

AUTUMN 2026

LEGACY



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A PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL

**Attending to the Affective Domain for
Increased Student Participation
and Improved Behaviour**

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Advancing Educational Transformation in Jamaica



The Worthy Educator
theworthyeducator.com



Attending to the Affective Domain for Increased Student Participation and Improved Behaviour

doi.org/10.67428/2026autumn13

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Very early in the semester, while teaching at the primary school, I realized that many of the challenges I encountered in the classroom were rooted in students' social and emotional needs. This realization shaped my approach to teaching and deepened my appreciation for the affective domain of learning. The affective domain focuses on learners' social and emotional development and was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) to complement the cognitive and psychomotor domains. However, I believe its application should extend beyond acknowledging students' emotions to intentionally addressing factors that significantly influence learning, such as hunger, the need for attention and affirmation, opportunities for play, and meaningful engagement. In my experience, attending to these needs encourages greater student participation and contributes to improved behaviour. Although such an approach may not eliminate all instances of misbehaviour or guarantee full cooperation, it can significantly reduce disruptive behaviours. Over time, teachers who consistently demonstrate care for students' holistic well-being earn their trust and respect, fostering stronger relationships and encouraging students to work collaboratively toward creating a positive and productive learning environment.

My appreciation of the affective domain was strengthened through my classroom experiences, where I witnessed firsthand how attending to students' emotional and social needs positively transformed both their behaviour and their attitudes toward learning. The affective domain encompasses aspects of learning related to emotions, attitudes, values, and motivation, reflecting changes in learners' interests, dispositions, and appreciation (Kretchmar, 2019). Although the cognitive domain has traditionally received greater emphasis in education, the affective domain has gained increasing recognition for its significant influence on learning outcomes (Kretchmar, 2019). This growing recognition is reflected in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information's (MOEYI) commitment to promoting a more holistic approach to education. Such an approach acknowledges that cognitive, psychomotor, and affective development are interdependent, and that neglecting any one of these domains can undermine students' overall learning and development.

From Behaviour Management to Relationship Building

My first year of teaching was both challenging and enlightening. I vividly remember being assigned a class in which two students consistently stood out because of their restlessness, disruptive behaviour, and failure to complete assigned tasks. Their behaviour initially appeared to be disciplinary issues, but as I got to know them better, I realized that their actions reflected unmet emotional, social, and academic needs rather than simple defiance.

One day, I publicly commended both students for completing a classroom task. The response was immediate. One student beamed with a broad smile, reminding me of the transformative power of affirmation. Although the other student responded more quietly, his increased effort in completing subsequent tasks suggested that he, too, had been motivated by the recognition. This experience demonstrated that students often respond positively when their efforts, rather than only their shortcomings, are acknowledged.

For one of the students, however, affirmation alone was insufficient. I soon recognized that much of his disruptive behaviour was driven by a need for attention. Rather than repeatedly correcting him, I intentionally redirected his energy by creating opportunities for him to contribute positively in the classroom. He was placed in a small collaborative group and assigned leadership roles that allowed him to showcase strengths I

had observed early in the year, particularly his creativity in songwriting and dance. Each opportunity to lead or perform was met with visible pride and enthusiasm, reinforcing positive behaviours through recognition from both his peers and me.

As our relationship developed, the student became increasingly comfortable approaching me to discuss matters unrelated to school. Although these conversations occasionally interrupted lessons, I listened attentively, engaged him briefly, and then gently redirected him to complete his work. These interactions strengthened our relationship and helped him feel seen and valued beyond his academic performance.

Recognizing that part of his frustration stemmed from a reading difficulty, I also implemented peer support by pairing him with academically stronger classmates while I attended to the rest of the class. This reduced his anxiety, increased his willingness to attempt assigned tasks, and fostered greater participation in classroom activities.

Understanding that meaningful change required a partnership beyond the classroom, I contacted his parent to discuss both his behavioural and learning challenges and sought support in reinforcing the strategies being implemented at school. The student was aware of these conversations and appeared encouraged by the collective effort invested in his success. I also provided regular motivational conversations about the importance of education, celebrated incremental progress through praise and small incentives, and, on a few occasions, ensured that he received lunch when I became aware that hunger was affecting his ability to concentrate and engage in learning.

These experiences reinforced an important lesson: students' behaviour is often a form of communication. When teachers intentionally address learners' emotional, social, and basic needs alongside their academic needs, they create conditions that foster engagement, improve behaviour, and strengthen relationships. While no single strategy transformed the student overnight, the combination of affirmation, meaningful responsibility, academic support, family collaboration, and genuine care gradually contributed to more positive classroom participation and a greater willingness to learn.

