

Affective Education in Guangzhou, China: A Case Study

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Abstract: While the affective domain is believed globally to be one of the main areas of human experience and development, affective education is interpreted differently in different countries, and its manifestation varies from region to region. It is argued that affective education is culturally contextualized. The present paper reports a qualitative case study attempting to investigate how affective education is conceptualized and implemented in contemporary China. A middle school in Guangzhou, the biggest city in South China, was chosen as the case school. The study was conducted via semi-structured interviews (both individual and group), analysis of textbooks and school documents, and on-site observations. Findings show that perceived aims and contents of affective education were closely related to character formation, traditional Chinese values and political ideology. Affective education was also interpreted as a response to the rapid social changes in modern China. These findings highlight the influences of Chinese cultural values and political ideology on the conceptualization and interpretation of affective education. Our findings suggest that affective education from the Chinese perspective is 'value-oriented' rather than 'affect-oriented' and it serves as the means to promote the well-being of the collective rather than that of the individual.

Keywords: Virtues, Affective Education, China

Introduction

THE CONCEPT OF *affect* has been playing a significant part in the human mind for many centuries. The affective domain was believed to be one of the main areas of human experience and development. Catering for the needs of individuals in the affective dimension of education is an irreplaceable responsibility of schools. The notion of affective education, in a broad sense, is the learning concerned with the emotions and feelings that motivate, constrain or shape human action (Best, 1998). A wide range of approaches to affective education has been discussed in the West (e.g. Beane, 1990; Lang, 1998; Lang, Best, and Lichtenberg, 1994), but how affective education is interpreted in school communities in Asia is a topic under-researched. The perceptions of school stakeholders on how to promote students' affective well-being are seldom explored. Empirical studies, which may inform comparisons across regions, are undertaken minimally in China. The purpose of this research is two-fold. Firstly, with the help of empirical evidence gathered from a qualitative case study, it aims to investigate how affective education is conceptualized in Mainland China. Secondly, this research is intended to examine how affective education in China is related to its wider social and cultural context.

Literature Review

The interpretation of *affective education* varies according to cultural contexts, which often causes semantic and conceptual confusion. As Martin and Reigeluth (1999) point out, a variety of terms, such as *education for affect*, *affective development*, *affective development education*, and *affective domain* have been used to address affect in education. Lang (2003) also stresses that affective education is an umbrella concept that may manifest in a number of different ways throughout the world. Examples of manifestations are *pastoral care*, *guidance and counselling*, *personal and social education (PSE)*, *socio-emotional learning*, *life education*, *comprehensive guidance*, *emotional literacy*, *character education*, *holistic education*. These terms are found to be used interchangeably and how they are defined depends heavily on the social and cultural context.

Apparently, there is a spectrum of ways of describing affective education which varies from the very strict sense of affect in school education to the very broad views of provision of affective education. One possible way to understand affective education conceptually is by examining its salient constitutive elements proposed by various researchers across regions. For instance, the Affective Taxonomy (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Massia, 1964), a widely known taxonomy of the affective domain based on the theory of internalization, illustrates how an *attitude* or *value* becomes increasingly a part of the individual. Based on the idea of affective taxonomy, Martin and Briggs (1986) include *self-development* as a key component with *social competence*, *values*, *morals and ethics*, *motivation*, *interest*, *attitudes*, and *emotions and feelings* being the sub-components. This taxonomy provides a more comprehensive description of the affective domain but the elements of affective constructs are still limited. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1992) presented a conceptual model of affective development education which identifies five major domains, namely the *intellectual*, *aesthetic*, *physical*, *spiritual*, and *social*. The characteristic of this model lies in its emphasis on the social dimension. Yet, there is a lack of neat classification of what is meant by the affective domain. Lambert and Himsl (1993) devised a conceptual model which identified five salient "indicators" of "affective growth" namely *self-worth*, *relating to others*, *world awareness*, *learning*, and *spiritual life* as interlocking areas. Each of the five indicators is expressed and observed through dynamic behaviors. This model illustrates how affective constructs can be complexly interrelated. However, there is not much elaboration on the aspects of emotion and motivation. Martin and Reigeluth (1999) propose another model, made up of six dimensions and three major components. The six dimensions of affective development are *emotional*, *moral*, *social*, *spiritual*, *aesthetic* and *motivational*. The three components are *knowledge*, *skills* and *attitudes*. The six dimensions are believed to be highly correlated and interdependent but qualitatively different from each other. Of the three major components, *attitude* is described as the crux of the affective dimension. Martin and Reigeluth (1999) provide a clear categorization of the affective domain. This also demonstrates that affective development can be both a process addressing individual growth and an end-product addressing the affectively well-adjusted person. However, these two aspects have not been explicitly elaborated. Puurula, Neill, Vasileiou, Husbands, Lang, Katz, Romi, Menezes, and Vriens (2001) portrayed a significant dimension that generally involves a concern for students' *moral*, *spiritual* and *values development*. Its affective constructs are: *feelings*, *beliefs*, *attitudes*, *emotional literacy*, *interpersonal relationships* and

social skills. Hence, the affective dimension of education is concerned with both an educational process and an end-product.

