CHAPTER 4
AFFECTIVE DOMAIN:
Student Perceptions and Motivation

Barbara L. McCombs, Ph.D.
Human Motivation, Learning, and Development Center, University of Denver Research
Institute, 2050 East Iliff Avenue, Boettcher East, Room 224, Denver, CO 80208

Abstract: This chapter will explore ways for assessing and measuring student perceptions of teacher practices. It will also examine students’ motivational experiences that can be used to meet their motivational, social, and emotional needs. This review will, in turn, provide teachers with suggestions about how to help their students identify the thoughts that interfere with maintaining positive motivation for learning. These thoughts often produce the emotional or affective responses that teachers see in students’ negative behavior in and outside the classroom. Knowing how to identify the thoughts that lead to the feelings and subsequent behaviors that students exhibit – both positive and negative – can provide teachers with important clues for how to handle the situation and use the situation to teach students important skills for regulating their own thinking, motivation, emotional, and learning skills. The key is to focus on student strengths – in whatever form they may take – and help students regain the positive motivation that can enhance their learning and achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychologists and educational researchers have for decades studied the influence of individual learner perceptions and thinking on their emotions (affect), motivation, learning, performance, and other behaviors in a variety of learning situations (e.g., Cervone, Shadel, Smith, & Fiori, 2006; Combs, 1962; Do & Schallert, 2004; Marshall & Weinstein, 1986; McCombs, 1999; Rogers, 1961). As reviewed by Seidel, Perencevich, and Kett (2005) in their chapter on the Affective Domain in the companion text for this workbook, affect in learning can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) learning to express
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affect, and (2) how affect influences learning. My goal is to put these two perspectives together in practical ways that can help teachers and other educators make a difference with their students – a difference that can result in students being more willing and able to regulate their own emotional life as well as their learning outcomes.

In this chapter, we will examine the types of practices shown to be effective in fostering positive affective functioning in learning contexts. Following this introductory section, the rest of this chapter will provide practical instructional advice based on the research for promoting students’ affective skill development per the Seidel et al. (2005) framework of Acquisition, Automaticity, Near Term and Far Term Transfer.¹

As a first step in reaching this goal, it is important to understand that previous research findings make the practical advice presented here both valid and timely. My own research has confirmed that high school students can be helped to learn to understand and value themselves in learning contexts that are sometimes difficult for some students such as mathematics (McCombs & Pope, 1994). Students can be taught to understand their psychological functioning and agency while also learning to value themselves as learners and to value the process of learning itself. The key lies in creating classroom environments that motivate students. As has also been found by Perry (2003), these positive learning environments create opportunities for student growth and self-determination as well as encourage students to engage in academic risk taking. You will be learning specific strategies in all of these areas in the next sections of this workbook, following a brief introduction to the instructional issues and specific instructional tools you will be using. These tools include the Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices (ALCP) teacher and student surveys and the Thought Cycle Exercise.

2. INSTRUCTIONAL ISSUES

How can research findings assist teachers and other educators make a difference with their students? How can it help students regulate their own emotional life as well as their learning outcomes?

In addressing instructional practices that build on the research cited, instructional issues focus on the general role of student perceptions in triggering various emotional or affective responses that influence both their

¹ Look carefully through the research review in Appendix D and the reference lists for this chapter and Appendix D. They contain many interesting and helpful resources that teachers can use to further their learning and identification of other effective practices in the area of affect.