear and anger become disabling when they are cumulative and recurring, repressed, and unresolved by catharsis or transmutation (see below). The denied distress distorts behaviour, thought and attitude into rigid, maladaptive and

compulsive forms - the origins and status of which the person concerned is relatively unaware. Human capacities then cease to respond flexibly and creatively to the current situation as it is. They get locked up in distortions that symbolically but uselessly re-enact past painful predicaments: irrational forms of psychological survival that were inescapable for the oppressed child, but are inappropriate and disabling for the adult. The persistent energy of the distortion derives from the interrupted capacity - a frozen need or longing - interwoven with the grief, fear or anger at its interruption.

(A.5) Distorted emotions I distinguish, then, between distress emotions and distorted emotions. Distress emotions are the original healthy responses of grief, fear and anger to interference with human capacities, to the interruption of human development. Distorted emotions indicate the destructive metamorphosis that has occurred when interrupted, frozen needs and distress emotions are repressed and denied healing. Then grief, fear and anger congeal into emotions of alienation, withdrawal, self-pity, dependency, claiming, clinging, demanding, neediness; of self-righteousness, dogmatic certitude, propitiation, superstition, insecurity, anxiety, self-doubt; of despair, apathy, powerlessness, depression, self-denigration, self-destruction, destructive rage, malicious hate, jealousy; and so on. The averagely well-intentioned person in our society, while often unawarely afflicted by varying degrees of this mass of distorted affect, nevertheless tries to deal with the more obvious perturbations as best they can. But there is an unfortunate group of persons on this planet who manifest what I call perverted emotions. Perverted emotions occur when a person takes up distorted emotions and gives them systematic and intentional expression as part of their life-style: the person who makes a career of torture, unbridled oppression, for example.

(A.6) Catharsis Distress emotions of grief, fear and anger, when they choke and disable the healthy, flexible exercise of basic capacities, can be resolved by the process of catharsis, of emotional discharge. Grief discharges in tears and sobbing, fear in trembling and cold perspiration, anger in (harmless) high frequency storming movements of the limbs and loud sound; together with thoroughgoing experience of the relevant emotions in full consciousness. Catharsis, when taken far enough, restructures awareness, liberates insight and re-evaluation about the genesis and consequences of the originating trauma. It discharges some of the

underlying energy that disables human behaviour, and gives scope for the re-emergence of flexible human responses. Its traditional home, in cultures more emotionally competent than ours, has been in religion, ritual, healing and drama. In our society it is largely denied, little understood, much feared and regarded more as a sort of disorder than as a healthy process of regeneration. Consequently, those of us who believe there is a case for practising catharsis as one form of emotional competence, need to develop simple methods for dismantling the inappropriate and repressive controls which we have been conditioned to impose on distress emotions. Or to put it another way, we need to find a way of unpicking the distorted emotions in order to get at the underlying distress emotions.

(A.7) Transmutation Complementary to catharsis is the process of transmutation of distorted emotions and their underlying distress emotions. The process is one in which a shift of consciousness takes place through the exercise of mental aspiration and choice. There is an intensification of awareness, or to use an array of metaphors, an alteration in the pitch, frequency, level, angle or plane of awareness. As a result, you can say either that distorted and distress emotions simply dissolve, evaporate, fall away, lose their hold on the psyche. Or you can say, to use an alchemical metaphor, that such emotions become transmuted from base metal into the gold of finer affect. Probably each of these sorts of process occurs. In my view, both catharsis and transmutation are necessary for the resolution of disabling distress; neither should be used as defence against the other; and catharsis has, perhaps, a certain precedence in any developmental programme. The transmutation of consciousness and its contents has its contemporary home in the field of transpersonal psychology and altered states of consciousness research.

(A.8) Classic model of the human being Our whole child-raising and educational system has no adequate working theory of affect in my view. It continues to uphold a classic Aristotelian-Platonic model of the human being, which, great though its contribution has been, has now surely outlived its usefulness. For Aristotle, intellect is that which supremely differentiates humans from animals, and the highest virtue is the cultivation of theoretical intellect. For Plato, intellect rules over the noble emotions, which under the guidance of intellect rule over the base passions. In this tradition, intellect is hierarchically supreme. Pursuit of truth is the

highest end in life. A secondary role of intellect is to regulate and control conduct and emotions. And still in higher education today the curriculum is committed exclusively to the cultivation of intellectual competence, both theoretical (often with somewhat higher status) and applied in a wide range of different technologies. There is no provision in the curriculum for the cultivation of emotional and interpersonal competence, of decision-making (including political) competence. It is assumed that if students become intellectually proficient through the formal curriculum, they will learn privately to introduce rational control into the management of their emotions and conduct. If they fail to do this, to a degree that is socially incapacitating, then the concept of mental disorder or illness is invoked, and the psychiatrist or psychotherapist is called in.