Overtime, I recognized the transformation in this student in two distinct ways. Firstly, his attitude towards schoolwork moved from disinterest to taking the initiative to prepare his utensils for the start of class, enquiring about the task for the day, admitting, and seeking help when he came upon a challenge. Secondly, his behaviour improved and he became more settled, engaged in the lesson and consistent in attempting to complete the tasks for each day. He also sought feedback on his efforts when they were not readily stated. Although these changes did not happen overnight, the consistent use of these strategies gradually began to influence both student behaviour and his attitude towards learning. Looking back, I realised that before these students were ready to learn from me, they first needed to know that I genuinely cared about them as an individual.

Responding to Students' Emotions: A Lesson Beyond the Curriculum

My experiences also taught me that the affective domain is not only essential for supporting students with behavioural or academic challenges; it is equally important for students who consistently perform well and readily complete their work. One morning, my students worked diligently to complete their first assigned task because they were eagerly anticipating an outdoor class competition during the next physical education session. However, at the scheduled time, the activity had to be cancelled as dark clouds gathered and rain became imminent. The disappointment of the students was evident. Rather than continuing with the day's timetable as planned, I decided to respond to their emotional needs first. I brought out a collection of indoor games, including card games and other activities, and invited the students to form small groups and choose a game to play. I even joined one of the groups in a card game, which quickly filled the classroom with laughter, conversation, and excitement. Within a short time, the disappointment that had overshadowed the morning had given way to joy and renewed enthusiasm. The children were observed laughing and talking while playing.

After approximately thirty minutes, I announced that it was time to resume lessons. Without hesitation, the students cooperated by rearranging their desks, taking out their learning materials, and quietly awaiting the next instructions. The remainder of the lesson was one of the most productive of the day. That afternoon reminded me that acknowledging students' emotions is sometimes the most effective classroom management strategy. Once the students felt their emotion of disappointment was validated, they were ready to learn. This reinforced an important lesson for me. Sometimes the most effective teaching strategy is not introducing new content but first responding to the emotional needs of students.

Embedding the Affective Domain in Everyday Teaching

I am convinced that attending to the affective domain should not be viewed as an optional aspect of teaching but as an essential component of creating inclusive, engaging, and effective classrooms. Krathwohl's taxonomy of affective domain comprises of five levels namely receiving, responding, valuing, organizing and characterization (Cutting Edge, 2007). By intentionally incorporating affective objectives into lesson planning,

teachers help students move beyond acquiring knowledge to developing attitudes, values, and behaviours that influence how they relate to others and apply their learning in real-life situations. According to Cutting Edge (2007), the taxonomy encourages learners to progress from simply receiving information to valuing and ultimately characterizing it, where positive attitudes and values become internalized and reflected consistently in their behaviour. For example, an affective objective such as *respecting the opinions of others* not only enhances classroom discussions and group work by promoting cooperation and reducing conflict but also nurtures dispositions that extend beyond the classroom. As students internalize this value, they are more likely to build healthy relationships based on mutual respect. Equally important, teachers reinforce these values when they consistently model respect, empathy, and compassion in their own interactions with students. For this reason, I believe that attending to the affective domain should extend beyond including affective objectives in lesson plans to intentionally responding to students' social and emotional needs through everyday classroom interactions and relationships.

Recognizing the importance of the affective domain, I offer several practical strategies that teachers can use to support students' social and emotional development:

- Being intentional about understanding the factors that affect students, such as their home situation, reading level, interests, and individual needs.
- Involving parents or guardians in reinforcing students' behavioural and academic progress.
- Addressing basic needs that may affect students' behaviour and learning, such as hunger.
- Demonstrating genuine interest in students' interests and talents to build rapport.
- Celebrating effort, small improvements, as well as significant achievements.
- Acknowledging students' feelings or behaviour before redirecting them.

Looking back, I realise that some of my greatest successes, as a teacher did not come from delivering the perfect lesson, but from taking the time to understand my students as children first and learners second. When teachers intentionally attend to the affective domain, they create classrooms where students not only demonstrate behaviours that are conducive to learning but also feel valued, respected, and eager to learn.

References

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Judene Williams has over 15 years of teaching experience across the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of the education system. She is passionate about education and training, viewing them as powerful tools for equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to thrive in their professions and contribute meaningfully to society. Committed to lifelong learning, Mrs. Williams continually seeks opportunities to enhance her professional practice, enabling her to make lasting contributions to the education sector. She is married and the proud mother of one child.



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