This overview of the components of affective education reveals that affective education addresses a wide range of constructs varying from feeling-based dispositions to internally consistent qualities. These constitutive elements form the salient content of affective education to be realized in the formal and informal curriculum.

Affective Education in a Chinese Context

In Asian societies, traditional and indigenous values are prevalent in the affective dimension of education. In China, the word for *affect* is *qing*, which is a broad concept related to the inner feelings of an individual. Ames (2003) points out that in the classical world of China, *qing* was said to be constantly reforming our natural tendencies as human beings. The arousal and expression of *qing* should always conform to patterning in order to achieve appropriateness and harmony (Tang, 2003). The major concern is how to live in dignified harmony with others. This is shown by an individual in relationships with others, social communities, and with personal moral cultivation by which the self is brought to maturity (Liu, 2004). In modern China, affective education is called *qinggan jiaoyu*. According to Zhu, (1993, 1994), *qinggan* equals *affect* and thus affective education aims to foster affective qualities of the self. The emphasis of *qinggan jiaoyu* is on moral development, specifically on fostering *moral affect* (Lo, 1993; Yu, 1999; Zhu 1999 2004). In line with the traditional concern for ethics, morality is perceived to be central to the affective development of an individual. In fostering moral affect, focus is given to forming a student as a moral person who is able to relate to others in appropriateness. Affective education in China is thus characterized by moral values and the strong influence of traditional virtues. It is argued that one of the main manifestations of *qinggan jiaoyu* in Modern China is in the form of *Meiyu* (aesthetic education in its broadest sense), with the aim of building students' moral character via the cultivation of *qing* (Sun, 1990; Zhu, 1999; Zheng, 2006).

It seems that the prevalent concepts of affective education which are interpreted in western contexts with an individualistic culture are inadequate to show what Chinese *qing* entails. There is a lack of research on how affective education is conceptualized in a Chinese context. Attempts made to examine the functions and content of Chinese affective education are minimal. The present study aims specifically to examine how affective education is perceived, interpreted and implemented in a Chinese school context. This study aims to fill this gap in existing research on the provision of affective education and the cultural dimension of affective education.

The Research Study

This study is a research project conducted in a middle school in Guangzhou, the biggest city in southern China. This city was chosen because of its uniqueness in cultural complexity. Guangzhou has long been regarded as the symbol of *Ling Nan Culture* (Southern China culture) (Li, 2003; Zhao, 2005). It is characterized by openness and inclusiveness (of different cultures), as well as by the preservation of its cultural heritage (Chen and Yu, 2005). A qualitative case study was conducted from the year of 2005 to 2007 to investigate the perceptions of school leaders (school principal and School Communist Party Secretary),

teachers and students about the concept and practice of affective education. Data was drawn from observations, analysis of textbooks and school documents, in-depth interviews with the present and former school principal, Communist Party secretary, teachers and students of the school. A total of 35 semi-structured interviews were conducted involving 41 informants including 3 school leaders, 20 teachers and 18 students. Twenty three sessions of participant and non-participant observations were conducted on site during morning assemblies, school events, competitions, outings, activities in the local community, class teaching, school recess and lunch breaks. A shadowing approach was employed to observe the principal for a whole working day.

The present case school is a middle school with history of forty years and student population of about 1000. Held in high regard by the government, its provision of affective education is unique, for affective education has been implemented as *Meiyu*. There was no specific subject or stand-alone course named 'affective education' in the school, but it was generally understood and widely adopted as an essential theme of the school's mission.

Results

The different sources of the qualitative data were categorized, thematically analyzed, and triangulated. The functions, content and practice of affective education in the case school were classified under different headings as presented below.

