



Bloom's Taxonomy: The Affective Domain

Part Two

In part one, "Bloom's Taxonomy & Its Recent Revision," we looked at the history of Bloom's Taxonomy, its purpose, and the way that Bloom and his team categorized learning objectives in the cognitive domain. Part two explores the affective domain, while part three, which will appear in the next issue of this newsletter, will look carefully at the psychomotor domain. This series of articles aims to help massage instructors write strong learning objectives for their classes.



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Emotions, Motivation, and Attitudes

While the cognitive domain focuses on the recall and recognition of knowledge, the affective domain relates to the emotional component of learning, student motivation, personal values, and attitudes. The affective taxonomy contains five levels of learning behaviors.

1. Receiving. This is the most basic level of involvement in the learning process. The learner must be able to focus his or her attention in a particular direction and demonstrate a willingness to hear ideas and information. Examples of learning objectives are:

- Listen to others in the classroom with respect.
- Attend classes regularly.
- Take notes from selected lecture material.

2. Responding. At this level the student doesn’t just attend class, but actively participates by asking follow-up questions, entering enthusiastically into activities, sharing ideas in discussions, and showing interest in outcomes. Examples of objectives are:

- Discuss the role of laws in massage.
- Lead a class activity on ethical decision-making.
- Report on the research methods of a clinical study.

3. Valuing. At this level, the student demonstrates that he or she attaches personal value to ideas and is able to decide the worth and relevance of information and experiences. The valuing level ranges from acceptance of a value to a clear preference for a value, to a commitment to a value. Examples of objectives are:

- Values self-improvement.
- Defends a treatment plan.
- Justifies beliefs on energetic bodywork.

4. Organization. Students may be faced with situations where more than one value is relevant. The learner must organize personal values by contrasting different values, resolving internal conflicts, prioritizing values, and developing a value system. Examples of objectives are:

- Integrates the potential benefits and risks of a private practice.
- Formulates a personal code of professional ethics.
- Modifies ideas in light of new evidence.

5. Characterization. Now the student is self-reliant and behaves consistently, based on a personal value set. The value organization of the previous level is replaced by a working system or philosophy of life. Examples of objectives are:

- Displays teamwork when participating in group activities.
- Acts with self-reliance while conducting an intake interview in student clinic.
- Influences others by modeling professionalism on a regular basis.

As the instructor can see, the differences between the affective levels, especially levels three, four, and five, are subtle. These types of learning objectives are not as familiar as those from the cognitive taxonomy. Still, most teachers are instructing students on attitudes and values, even if they don't recognize it.

School's Values Become Students' Values

Most school administrators and faculty have clear ideas about how massage professionals should conduct themselves. Learning objectives are likely to reflect the school's values. Schools can also develop specific learning activities that promote the exploration of values the school deems important. A few examples:

Imagine a school has a decidedly green focus, placing emphasis on environmental awareness and teaching future therapists to be thoughtful citizens of the planet. One classroom activity might require students to keep a bag by their massage stations and fill it with all of the things they would normally throw away during the course of a week. The stations will likely become crowded as bags get fuller and some bags might smell. At the end of the week, the instructor holds a class discussion to explore what students learned from the activity, student values, value shifts, new insights, and changed attitudes. A homework assignment asks students to come up with a conservation plan for their future massage practice.

Perhaps at another school an instructor is very involved in the regulatory process of the massage profession. He values laws, guidelines, and standards of practice. These values are reflected in the guest speakers he invites to class. One is from the board of massage and one is a lobbyist working to garner support for a massage bill. Classroom discussions that evaluate current laws or new information about regulatory changes are introduced whenever class time is allotted to professional development. This teacher also gives extra credit points when students attend regulatory meetings.

It becomes easy to see how schools and instructors teach values and attitudes. Without a school's staff evaluation of the manner in which they teach values to students, it is easy to see that the power differential between students and instructors could be exploited, even when an instructor has the best of intentions. Schools can strengthen their massage curriculum by appraising their ideals and understanding how they are communicated to students.

Another proactive task that schools can undertake is to identify the pervasive attitudes students hold about themselves, their learning abilities, and the degree to which they value life-long learning. It's not uncommon for some students to believe that they are not smart enough to go to college, to get an A in anatomy class, or to excel at business skills. How does the school uncover these beliefs in students and, through meaningful learning events, begin to improve these attitudes?

How can the school build an appreciation for life-long learning and help students value learning for learning's sake? It's also important to look at how students' emotional processes are protected and developed and how students can confront and question school values, when appropriate. Motivational activities and time for self-reflection and sharing become important regular activities.

Next Steps

Evaluate your current curriculum and analyze its learning objectives. Determine if the learning objectives adequately capture the emotional aspects of learning and address motivation, values, and attitudes appropriate to your goals for graduates. Plan an early learning event that explores student attitudes about their own abilities as learners and that emphasizes life-long learning as important. Periodically review objectives in the affective domain and determine how you will evaluate student progress in this area.