A Model of Influence: Teaching Affective Skills to All Students

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In today’s complex educational system, much attention is given to teaching all students academic content and focusing on rigorous content standards. While this is important, the authors contend that it is equally important to ensure that all students receive instruction in affective skills, and that the marriage of both areas takes careful, purposeful attention. The authors have developed a model of influence, based on a hierarchy of affective development crafted by Krathwohl in 1964, that suggests teaching affective skills effectively involves a four level sequence: developing consciousness, acknowledging beliefs and affirming perspectives, realizing benefits to self and others, and taking action and embracing influence. The authors present this model and provide examples to be used in teaching all students skills needed to communicate with others in a diverse world.

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It takes very little attention to today’s headlines to understand that in many respects, we are a nation at war with itself. Recent events in Ferguson, Missouri that have led to chaos and days of continuous rioting, make us all pause and take notice. When our children are angry, when our families are grieving, and when our leaders are pointing fingers at one another, it is time for us to take stock of who we are and who we want to be. We must ask ourselves, what legacy do we want to leave for our children? How do we want our world to look in ten, twenty, or thirty years? What messages do we want to send to those whose lives are affected by the decisions we make and the actions we take today? These questions swirl through the heads of educators everywhere who want to make a positive difference in the lives of those whom we are called to serve.

Just as there are catastrophic events in the news fueled by angry words and a lack of compassion, so there are stories of tremendous courage and caring, often in the face of danger. Take the Sandy Hook case. Children were murdered by a ruthless killer, yet teachers sacrificed their lives to save young students, and a community as well as a nation embraced those who had suffered such tremendous loss. Other examples abound. Passersby have stopped to rescue total strangers from natural as well as man-made disasters, often with no regard for their personal safety. What is it that we as educators can do to positively impact our students so that they communicate respectfully and kindly with one another? How do we create classrooms that ensure that the nation is filled with promise instead of despair? The purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical framework, based on the work of Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) that will assist schools meet the needs of all students by investing in their affective needs as well as cognitive and academic needs. Suggestions for implementation will also be shared.

Theory of Affective Development
Within this context, the authors have developed a model, based on Krathwohl’s affective hierarchy, created in 1964, as a framework for developing and teaching value-oriented concepts to children. Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) proposed a theory of affective development that characterizes how one moves along a continuum of internalizing various schemes, constructs, ideas and experiences (Krathwohl, et al, 1964). It is often represented in hierarchical stages that include attending, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing or internalizing. In the context of promoting and teaching critical skills such as caring, compassion, kindness, and civility, at each stage, the student becomes increasingly invested in the learning. For instance, there are three characteristics of attending — awareness, willingness to receive, and acceptance. Krathwohl is right to suggest that a student’s learning is compromised when he fails to receive or attend to the teaching, but in order for a student to maximize the learning, he must go much deeper in his understanding. Consequently, the teacher must ensure that this understanding takes place.

The second stage of Krathwohl’s hierarchy involves responding. Compliance represents the lowest level of responding followed by two additional levels — a willingness to consider new perspectives and an emotional response to the new information. A student may accept information while in the first stage of the hierarchy. However, such acceptance may represent no more than simply accepting that the information exists. On the other hand, the higher stage of
responding involves the student’s propensity to not only know the facts, but also to experience the facts taught.

As the student begins to experience the facts outlined, a third stage of Krathwohl’s hierarchy emerges – valuing. In the beginning of this stage, the student considers the information as a new idea or perspective without any great commitment to the idea or perspective. The student moves from this lukewarm view of the information taught to a view that represents a higher level of understanding and even a commitment to such understanding as a belief. Commitment entails an enormous amount of conviction. The student might have a deeper level of confidence that his new perspective, ideas, knowledge, or phenomena is true. At this level the student also recognizes that there may be various instances where this new idea is relevant. Therefore, the student has to organize these new values, which is the beginning of a value system.

The fourth stage of Krathwohl’s hierarchy involves the organization of a value system. In this case, the student sees how the values relate to those they hold or ones that they are coming to hold. It is not until the student begins to develop this value system that he reaches the peak of this internalization hierarchy called characterization. This final and highest level in Krathwohl’s hierarchy is characterized by the students’ actions which are solely based on the value system they have internalized. The students’ beliefs, ideas, perspectives, and attitudes now greatly influence their lives and how they engage with others. As we delve into promoting positive attributes in the classroom, we offer this hierarchy as a foundational framework to move students from simple awareness of, to an internalization of how these attributes affect their lives as well as their learning.

