

Institute for Christian Teaching  
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**Developing Healthy Emotions in the Curriculum of  
Seventh-day Adventist Schools and Colleges:  
Some Suggestions**

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The emotions are an everpresent, integral part of experience. Emotional, affective aspects of life are inextricably bound up with religious faith, ethics, character development, thinking, and even physical activity. Consequently it is time Adventist educators thought more about how they should both develop the emotions and integrate the learning of religious faith and emotional expression in secondary and tertiary curricula. This paper suggests some ways in which this integration may occur.

The first task is to define faith and emotions, and to briefly explain how they are related. Religious faith is described as being confidence or trust in a person or thing, belief which is not based on proof, or belief in religious doctrines (Concise Macquarie Dictionary 1988). Henry (1957) described faith as being an abiding confidence in God, something which is a state of mind. In the same vein, Rasi (1990) sees faith as being an experience that embraces all of life which includes beliefs, values and lifestyle, and as being a human response to God's self-disclosure. He notes that any full definition of faith must include choice, confession, trust, obedience and hope, with trust being the core factor.

Religious faith finds expression in multiple ways in Adventist curricula. It is an essential in character building, cited by Ellen White (1905) as the most important work entrusted to teachers. And it is emphasized as the key element in Adventist curriculum objectives which mention the need to develop spiritual sensitivity, distinguish between right and wrong, accept responsibility for what we create, and relate to God in a redemptive way (South Pacific Division Discussion Document 1990).

So Adventist faith includes more than character building and ethics. In reality, as shown by their educational objectives, Adventists perceive that their religious faith also embraces elements of curriculum learning such as moral, aesthetic, and emotional development. This paper starts to explain how emotions relate to these other aspects of faith.

The Concise Macquarie Dictionary defines emotion as an 'affective state of consciousness...', as 'feelings...', and as 'a state of agitation of the feelings...'. Thomson (1989, 200) says that an emotion is 'a perception of something as harmful or beneficial in a particular way', and that it 'involves the tendencies to embrace the benefit or shun the harm, and to express the perception in such a way that it is likely to be communicated to others'.

In contrast to the dictionary definitions, Thomson's definition indicates that emotions are partially cognitive, and that they can motivate people to communicate and act. Furthermore, they may also form part of moral judgments, and they may be descriptors of moods. The most important point arising from the above definitions is that emotions may act as either feelings or motives.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORALITY, EMOTIONS AND FAITH

For Adventists, religious faith automatically includes moral traits which include the fruits of the spirit. It is important to note this relationship between religious faith and morality in the curriculum because the assumption that they are closely related underpins much of the discussion in this paper.

The link between morality and faith is easy to sustain. In fact there is a good deal of support amongst educational scholars for the idea that the type of morality outlined in educational literature, and religious faith as described earlier, substantially overlap. Examples of its supporters are Loukes (1970), Kohlberg (1974), Straughan (1974) and Wellock (1979). By way of illustration, Kohlberg talked of the need for higher levels of morality to be supported by a faith orientation, and Wellock showed how both religion and morality are concerned with good and evil, and the knowledge of right and wrong.

There is also good support for the notion that emotional and moral learning are closely linked. John Rich (1980) and Anne Thomson (1989) are two writers who have sustained this link at length. Remembering the argument that morality and faith overlap substantially, there is therefore significant researched and philosophical educational support for the view that religious faith is nurtured and developed through the emotions. John Wilson (1971) and Richard Allen (1973) are examples of scholars who argue that religious and emotional education are interdependent. Their argument follows from their analysis of the nature of emotions.

### THE NATURE OF EMOTIONS

In order to show how emotions and faith may be related, and how emotions can be developed, it is necessary to discuss some attributes of emotions. As implied in the earlier definition of emotions, they generally contain some form of cognitive thinking. Peters (1972) has cogently argued that emotions are basically forms of cognition. They are contingent on cognitive appraisals, sometimes referred to as 'seeing as'. Envy for example is connected with seeing someone as possessing what we want. Bantock (1965)

has moved a step further and explained how emotions not only accompany modes of cognition, but can even determine the form taken by these modes. Rich (1980) and others have demonstrated how emotions can be rational or irrational in the way they relate to cognition. Collectively these writers are making the point that we should not conceive of feeling and thinking as being separate or opposed, for they are often both involved in emotion. It seems that to understand emotion, it would help to perceive the cognitive and affective or feeling elements in emotion, and see how these interact.