Affective Education as Education for Character Development

In the case school, affective education (*Meiyu*) was equated to the broadest sense of aesthetic education. It entailed the meaning of harmony and perfection. School leaders and the majority of teachers believed that the overall function of *Meiyu* was to develop students' character. For instance, the school principal made the following remarks on the functions of *Meiyu*:

We have to emphasize nurturing (students') character...we emphasize how to develop thought and knowledge but it is nurturing moral character that really matters

In particular, school leaders highlighted virtues in character development, such as responsibility and concern for others. Teacher informants generally put emphasis on *Meiyu* as forming students to become caring persons with affection. The purpose of this was to overcome students' self-centeredness, deemed as the negative effect of the country's single-child policy. Student informants believed that *Meiyu* served the function of developing good personal qualities which would enable them to develop better social relationships. In addition, fostering self-cultivation was also seen by most of the informants as an essential function of *Meiyu* for the purpose of character formation.

Meiyu was described as self-improvement in character building and refinement of the inner life with the ultimate aim of achieving personal harmonious development and the perfection of one's character. This was revealed by the views about the multiple functions of *Meiyu* in character development given by the former school principal, who initiated the idea of *Meiyu*:

In a broad sense, *Meiyu* also carries the functions of regulating one's attitude, purifying the inner self and beautifying life. *Meiyu* effectively brings about self adjustment and character perfection.

According to the school leaders and teachers, *Meiyu* was made possible through the process of *regulation* of self, a process of developing personal strengths and ability to regulate attitudes, beliefs and ways of thinking, in which the heart and mind were “beautified” and “purified”.

The content of *Meiyu* was of two types. The first was concerned with the virtues and self-cultivated dispositions which reflect traditional cultural values. These salient virtues are “love and care”, “thankful reverence”, “truthfulness”, “self-strengthening” and “self-improvement”. The second type was concerned with the personal qualities of a moral person, namely altruism and responsibility, socialist ideals and morals, and owning one’s affective feelings. The school leaders and teachers shared the view that the salient content of *Meiyu* was cultivating virtues and personal dispositions to promote character perfection and the development of moral personal qualities.

The influence of traditional values was predominant while the political ideology played a role as one of the components. This is the unique feature of affective education characterized by traditional values in a socialist template.

Affective Education as Agent for Harmonious Human Relationship

School leaders, teachers and students all shared their perception of the importance of developing positive interpersonal relationships via *Meiyu*. The pursuit of harmony in human relationships was deemed of primary importance. The school leaders regarded *Meiyu* as the instrument to create a harmonious society as a response to the political doctrine proposed by Hu Jintao, President of China, so as to sustain collaboration in competition, and promote connectedness among young people. Teacher and student informants on the other hand valued the promotion of teacher-pupil relationships as an essential goal of *Meiyu*. Teachers believed that maintaining an authoritative but caring relationship with students was ultimately crucial in facilitating teaching and learning. Student informants, in addition, expressed the need of learning how to relate to and cooperate with each other in a group. Students asked for more effective communication and the development of closer teacher-pupil relationships via *Meiyu*.

In the case school, *Meiyu* for the purpose of developing harmonious relationships was conducted in “Harmony Education”. It entailed three salient themes. First, there was the promotion of mutual respect - the essence of human relationships, applied also to the wider social context. Second, fostering an attitude of harmony - a facilitative factor which sustains positive human relationships. Third, cultivating reverence for teachers - this love with respect highlighted strictness and relational authority.

Affective Education as Promoter of Code of Behavior and Psychological Health

As revealed from interviews, school leaders and teachers perceived the function of *Meiyu* as maintaining a code of behavior or setting boundaries for students. *Meiyu* promoted social adjustment by adhering to norms, roles and values, including socialist values. A set of objectives were identified including the cultivation of moral obligation and a sense of dutifulness, and the enhancement of self-discipline to preserve public order, the acceptance of authority and observation of the code of behavior.

The code of behavior was linked to the cultivation of psychological health since the latter was believed to be the accelerator of the former. Evidence also showed that the promotion of *psychological health* of individuals was valued in the case school. However, this was interpreted as the self-awareness of personal strengths and the way to self-perfection rather than the psychological well-being of individual students. School leaders and teachers put stress on how to regulate individual feelings and attitudes when they referred to psychological health. Some student informants, on the other hand, perceived promoting psychological health as strengthening one's personal qualities. They linked it to the ability to handle anxiety caused by academic pursuit and examinations. The salient content of *Meiyu* for promoting psychological health included the management of emotions and the attainment of honor. The former was concerned with regulation, control, nurturing and cultivating temperament. The latter referred to gaining personal honor and collective honor.

To promote a code of behavior via *Meiyu*, learning to set boundaries and limits to behavior was emphasized. Proper conduct and manners were stressed, referring to the specific behavior and etiquette proper to different areas of daily life. These were believed to be a salient part of character perfection. The emphasis on conformity of behavior served to provide an orderly environment in school but fell short of enhancing the sense of self-discipline in the case school.