(A.9) Cultural pathology Thus the culture, through its educational system, offers only one guiding norm about emotions: control. This norm is largely tacit, implied, entailed, by the formal system - in the sense that it is assumed that everyone will be doing it, exercising control without any clarification being given as to what this means in theory and practice. The result is that throughout the culture there is simply no grasp of the distinction between valid, healthy, appropriate control of emotions, and invalid, unhealthy, inappropriate and repressive control of emotions. Thus distress emotions, past and present, become unwarily repressed, denied, then distorted and displaced into rigid and maladaptive behaviours. Much of this behaviour becomes socially and theoretically legitimated - in some aspects of the way organizations are run, professions practised, relationships conducted, children raised, democracy purveyed, research done, and so on. In short, a society that does not educate people to manage their distress emotions through catharsis and transmutation as well as through control, practises against itself throughout its associations and institutions a widespread and largely unidentified pathology.

(A.10) Disease model One symptom of this is the relegation of work on emotions and distress emotions to the domain of psychotherapy, where the professionals in many instances still talk of their "patients" and invoke a disease model of treatment and cure. I suggest that the professionals' own unidentified pathology is evident in this whole arrangement. My belief is that all human beings are vulnerable, especially at the start of their lives, to interference and

resultant distress, and that work with human vulnerability and distress emotions needs to be seen as part of a comprehensive education. If a disease model or treatment model of working on emotions is adopted then professional helpers of all kinds - from teachers to doctors - exempt themselves from personal work on emotions on the grounds that they are normal, not ill. So they continue the pathology of displacing through their helping role, to a greater or lesser degree, the distortions of their own denied distress. Thus we get a lot of rigid, maladaptive, fundamentally irrational pseudo-helping.

(A.11) Radical revision of higher education I would like to see a radical revision of higher education, in which the supreme and exclusive controlling role anciently ascribed to intellect is abandoned, in favour of the concurrent development of capacities for loving, understanding and choosing; in which the domain of work on emotions and on interpersonal processes, on the experiential, existential dimension of human existence, is included as a fundamental strand in the curriculum; in which a significant component of self-direction, participation in educational decision-making, is woven into the development of learning both in the affective and intellectual domains; in which intellectual competence balances the rigour of its own autonomy with the influential sympathy of a developed life of emotion.

(B) Skills in managing emotions

I take the view that there are at least four basic skills in the management of emotions: expression, control, catharsis, transmutation. To talk about the management of emotions is not, of course, to reinstate the intellect as the supreme regulator and controller. In a system of co-equal interdependent capacities or psychological functions, all of them are involved in the management of any one of them. Emotion, understanding and will are involved in the management of emotions. The whole person is involved in the exercise of a skill or competence in any one domain of their being.

(B.1) Expression Positive emotions, I have suggested (A.2), are involved in the fulfilment of distinctively human capacities. So the first stage in the expression of positive emotion is the development of these capacities. Indeed, the expression and the development are part and parcel of the same process; developing my capacity for love in action is also to express the

loving emotions involved in that development. This is the principle of positive accretion: the positive emotions and the developing capacity mutually build each other up. But we can extend this principle further, for there are at least three degrees of expression of positive affect.

(B.1.1) *Expressive deed* First, as just stated, there is the doing which itself expresses the emotion involved with it. I do a deed that helps or gives pleasure to my friend, and the deed itself expresses the affectionate emotion involved in it.