When we sort out the thinking and feeling elements of emotion, we are often starting to distinguish between motives and feelings. Emotion can be feeling or motive, or a combination of these (Kenney x, quoted in Bantock 1965). Peters (1972) has explained at length how feelings and motives differ. He has shown how our cognitive appraisals of situations could be connected with either passivity or action. On the one hand we may control our feelings and be passive when interpreting certain situations, while on the other, we may match our appraisals with appropriate action. When we act on these appraisals, we exhibit motives, and hence are motivated. If we can discriminate between feelings and motives in emotion, and see how they interact, then we are more likely to understand our emotions better and so display them more aptly in our faith and behaviour.

Passivity is particularly important to emotional control. It is defined as being a state in which we are subject to, and controlled by feelings that come over us. Sometimes we should be passive and controlled, rather than acting rashly or hastily, but at other times we should not be at the mercy of feelings in a passive way. Passivity becomes counterproductive when we submit to vague negative states of mind such as depression, anxiety or fear. That is why Peters (1972) has stated that we should be able to transform vague wishes into determinate wants and relevant action. We should not be at the mercy of passivity, but should rather be able to direct it or accept it when we choose.

Emotions often possess objects (Bantock 1965). That is, we direct emotions to people or events when we perceive their possible effect on us. As Peters (1972, 475) put it, 'the question for the educator would not be whether, but with and what, people should be angry or afraid'. We may angrily kick the cat, but upon reflection, we may conclude that it is not always fair or appropriate to do so. One aim of emotional education then is to attach emotions to appropriate objects.

Because emotions have many objects, they really involve a way of responding to the whole human environment, and so constitute a certain way of apprehending the world

(Bantock 1965). In this sense, they form a part of our worldview, defined by Olthius (1985, 155) as being 'the integrative and interpretive framework by which order and disorder are judged, the standard by which reality is managed and pursued'. In the course of analysing fourteen elements of worldviews, Rasi (1990) shows how important a worldview is in shaping the development of Christian faith. This paper argues that both the processes of developing a worldview and faith naturally involve emotions, and that we should therefore relate these processes to emotional education.

Our worldview includes a quest to find the truth about aspects of reality, and there is a balance to be found between thinking and feeling when seeking truth. Emotional truth can sometimes reveal the real truth about a situation better than rational truth can (Bantock, 1965), (Rich 1973). Anger or fear for example may be more correct ways of dealing with some situations than cool argument. The reader's personal experience may bear out this view. After all, Christians do not condemn Christ for driving out the money changers from the temple. While we could argue that cognitive appraisals still figure in emotional revelations of truth which appear overwhelming, the thought is that the 'feeling' component of emotion can sometimes be a useful and powerful guide to action, and that we can be taught when to let feeling dominate reason, and vice versa.

It is useful to further understand the 'feeling' element of emotions. As stated earlier, while emotions may include feelings, they are not necessarily merely feelings. In regard to feelings, Schrag (1972) stated that there was no sharp boundary between related tasks of learning to feel and discovering what one feels. He presented good reasons why our self-awareness will grow as we discover what we feel, and as we learn new ways to feel. He distinguished occasional and dispositional emotional experience. Occasional emotion may occur briefly, as when a person is frightened by a face at the window. However if that person hates his father, he does not always feel the emotion with intensity, but is still generally in a state of hatred. This state is referred to as the dispositional experience of emotion. When we understand and apply the distinctions explained here, we are on the way to clarifying and refining emotional feelings.

Emotions can be experienced with a breadth of diversity and depth of intensity. Writers such as Hepburn (1973), and Butler (1969) have illustrated some possibilities for developing emotional diversity and intensity. They mention for example: engaging precisely in a range of experiences; enlarging emotional experience and freedom; avoiding emotional stereotypes; and extending expectations about courses of action when feeling strongly. As we are shown how to broaden and intensify our emotional

experience, we can engage in the experiences of faith and living with added meaning and fulness.

Stabilized emotional dispositions may help form character (Allen, 1973). Here character is thought of as including traits such as integrity, perseverance, loyalty, and fair-mindedness, - traits which also help to constitute religious faith. It follows that emotions are therefore often involved in judgments and actions which are religious.