Realization of Affective Education

Meiyu as affective education was implemented on different levels of the school. This can be illustrated by the three-level model suggested by Lang (1998), in which affective education is conducted on (A) an individual level, (B) a group/class level and (C) a whole school/institutional level.

(a) Individual Level

For the realization of *Meiyu* on the individual student's level, *informal conversation* took the form of a private talk between a teacher and a student beyond the classroom situation. This was based on the notion of subtle influence exerted by the teacher on students through daily life contact. It was a gradual process which helped students form moral behavior under the influence of the teacher as a role model. Another way of practicing affective education was via the counseling service, which provided support for personal development, though it was the usual practice that students approached their homeroom teacher first for guidance and advice. Teacher counselors not only conducted individual counseling but also established close relationships with students to maximize social contact between teacher and student. The provision of a counseling service was a means to build up closer teacher-pupil relationships and supplement the homeroom teachers' work in personal support.

(b) Group Level

At the group level, *Meiyu* was realized mainly via "*class collective*" and "*pedagogical practice*". *Class collective* was the term adopted by the case school to represent the concept of a class as a community or a unit of a collectivistic nature. The class collective created a social environment in which every member had a distinct role to play and each was expected to contribute actively through routine service, peer tutoring, and small group meetings.

Through the "class collective", students' collective self was fostered instead of their autonomous self. The homeroom teacher played a vital role in promoting positive class ethos via class management and the transmission of values. Affective elements such as human feelings and emotions were emphasized in pedagogical practice as the components of classroom teaching which helped enhance students' learning interest on one hand and instill value education on the other.

(c) Whole School Level

Meiyu was instilled at a whole school level mainly via "mass programmes" and the "campus culture", or the physical and social environment of the school, with a comprehensive support system in the form of a hierarchy under the centralized leadership of *Jiao Dao Chu* (Guidance Committee). Large scale school based activities were organized under different categories including training, interest groups, outings, visits, contests, service learning (voluntary work), performances (art and music), educational exchange programmes and school festivals. These programmes helped generate positive feelings towards school among students. On the other hand, the value of *Mei* (beauty) was dissimilated through the school's physical environment, its architecture and design, the arrangement of its horticulture, and its campus facilities. All of this enabled students to feel the ambience of *Mei* "for the nurturing of students in the area of feeling and emotion, and shaping of their character". In addition, the value of *Mei* (beauty) was conveyed through schools events which aimed to instill traditional values.

Three identifiable features of *Meiyu* as affective education appeared on different levels. Firstly, most of the work implemented was of a remedial and preventive nature. Secondly, practice was controlled and closely monitored by a hierarchical system, headed by the *Jiao Dao Chu*. Thirdly, the key person for the implementation at individual and group levels was the homeroom teacher. To sum up, affective education in the case school was realized through either the personal contact provided by the individual homeroom teacher with back-up from a centralized support system. The aims were to foster students' character development and harmonious human relationships, and to promote the code of behavior and psychological health.

Discussion

Affective education in the case school was perceived more as a means than an end in itself. There was a strong inclination towards working for the common good and for self-regulation, with the ultimate goal of building and maintaining a harmonious social order. Our findings in Guangzhou provide an interpretation of affective education from a Chinese perspective, which addresses both psycho-cultural and socio-political dimensions of affective education.

Psycho-Cultural Dimension

In the case school, the informants' conceptions and the practice of affective education revealed the traditional belief of "self". Affective education in the West is concerned with personal and social development. Central to such a dimension, as Pring (1987) argues, is a deep concern for students as persons, enabling them to articulate and to refine their feelings to attain self-esteem and a sense of personal worth, to develop their ability to engage in prin-

cipled thinking, and the ability to reflect upon experience, and to own seriously their values and attitudes. Adolescent development is concerned with the formation of identity including the development of different aspects of self: bodily self, sexual self, social self, vocational self, moral/political self, self as a learner and self within an organization (Wall, 1977; Watkins, 1995). Affective education in the case school, however, seemed to present a different picture of "self development". The cultivation of moral virtues was emphasized and the self, to a great extent, was defined in terms of one's roles and one's relationship to the nation or the collective. The persistent influence of Chinese culture, Confucian thought in particular, definitely has an impact on how the self is perceived, and this in turn affects the interpretation of affective education. It is the Confucian belief that human beings are born good and an individual's feelings come from the inner-self, combined with external rites (Wang, 2004). Everyone is born with potential virtues, which provide the starting point for striving for sagehood with perfect morality. The heart and mind always possess the capacity of reflecting on and reshaping one's own life (Cheng, 2004). The underlying message of affective education for the development or perfection of personal qualities in the case school, in fact, echoes the traditional belief that an individual can be transformed into a person with a virtuous character via self-cultivation. Affective education, *Meiyu* in the case school, was employed as a means for character formation and for nourishing the inner self. Such a characteristic is in line with the Confucian belief in self-cultivation through rites and music.