Model of Influence
Using Kathwohl’s hierarchy as a foundation, the authors have revised the model (figure 1) to define four levels of promoting and teaching value concepts. This revision has been named a Model of Influence (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015). The authors propose that the first step in the model is to build a consciousness for a concept in order to promote learning of the concept. The next step is to foster acceptance of the new idea and awareness that various perspectives exist. The third step is recognizing the importance of the benefit to oneself and to others. As the level of understanding the benefit deepens, one moves on to influence and action. This represents the highest level on the hierarchy because one is called into action. It is at this level of influence and action that the value system is manifested into behaviors that exemplify positive attributes.

It is imperative to note that this Model of Influence (MOI) should not be viewed as an add-on to a school’s curriculum. It is the authors’ belief that the MOI should be used as a framework to be integrated into the curriculum as well as across content areas. This model can be used to teach numerous attributes such as gratitude, taking initiative, empathy, and compassion.

Level One: Develop Consciousness
We propose that the first level to consider in the Model of Influence is to develop consciousness for a concept in order to promote learning of the concept. This requires one to move beyond the act of passive learning to active learning. It also means that both the student and teacher must embrace their

Figure 1. Model of Influence (MOI)
roles as learner-follower and learning-leader in the classroom. It is at this level that the concept becomes real and meaningful for all learners. This is the level that builds upon an individual’s curiosity and interest to learn more. It might also be the level at which one begins to grapple with his or her own cognitive dissonance about certain topics, ideas or perspectives. In a K-12 setting, both the teacher and the student need to experience this level so that both find meaning and relevance in the topic.

Level Two: Acknowledge Perspectives and Affirm Beliefs
The second level is to foster acceptance of the new idea and awareness that various perspectives exist—acknowledging perspectives and affirming beliefs. When building upon the challenges which compromise one’s current thinking, one begins to acknowledge other perspectives have relevancy and meaning. This might occur even if those ideals, principles, or beliefs are in opposition to one’s own value system. Accepting that differences exist to be further examined can often affirm, extend, challenge, or even, change one’s thinking. It is important to note that we are not proposing that the purpose is to change how another person thinks. We are, however, proposing to offer them other ideas to consider or engage in perspective taking to deepen their knowledge of how other’s may interpret, analyze and reflect on various concepts, thoughts, statements, and ideas.

Level Three: Realize Benefit to Self and Others
The third level is realizing the benefit to oneself and to others. As with the last level the idea is to build upon the knowledge gained and insight discovered and shared. It is often times far easier for humans to identify how something will benefit self. What has sometimes become difficult is for us to recognize the relevance of our lives to others. In other words, how are each of our lives connected to others’ lives, and how can we use our lives to be productive, compassionate, caring members of mankind? How can we use our talents, knowledge, skills and lives to support and serve others? When we take the time to examine the perspectives of others, witness their struggles and successes, it can empower one to see beyond self and find ways to advocate and help others. It also affords opportunities to enter the last level—taking action and embracing influence we have to make a difference. The idea of this third level is to engage in discourse, discussion, reflection, and yes, explicit, authentic teaching.

Level Four: Take Action and Embrace Influence
Taking action and embracing influence represents the highest level of the framework because it requires one to take some courageous steps to initiate necessary change—steps that might seem daunting, challenging, foolish, or daring. Each previous level requires one to “do something”—that doing something might be study more, ask more questions, engage in more discussion, do more research. This level of action and embracing influence encourages one to develop and seek a sustainable response to an issue, problem or concern. It might be also difficult because many individuals may not necessarily see themselves and difference makers, nor might they recognize the gifts and talents they have to offer.

This level requires one to retreat from the fear that stifles creativity, flexibility, organization, and productivity, and move toward embracing those attributes to galvanize movements, initiatives, service-mindedness and action. It is at this level of influence and action that the value system is manifested into behaviors that exemplify positive attributes such as honesty and compassion. In the next section, some ideas for teaching at each of the four levels will be shared. It is believed that the character attributes can be taught at all grade levels although levels one and two might be the focus more at the early grades than in grades six through twelve. What is most important is that attention is given to these at all grade levels. As we contemplate the state of emergency in our educational system, it is vital that we seek every opportunity to support our students and help them develop the skills, dispositions and social-emotional competencies with vigor and determination.