Rich (1985) explained how emotions help constitute and regulate our morality, and hence by implication our religious faith. To illustrate, emotional remorse can depend on grasping the moral concept of harm. Remorse is here constitutive in that it partly constitutes a moral virtue. Emotions can also prevent or promote moral or religious actions which may be associated with religious faith. Rich calls these emotions regulative because they influence our actions. Such discussion has implications for Christians, because emotions such as guilt and remorse constantly affect the quality of their faith.

There are numerous other ways in which emotions affect morality. Thomson (1989) has contrasted sympathy and resentment. For instance, sympathy can be felt for both doers of good and evil simultaneously, so although sympathy as an emotion is not necessarily the medium for moral judgment, it is still often a prerequisite for moral actions. By contrast, resentment involves objections to harm, leading to a tendency to indulge in value decisions and judgments which may be religious. Resentment can be a negative emotion which leads us to constantly relive negative experiences which can in turn suffuse our whole person in a detrimental way. This kind of resentment should therefore be eliminated. On the other hand resentment can be helpful in prompting us to act out feelings for the cause of justice, or it may lead us to genuinely accept punishment we know we deserve. In these instances, the emotion of resentment and morality are working together positively.

Some emotions which influence religious experience can be arranged in a developmental hierarchy. As an illustration of this point, Rich (1980) demonstrated how guilt figures in the development of three ascending levels of altruism. At the first level, children cannot distinguish between their own and others' inner states. As they mature to the second level, they can take another's role. By pre-adolescence, they can genuinely respond to others' distress. Guilt figures in these stages as children gradually learn to feel guilt both as sympathetic distress, and as awareness of being the cause of another's distress. So in its association with altruism, guilt, an emotion which is often negative, becomes positive in impact. Rich also attempts to show how religious traits such as conscientiousness,

compassion, remorse and benevolence indicate increasing moral virtue according to the order in which they are listed here. And each of these moral levels is associated with different emotions.

Some emotions are legitimate in experience in simply because they are 'self-transcending'. Awe of the Creator, love of God, and a sense of being part of a larger whole such as nature are examples. These emotions may produce a calming effect, contemplation, or joy *et cetera*. They are not necessarily moral, but they do add a spiritual or aesthetic dimension to life, and they help us experience variety and depth of emotion.

Emotions are a means of communicating what concerns, delights or frustrates us. When expressed overtly, they inform others of what we are thinking and feeling, and they show what is important to us as we pursue our goals (Rich 1980). The point is that emotions both communicate and express themselves in actions. In schools and colleges we can be shown how to express our emotions appropriately, and how to direct them into acceptable and constructive behaviour.

#### OBJECTIVES FOR PURSUING EMOTIONAL EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

The foregoing discussion has indicated a number of attributes of emotions, and in so doing has inferred and suggested possible objectives for educating the emotions. These objectives are drawn together in Figure 1 so the reader can see them as a group. They are meant to be a resource of ideas which suggest some possible directions and emphases for teachers, rather than being prescriptive or exhaustive. Readers could select from them if they felt overwhelmed by their number or specificity. In summary, they focus on: **identifying** the causes and components of emotions; **feeling** a range and depth of emotions; **controlling** emotions; and **directing** emotions into appropriate behaviour. The objectives may also function as a set of skills which students should develop if they are to be emotionally balanced. Although the objectives are categorized, it is possible for all of them to be linked with faith.

## **Aims of a Programme of Emotional Education for Adventist Schools and Colleges**

### **A. Aims With a Religious Emphasis**

1. To understand how emotions influence the development of faith.
2. To justify the experience and expression of emotion in religious faith.
3. To enrich worship through feeling and expressing emotions.
4. To develop faith through identifying, controlling and directing emotions in religious experience.

### **B. Aims With A Cognitive Emphasis**

5. To discover, clarify and refine emotional feelings
6. To direct emotions to the appropriate objects.
7. To distinguish between emotions as motives and feelings.
8. To identify rational and irrational emotions in self and others.
9. To distinguish when emotional truth is more important than cognitive truth.
10. To diagnose emotional abuse, neglect, and effects.

### **C. Aims With An Affective Emphasis**

11. To feel emotionally with diversity and intensity.
12. To feel appropriately and deeply for self and others.
13. To develop self-transcending emotions such as love and respect.
14. To become involved in a wider range of emotional experiences.
15. To accept responsibility for emotional control and behaviour.