(B.1.2) *Expressive declaration* Second, I can directly express, with words or gesture or touch, the positive emotions I have for the other. Verbally and nonverbally, I can appreciate, validate, confirm, affirm, support, approve, express delight and pleasure in, the presence, the qualities, the behaviour, the products of the other. In this second degree, the positive emotion directly identifies and declares itself; while in the first degree it is declared through a deed. In any complete expression of loving emotions, for example, both deed and word are needed, and provide the most complete fulfilment for all concerned. If we consider emotions of excitement in intellectual discovery, then in the first degree these emotions are expressed in the intellectual pursuit itself; and in the second degree the researcher takes time out from the research to express directly to friends and colleagues the excitement that is being felt. With the general taboo on affect in our culture, redundant self-consciousness and inhibition restrain many people from this kind of person to person celebration and expression.

(B.1.3) *Artistic expression* Third, I can express positive emotions through the symbolism of art, the symbolic products of the imagination, in poetry, drama, mime, dance and movement, music, painting and so on. As I take emotions further away from the existential, lived experience, into the imaginative domain, they become, in a sense, developed, refined and illuminated. Thus art in its many forms is an important mode of knowledge of the world of emotion, and a mode of developing emotions (Bantock, 1976). Improvisatory art forms are basic in education of the affect (see below).

(B.2) Control Control of emotion - of all kinds - is clearly one of the great human skills. In our cultural tradition we have rightly admired it. But we need to distinguish between aware control, suppression and repression, which represent, respectively, three degrees of decreasing

awareness of increasing "blindness" . It seems to me that in our culture these three are often confused. Aware control identifies clearly the emotion (whether positive, distress or distorted), judges that it and/or the situation makes expression of it inappropriate, and takes attention off the emotion without denying, invalidating or forcibly ejecting it. Suppression means that the emotion is somewhat identified but that immediate attempts are made forcibly to deny it access to awareness and behaviour: there is the process of conflict, battle, struggle. With repression, the emotion is at most subliminally "identified" and then systematically denied access to awareness and behaviour in its original form. Of course, what is suppressed, and especially what is repressed, returns with the vengeance of distorted and disguised forms which paradoxically both sustain and bypass the repression. Aware control alone is a skill worth cultivating in my view. But it has corollary skills: the ability to spot and interrupt the suppression and repression of emotion.

(B.2.1) *Attention switching and cognitive restructuring* Aware control involves a field of awareness within which the person has the inner freedom to direct attention flexibly over the interacting contents of the internal and external environment. One form of it is to switch attention off the emotions and onto some other internal or external content or activity. Another form is to construe and perceive the situation in a different light and so change or modify one's affective response to it. Generally, it is the freedom to move around, make changes of gear, within and between the affective, cognitive and active domains, in a way that does not suppress or repress emotion, but acknowledges its presence while arranging for some other experience, activity, expression to be focal. Inevitably, the exercise of this kind of aware control is interdependent with skills in expression, catharsis and transmutation.

(B.2.2) *Managing restimulation* An area of practical emotional skill, critical in daily life, and not acknowledged in our culture, is the ability to identify and control restimulated, old and by now distorted, distress emotions. By restimulation I mean the re-activation by a current situation of the emotions originating in some earlier and genuinely distressful situations. Jealousies, rages, depressions, over-control, dominance, possessiveness, clinging, despairs, powerless emotions: all these and many more may be projected out into the present situation because it resonates in some respect to early traumas whose pain and frozen need have become

distorted by denial and repression. To control such restimulated pain does not of course mean to suppress and repress it, but awarely to notice and identify it for what it is; then switch attention off it, reconstrue the situation, or act in a way that contradicts its compulsion, and so on. For a much fuller review of tactics for dealing with restimulation see Heron and Reason (1982).

(B.2.3) *Interrupting projection* A special case of this kind of control is the ability to spot and interrupt the projection of old frozen needs and buried pain into intimate adult relationships. I may unawarely project onto the intimate other, buried emotions for the good parent I never had but longed for, or for the bad parent I actually had and resented. Aware control would spot this sort of projection at an incipient stage, raise it into full awareness, and defuse its ability to distort the present-time relationship. More generally, it would seek to decontaminate all sorts of adult transactions from the noxious influence of unfinished business from the past.

(B.3) *Catharsis* Catharsis, as I have indicated in (A.6) above, is one way of resolving accumulated and disabling distress. As well as the discharge of pent-up grief, fear and anger, in, respectively, sobbing, trembling, physical/vocal storming, I should also mention the discharge of embarrassment in laughter. In (A.6) above I described catharsis and its effects briefly. Here I will describe four basic routes to catharsis.