In the Confucian tradition, the personal and social development of an individual is more concerned with building relationships and reciprocity (Yan, 1996). The individual, in a Chinese sense, is not independent (Lai, 2006), but is in fact a *small self* which submits to the benefits of a *large self* (Hsu, 1985) or the *collective self*. The basic task of an individual, understood primarily as a social being, is to learn how to relate to others in the collective (Tu, 1985). The main foci of the practice of affective education are working for the common good and sustaining the benefits of the collectivity. Such foci were manifested on the interpersonal dimension in the provision of affective education in the case school. The focus of affective education was on demonstrating the way to achieve self-actualization through collective identity. On the other hand, emotional literacy as an essential dimension of personal and social development was not adequately addressed in the case school. Such a lower priority reveals the Chinese way of coping with emotions. As argued by Yu (1999), *self-cultivation* is generally seen as the effective way to regulate one's emotion. This is in line with the traditional belief of the need to regulate one's inner feelings. Being a "relational" self, students tended to be interested in maintaining harmonious human relationships. Regulating one's own affect is a purposive and conscious way of enabling oneself to engage in harmonious human interactions in daily life. Apparently, in this regard, affective education, instead of facilitating the liberation of self, is for the purpose of regulation of self.

Socio-political Dimension

School is a miniature of society and the case school is no exception. What happens in the social and political arena exerts considerable influence on the school's campus life. Parallel with the development of reforms and the promotion of modernization, profound changes are taking place in the social and economic sectors of China. In facing the marketization of the economy, there is a need for the establishment of corresponding values and norms of morality. Fostering positive human relationships and promoting social ethics as a response to rapid

social changes and the tension arising from the establishment of the market economy are necessary (Li, Zhong, Lin, and Zhang, 2004; Qi and Tang, 2004.). Thus, the re-emphasis on traditional Confucian values is deemed to be urgent to maintain social and political stability (Yu, 2008). These changes are reflected in the stress of the case school on addressing the issue of human inter-relatedness, ethical behavior and public morality by promoting affective education.

Ideo-political education has a significant influence in the school's affective education. This influence is understandable since China's educational system is always a subsystem of the political system and has been used as an instrument to sustain a social order and to build up a modern society (Zhou, 2003). In supporting the ideology of collectivism and encouraging conformity to socialist values, ideology-political education is implemented by using affective education as a vehicle to foster civic morality and reinforce a collectivistic culture. Besides, in order to respond to the political doctrine of the Communist Party on bringing harmony among groups with conflicting interests in China, the promotion of "harmony" as a Confucian value was prevalent in the case school. Affective education is employed to help fill the moral vacuum, a term used by Schell (2008). Such phenomena reflect the present social situation of China, and the way to provide remedies for society as a whole. Beyond doubt, affective education is politicized in order to promote political values for stabilizing society as well as strengthening the political leadership of the Communist Party. This vitalizes the concept of *moral affect* as suggested by various proponents of affective education in China.

Conclusion

This study revealed how affective education was conceptualized and practiced in a middle school in Guangzhou, China. Affective education in contemporary China serves multiple functions: developing moral character, fostering self-cultivation, sustaining harmonious human relationships, promoting social adjustment through conformity to norms, and strengthening psychological health via the formal and informal curriculum. Affective education is also a means of responding to the rapid social changes and the need to maintain social and political stability. Chinese affective education is characterized by ideology-political elements and the integration of the political dimension with personal and social development. The present study also identifies an approach illustrating how affective education was implemented on three levels: individual, group and whole school through the inculcation of traditional values and the political ideology. The monitoring by the centralized leadership and the intensive work undertaken by individual homeroom teachers produce a unique support system in a collectivistic culture, in which a collective identity was developed instead of autonomous self-identity. All in all, affective education in the Chinese context served to promote the wellbeing of the collective rather than that of the individual. The role of affective education in personal and social development needs to be re-examined, and more focus should be put on the liberation instead of regulation of self. Otherwise, the claim of a commitment to the education of the whole child remains mere rhetoric in Mainland China.

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