### **D. Aims With An Action Emphasis**

16. To transform vague emotional wishes into relevant action.
17. To direct emotions into acceptable and constructive behaviour.
18. To develop the ability to live with emotional conflict.
19. To express emotions appropriately in different contexts.
20. To control emotions.

## **METHODS OF DEVELOPING EMOTIONS**

Methods employed generally in passing on values in the curriculum can be used directly or adapted for use in educating emotions and implementing the aims listed above. This point is first illustrated below in reference to three common methods - identifying and exploring, discussing dilemmas, and analysing. Each will be illustrated briefly by posing a set of questions.

a. Exploring Feelings by Discussing an Incident

1. What happened?
2. How do you think .....felt? Why?
3. Has anything like this happened to you?
4. How did you feel?
5. Why do you think you felt that way?
6. How should you feel in light of scripture etc.?

b. Analysing Feelings

1. When you.....how did you feel?
2. Was that the best thing to do or feel? Why or why not?
3. What alternatives were there?
4. What were the consequences of your feelings?
5. According to scripture etc., how should you feel in this situation?

c. Discussing Dilemmas

Present a dilemma involving emotions. Cause a division in reaction, and discuss it as we would discuss any type of dilemma.

1. What are the emotions shown here?
2. What are the emotional options?
3. What religious, aesthetic etc. values are represented by these options?
4. What would be the best option for Christians here?
5. What is the evidence that this is the best option?

Some other tactics which can be used in various situations are enumerated over the page.

They are:

1. Emotionally balanced teacher example which includes empathy, respect, genuineness and warmth.
2. Using video sequences to discuss expression of emotion in the media. Questions could be: Is the emotion overdone,

unrealistic, too intense, natural etc.?

3. Variations of the discussion approach by doing the following:
  - i Search the media to find pictures that portray emotions, display these and discuss causes, probable actions, and effects on others.
  - ii Draw up tables of situations involving emotional arousal, and fill in a grid which records changes in students when they are aroused, how they should feel, etc.
4. Write creatively about emotional experience in dialogue, poetry and stories.
5. Create visual displays depicting emotional expression.
6. Research the effects of emotion on people.
7. Role play situations and analyse their emotional expression.

#### THE CONTENT FOR EDUCATING THE EMOTIONS

This paper takes the position that emotions should be educated across the curriculum. It is also possible that they could be developed in a more intensive way in Bible and other subjects such as English and art. For those teachers seeking ideas for developing topics which principally convey emotional content, some ideas are set out below.

Firstly, the skills that could help compile a block of instruction or be used incidentally can be derived from the list of objectives in Figure 1 of this paper. Secondly, more substantive examples of emotional concepts and themes can be employed. Some are included here:

##### a. Examples of Concepts That Can Be Developed

1. It is normal for all people to experience emotions such as anger and romantic love.
2. Emotions can be expressed in constructive or destructive ways.
3. When we control emotions rationally, we can more likely express them constructively.
4. An emotionally mature person expresses emotions so that they help rather than hurt self or others.

- b. Examples of Themes That Can Be Pursued
1. Characteristics of particular emotions involved in religious faith - fear, guilt, joy, love etc.
  2. Ways in which emotions should be expressed in faith.
  3. Ways in which emotions influence our faith, our relationships, and our aesthetic experience.
  4. Ways in which emotions influence our perceptions of reality.
  5. Emotional experiences which include descriptions of: stimuli; control; intensity; reactions; moods.
  6. Preventing and coping with emotional upsets.
  7. Mechanisms for coping with emotional anxiety - repression; conformity; fantasy; compensation; sublimation etc.
  8. Characteristics of the emotionally mature person.
  9. Differences between feelings, emotions and cognition.
  10. Ways of feeling, and of dealing with conflicting feelings.

#### BRINGING METHOD AND CONTENT TOGETHER

To give teachers a feel for ways to combine method and content, we will now turn to some suggestions for dealing with emotions in particular subjects. The first and most important of these subjects is Bible. There are many stories in scripture which may serve as media for emotional education. At a more elementary level we could for example consider the account of Absalom's death in 2 Samuel 18: 32-33 and ask questions such as:

- a. What emotions are shown?
- b. Why did the king react like this?
- c. Was his reaction appropriate? Why or why not?
- d. Could he have changed his reaction?
- e. Should he direct his intense feelings to anybody else? Who?