(B.3.1) *Passive imagination* First, there is the catharsis of passive imagination: by identification with someone else who is undergoing trauma or catharsis, the subject is triggered into the release of their own distress. A classic example is the case of the spectator at the theatre, at a religious or healing or other dramatic ritual. At one level of response the spectator still sees their, say, fears to be to do entirely with the drama out there on the stage or in the ritual. At an other and perhaps deeper level of response, where the element of skill is involved, the spectator also identifies, and works with, the drama and hidden distress in their own personal history that resonate with what is going on on the stage or in the ritual. Another example of catharsis via passive imagination, or sympathetic identification, is at the personal growth workshop, where one person is doing cathartic work in the middle of the group, and other group members are triggered by this into the release of their own distress emotions. The

modest skill here is to be open, as group member, to this possibility, and allow it to occur if it will.

(B.3.2) *Active imagination* Second, there is catharsis via active imagination. The skill here is much more developed. It is well-exemplified by experienced clients in co-counselling, who can use on themselves simple techniques such as literal description, repetition, psychodrama, association, to open up a chain of memories linked by unresolved distress, to discharge the associated emotional pain, and to catch the insights and re-evaluations that follow from such discharge. So the client is active in entering into memory images and releasing their affective charge. The core of this skill is psychodramatic: being able to re-enact critical incidents in one's own life, and in the re-enactment express fully emotions that were denied, cut off, went into distortion, on the original occasion. This resurrection and expression of hitherto buried emotion means that I do not just re-enact the drama of my life, but re-interpret and re-create in liberating ways that drama. It is original, archetypal, existential theatre. As the central actor, I am not simulating anything: I am discovering and portraying my own reality.

(B.3.3) *Passive body work* Third, there is catharsis via passive body work. The skill here is almost exclusively in the hands of the practitioner; for the subject is passive and needs only to let go the catharsis that is triggered by the practitioner's manipulation of tense musculature and other structures of the body; for these structures are the somatic correlates of buried psychological pain. Working on them manually can release both the pain and the associated imagery.

(B.3.4) *Active body work* Finally, there is catharsis via active body work: the subject practises hyperventilation, loud sounds, vigorous shaking, trembling or agitation of the limbs with a frequency and in a manner that interrupts the somatic controls on distress emotions and sets off their catharsis. Both passive and active body work methods can be swift, effective and move steeply and powerfully into the unfinished emotional business of early life. Of course, both the imagery and the body work routes can interweave and enhance each other. The body-mind is an interdependent system with a continuous interplay of processes both ways between its poles.

Skills in managing these processes in ways that procure the healing of catharsis seem to me to be essential in education of the affect.

(B.4) Transmutation I introduced the concept of transmutation in (A.7) above. The traditional home of transmutative skills has been in religious and mystical schools and traditions, both in the East and in the West. These subtle skills are to do with the management of consciousness itself, and are acquired by what may be termed consciousness training. Their very subtlety can lead them to become over-developed to the point of defensiveness, so I think they need to be well balanced, and perhaps preceded, by cathartic competence. I present them here phenomenologically and experientially, shorn of any large scale theologies in which they have been classically embedded. And I give an account of them particularly concerned with the resolution of distorted and distress emotions.

(B.4.1) Witnessing I simply notice the emotions, witness them, without giving energy to them, without getting sucked into them, without trying to do anything with them. I am aware of them and I am non-attached to them.

(B.4.2) Penetration Or concentration. I focus my attention in the very core of the emotions and hold the light of my awareness there undimmed, until after a time the emotions dissolve away. Witnessing and penetration overlap strongly with control skills in everyday life (B.2.1).

(B.4.3) Metamorphosis By the use of active, symbolic imagination, I transmute the emotions through their symbolic equivalents. I visualise and develop the image of, say, a lotus growing out of mud and murky water; or of a monster going through several stages of a journey that change it into a beautiful being, with different sorts of influential encounters at different stages; and so on.

(B.4.4) Dismantling A special case of deep insight, or reflective contemplation. By reverse chronological scanning of all associated memories, or by a more direct insightful descent, I uncover and see and understand clearly the irrational choice I once made that has kept me locked in the distorted re-enactment of old distress. This dismantles the hold of the emotions, loosens the chains.

