

What is Cognitive-Affective Learning (CAL)?

Patti Owen-Smith, Center for Cognitive-Affective Learning Coordinator

Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies

Oxford College of Emory University. Email: psypos@emory.edu

While "CAL" may be an unfamiliar cluster of letters to most individuals, the words from which the acronym is derived, *Cognitive-Affective Learning*, may be similarly strange even to those of us who are teachers. Of course, as teachers, we have been well socialized to value the cognitive but more times than not, we have also learned to ignore or marginalize the affective, the emotional, in teaching and learning. Some of us have been embarrassed by any attention to the affective in our students and in one another as if such attention diminishes our reputations as scholars. At best, those of us in higher learning have often treated the cognitive and the affective as separate spheres often relegating the emotional lives of students to Student Affairs and Campus Life offices.

The irony, however, is that as early as 1917 William James spoke eloquently about the intimate connection between emotional and cognitive understanding, and interestingly, neuroanatomists and biopsychologists often have had more to say about the significance of emotions in learning than have educators. These scientists remind us that the brain does not separate emotions from cognitions. Similarly, many master teachers often point to enduring learning as more likely to occur when the emotions are honored in the learning process. In spite of James' legacy and the impressive scientific research on the cognitive-affective relationship, emotions have been virtually absent from most traditional analyses of and practices in the college classroom. In recent years, however, some contemporary educators have urged us to rescue the affective in higher education. For example, Parker Palmer admonishes us to reject the academic bias against subjectivity that not only teaches students to think and write in poorly articulated ways but also alienates them from their own lives. Other scholars have criticized the academy by suggesting that we teach students to distrust their inner truth and their subjectivity as critical components to their cognitive maturation and growth as students and individuals.

As a response to the dearth of attention given to the cognitive-affective relationship in teaching and learning and encouraged by individuals such as Parker Palmer, Alexander Astin, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Marshall Gregory, and Daniel Goleman our college began an intentional study of this relationship. We began our study with questions: Why is the affective important in learning? How do we construct emotional practices that help learners (and ourselves) make

the connection between the heart and the mind? How do we teach provocatively and evocatively? How do we raise consciousness? What epistemological frameworks privilege the subjective? What is the relationship between objective and subjective ways of knowing? How does the systematic devaluation of the subjective interfere with durable learning? And, at the same time, how do we avoid over-romanticizing the affective and reducing the materials of our courses and our disciplines to secondary stature?

In an effort to answer these questions we asked that the Carnegie Foundation and the American Association for Higher Education consider an initiative that would involve other like-minded campuses in the study of the relationship between the cognitive and affective. With the support of Carnegie and AAHE, Oxford College of Emory University assumed a leadership position in facilitating the participation of four other institutions: Agnes Scott College, Community College of Philadelphia, Kennesaw State University, and Wright State University School of Medicine. Together we have established the CAL initiative and are working together to answer the questions we have posed. On each of our respective campuses we are focusing on specific ways to create a campus environment that clearly privileges the connection between the affective and cognitive.

We are assessing ways in which our institutions are currently facilitating the connection between the heart and the mind (i.e., service learning and experiential education courses, reflection-centered and problem-based classes, etc.). We are intentionally exploring innovative, systemic ways to provoke and evoke, raise socio-political consciousness, and problematize the material in our courses and our curriculum so as to create the *disorienting* moments that are significant to enduring learning. We are considering new epistemological frameworks that affirm the subjective and we are exploring their appropriateness for each of our institutions. Perhaps most importantly, we are envisioning a campus climate and a faculty that will be intentional in its focus on the affective as a critical and necessary aspect of the learning process.

So, what is CAL? Fundamentally, it is a "calling of the question" by five institutions of higher learning; it is our voiced requisite that we return the conversation of the academy to that begun many years ago by the great educational philosophers. They reminded us then and now that our intellect rests in the mind *and* the heart. ♦