Application of the Model of Influence
Applying the Model of Influence takes conscious effort on the part of educators and school practitioners. Researchers from California State University-Fresno examined the link between high achieving schools and character education programs, revealing that schools which were characterized by both shared common indicators, such as a clean and secure environment, adults acting as models of values and virtues, student engagement in school-community projects, and
the promotion of positive relationships. In this section, the authors offer suggestions for utilizing the model with students.

**Step One: Take Responsibility for Teaching both Affective and Academic Concepts**
In order to implement a model such as the Model of Influence, it is imperative that educators begin to appreciate their role as instructional leaders who also seek to develop students’ character and social and emotional competencies. There is emerging evidence that both are equally important. One is reminded that, as the old saying goes, some teach subjects while others teach kids. When educators contemplate teaching “kids”, there is a strong reminder that kids are complex beings who have a variety of facets; these include their health, safety, emotional well-being, as well as their knowledge of content and standards. Taking responsibility for both roles, academics and affective skills, in today’s schools, is the first step in applying the model.

**Step Two: Accept the Role of Influencer**
Without a doubt, teachers have the power to influence others, especially those they teach. Each one who has ever been a student remembers the challenging teacher who expected his or her students to demonstrate their understanding of seemingly impossible content, yet taught with passion as well as compassion and understanding. At the same time, there are those teachers whose behaviors demonstrate a total lack of respect for those whom they are charged to educate. These teachers use language that demeans and criticizes. Although these two kinds of teachers exhibit polar opposites in behavior, they share one common trait: they are influencers. Whether a teacher is deeply committed and connected with students or totally disengaged, the role of influencer is a powerful role shared by both. By embracing one’s influence, a teacher might positively change the world through attention to developing kind, grateful, courageous, and compassionate students.

**Step Three: Plan to Integrate Curriculum**
Roger Weissburg, Chief Knowledge Officer for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), noted that behaviors such as drug use, violence, bullying and dropping out, can be prevented with integrated strategies used to develop social and emotional skills (Weissburg, 2014). When teachers plan and deliver instruction on character traits through content standards, the overall school environment improves. Such instruction might begin with identifying a trait such as kindness, defining it, demonstrating how it looks in action, and connecting the trait to real-world situations while at the same time teaching content. For instance, one might ask, how does kindness apply to our cooperative group work as we explore different ways to provide shelter? Or, what part does civility play in making your beliefs understood through debate? Another example: how can we communicate and demonstrate compassion as we use our technology to Skype with students in Kenya about water sources? Such thoughts can guide planning and lead to meaningful instruction, the final step.

**Step Four: Utilize the Model of Influence to Guide Teaching**
This final step may seem obvious, but it takes purposeful action. In order to infuse one’s teaching in an integrated way for both affective and academic skills, a commitment must be made to pay conscious attention to the ways we teach. In the Model of Influence, a suggestion is made to work on developing consciousness. Here is an example using courage, the character trait, to develop consciousness: In the context of studying Rosa Parks, ask, what does courage mean? What does it look like, sound like, feel like? What are other examples of individuals displaying courage? When have you displayed courage?

The second level of the model involves acknowledging perspectives and affirming beliefs. Having students journal about their experiences regarding kindness, love, gratitude and their responses to others’ as well as their own feelings and beliefs is an easy way to help them explore their own and others’ perspectives. This exploration can easily be linked to content standards, for example, examining various voices represented in literature or even in world events.

Realizing benefit to self and others can also be examined through a variety of means; some include school-community projects, discussing the benefits of collaboration, keeping data on outcomes of projects that benefit others, incorporating new understandings into written position statements etc. Finally, the last level involves taking action and embracing influence. What better way to do this than to revisit acts of kindness witnessed or experienced. Teachers
might challenge students to develop action plans for taking small steps, setting goals, then reflecting with students as they work to raise their hands when they don’t understand (an act of courage) or offer to help an elderly neighbor walk her dog (an act of giving) or thank their siblings or classmates for assisting them (an act of gratitude).

Final Thoughts
Given the state of today’s world, one is reminded again that the hope of the future lies in the children and students who will one day inherit the planet. As educators, one of the most important responsibilities is seeking to positively influence the diversity that characterizes the world by infusing social emotional learning and character education into the content standards that pervade today’s educational system. The authors propose a hierarchical Model of Influence to guide educators as they contemplate systematically and purposefully teaching all students in ways that help them become tomorrow’s leaders who communicate in ways that seek to promote and preserve the dignity and respect of all.

References


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