(B.4.5) *Disidentification* I dissociate from the empirical ego where the emotions hold sway, and become At Cause. I enter the void, the spaceless space, the womb of creation, the immediate divine immanence whence all thought, emotion and forms of manifestation continuously arise and come into being. The presence far more deeply interfused..... That which is forever within.

(B.4.6) *Transfiguration* In the West, the descent of Grace; in the East, illumination of the crown chakra. The elevation and transfiguration of consciousness that occurs through encounter with the transcendent Thou. The dross of disfiguring affect is both shed and transmuted. That which is forever beyond.

(B.4.7) *Art, nature and intimacy* There are several areas of human experience where transmutative processes can be at work. As well as having a cathartic effect, art forms as in drama, poetry, music, dance, may have a transmuting effect in resolving and refining tense emotion into its opposite. Similarly with the contemplation of nature. Sexual intimacy can have an incidental, post orgasmic, cathartic effect. It can also, as a loving art form, resolve, heal and refine disordered affect

(C) Educational methods for developing affective skills

There is a very wide range of methods. I give only a representative sample here.

(C.1) Methods for cultivating expressive skills

(C.1.1) *Daily life*, of course, closes the gap between education, experiential learning and living. It must have pride of place. Everyday life is the primary educational arena for cultivating expressive skills, that is, for developing basic human capacities, and for affirming and celebrating the positive emotions involved in such development. At home, at work, at play. Face to face; with groups in organizations. With others; by oneself in solitude.

(C.1.2) *Tripartite formal education*: which exhibits a comprehensive systems curriculum - work on emotions and the interpersonal, work on intellect, work on choice and decision-

making are represented both autonomously and interdependently. Such a curriculum is closely intermeshed at critical points with everyday life and the wider world.

(C.1.3) *Sensitivity training groups*, personal and interpersonal development groups, caring and sharing groups, in which members learn, *inter alia*, to reach out to each other in love, care, support, fun, joy.

(C.1.4) *Training workshops in expressive social skills*, in expressive style in interpersonal life.

(C.1.5) *Workshops in dramatic improvisation*, psychodrama, *Selbstdarstellung*.

(C.1.6) *Artistic celebration and expression* in poetry, creative writing, making music, dance, song.

(C.1.7) *Experience sharing groups* in which the human, felt experience of pursuing a discipline or course of study is expressed and shared, apart from its content.

(C.2) Methods for cultivating skills in aware control

(C.2.1) *Confluent education*: enabling the student in the learning situation to move flexibly between learning and planning what to learn and how to learn it and assessing whether they have learnt it; between theoretical, conceptual work and personal experience through the use of experiential exercises; between task work and work on emotional and interpersonal processes; between leading and following; between co-operating and competing; between learning at college and learning in living.

(C.2.2) *Consultative education*: involving the student at various stages, to an appropriate degree, in educational decision-making - about learning objectives, about curriculum design and learning contracts, about assessment of performance and course evaluation. This develops a good deal of aware control in both students and staff in managing emotions and interpersonal issues.

(C.2.3) *Consciousness-raising workshops on aware control*: looking at the theory and practice of aware control, the techniques, the rationale, of handling restimulation in various situations, of managing distorting projections in a variety of relationships.

(C.2.4) *Facilitator training*: workshops that train participants to facilitate emotional and interpersonal growth and awareness in others, for both one-to-one and group settings.

(C.3) Methods for cultivating cathartic skills

(C.3.1) *Co-counselling training*: a method whereby the client takes it in turn with a supportive peer to be significantly self-directed in managing their own regression work, catharsis and insight. The client uses both active imagination routes and active body work routes (B.3.2) and (B.3.4). See Heron (1979).

(C.3.2) *Birth re-enactment and primal training*, bio-energetics, Gestalt methods: these and related techniques all provide access to cathartic work. They become fully educational when participants are trained to be self-directed - with peer support - in the various techniques, which are of course primarily for using on self.

(C.3.3) *Charismatic groups* are or can be significantly cathartic.

(C.3.4) *Catharsis through art*: the intentional use of a variety of art forms to generate catharsis.

(C.4) Methods for cultivating transmutation skills

(C.4.1) *Workshops in consciousness-training*: practical exercises in the range of methods given above (B.4.1) to (B.4.6).

(C.4.2) *Transmutation through art events*: refining and developing emotions through the creation, interpretation and appreciation of various art forms.

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