We could examine a hymn such as 'Softly and Tenderly' and see how its emotions portray faith. Consider these questions:

- a. Is this too sentimental or overdone? Why?
- b. Do the words suit the purpose of the hymn?
- c. What emotions are evoked?

- d. Does the emotional feeling override the importance of the logic? Is this reasonable?
- e. How does feeling affect your faith here?

The story of Job suits emotional analysis. When Job's friends are miserable comforters, and when he describes God as breaking, seizing, dashing and slashing him (chapters 16 and 17), readers could thoughtfully ask questions which match many cognitive and affective aims mentioned in Figure 1 of this paper. Consider these types of questions:

- a. How do Job's emotions influence his responses to God?
- b. Who is he directing his emotions at in verses 9-14?
- c. Are his responses logical?
- d. Does it matter if they are?
- d. Did he really control his emotions here?
- e. Looking at this story, how is it most appropriate to sympathize with those in pain or grief?

At an advanced college level, it would stretch students' understanding of faith to analyse a passage like this one from Buber's book I and Thou. Some paraphrasing may be needed.

Men wish to regard a feeling (called feeling of dependence, and recently, more precisely, creaturely feeling) as the real element in the relation with God. In proportion as the isolation and definition of this element is accurate, its unbalanced emphasis only makes the character of complete relation the more misunderstood.

What has already been said of love is even more unshakably valid here. Feelings are a mere accompaniment to the metaphysical fact of the relation, which is fulfilled not in the soul but between I and Thou.

Questions such as the following could focus on some of the objectives listed in Figure 1:

- a. What emotional elements could be in the 'feelings' and the 'love' here?
- b. How does love become higher than feelings?
- c. Do you agree that real relationship with your creator is at heart a cool reasoned mental operation? Should it be?

- d. What do you think of Ellen White's statement that faith is not so much ecstasy as a deep abiding trust?

By way of contrast with Buber, *The Song of Solomon* provides a rich source for pursuing emotional aims with an affective emphasis. A thoughtful reflection on parts of this book could result in feeling appropriately, becoming involved in a wider range of experiences, and feeling with intensity. Consider the following questions:

- a. Distinguish the emotional differences between the romantic and other love here.
- b. Point out the expression of occasional and dispositional emotions.
- c. Describe the range of emotions in Chapter 7.
- d. What aspects of emotion in romance are being highlighted?

Literature study presents limitless possibilities for developing emotional sensitivity. Hepburn (1973) showed how a teacher could use a segment of Tolstoy's writing to: make emotion a sensitive study; create new emotions; feel precisely; experience emotion in ways that are normally beyond our powers; and oust hackneyed emotions in a quest for more emotional freedom. Butler (1969) explored some possible uses of drama. These were namely to: provide insight into their emotions of others; create the illusion of seeing events from others' viewpoints; provide a cathartic outlet for the emotions; order experience by setting up and resolving conflict; and intensify, control, and clarify emotion. Butler also showed how poetry could: control the content of feeling; express fine shades of feeling; attach emotions to objects; and use words that express feelings in themselves. It appears that with the exception of some action-oriented aims, all of the suggested emotional aims of this paper could be pursued in literary study alone.

Aesthetic and artistic topics also lend themselves well to emotional expression. Teachers could illustrate this assertion by attaining many emotional objectives as they have students evaluate a painting when they selectively attend to it, interpret it and judge its moral value. In so doing they may indicate precise emotional responses, discover alternatives for feeling, avoid stereotyped responses, feel with depth, and explain how emotions help portray reality.

**CONCLUSION**

**This paper has argued the importance of educating the emotions, both in the whole curriculum, and in a more concentrated way in specific subjects such as Bible. It has sketched some fundamental attributes of emotions, and shown how they relate to religious faith. The author has derived from the literature a basic set of aims for educating the emotions, and has presented some suggestions for how our instruction might start to develop emotions in the Adventist curriculum.**

**There is evidence from the literature that the emotions can be educated to the religious and moral point of view. As we show students how to discover, clarify, refine, control and direct emotions, we are also working towards showing them how to experience a relationship with the God who gave them emotions to enrich their faith and their lives.**

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