

Chapter 1

The Resonance of Learning: Affectagogy and the Emotional Dimensions of Education

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ABSTRACT

Affectagogy challenges the traditional cognitive-centric model by emphasizing emotions as essential to learning. This chapter explores its theoretical foundations—neuroscience, SEL, humanistic psychology, embodied cognition, and critical pedagogy—highlighting how emotional resonance fosters engagement, agency, and holistic growth. Neuroscience underscores emotions’ role in memory and attention, while SEL and humanistic approaches nurture emotional intelligence and intrinsic motivation. Embodied and justice-oriented perspectives further anchor learning in experience and equity. By synthesizing insights from over 30 recent studies (2020–2025), this chapter argues that emotions are not distractions but catalysts for deep understanding and transformative education. It calls for emotionally responsive, student-centered learning environments that honor the whole learner—mind, body, and spirit. Affectagogy emerges as a vital framework for reimagining education, fostering compassionate, capable global citizens prepared for an interconnected world.

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INTRODUCTION

For much of the 20th century, education was shaped by a cognitive paradigm that championed logic, reason, and skill acquisition as the pillars of learning (Beeler, 1978; Jones & Issroff, 2004). Rooted in Enlightenment ideals of rationalism and empiricism, and advanced by pioneers like Piaget and Skinner, this “cognitive turn” framed education as a mechanistic process of information transfer, often sidelining emotions as fleeting or disruptive (Efgivia et al., 2021). This dichotomy—mind over affect—reflected a cultural bias toward intellectual mastery, relegating the emotional dimensions of learning to the margins. Yet, as global educational systems face rising student disengagement, mental health challenges, and the complexities of an interconnected world, this narrow focus has come under intense scrutiny.

Interdisciplinary research over the past two decades has dismantled the Cartesian separation of mind and body, revealing emotions as indispensable to learning (Benningfield et al., 2015). Neuroscience demonstrates that emotional engagement enhances memory and attention (Hood, 2019; Huang & Rust, 2021), while psychological frameworks highlight affect as a driver of motivation and resilience. These findings challenge cognitivism’s reductive legacy, paving the way for Affectagogy—a transformative pedagogical framework that positions emotional resonance as the heartbeat of education (Mohammed & Watson, 2019). Emotional resonance, defined as a dynamic state of connection, vitality, and purpose, integrates mind, body, and spirit, fostering holistic learning experiences that transcend traditional boundaries.

Affectagogy draws on a rich synthesis of neuroscience, social-emotional learning (SEL), humanistic psychology, embodied cognition, and critical pedagogy to reimagine education as a vibrant, human-centered endeavor. Unlike cognitivism’s focus on isolated knowledge acquisition, Affectagogy cultivates environments where students thrive as integrated beings, equipped not only as thinkers but as compassionate, engaged global citizens. This chapter reflecting cutting-edge scholarship, to explore Affectagogy’s theoretical foundations and practical implications. To ensure global relevance, it incorporates non-Western perspectives, such as Confucian relational learning (Li, 2021) and Indigenous storytelling pedagogies (Kusmawan et al., 2025; Malizal, 2025), alongside practical examples that bridge theory and practice.

The urgency of this exploration cannot be overstated. As educators grapple with disengaged students and policymakers seek solutions to mental health crises, Affectagogy offers a roadmap for transformation. For instance, a middle school can implement SEL through storytelling circles, fostering emotional resonance and reducing behavioral issues (Rosen et al., 2022). Such examples illustrate Affectagogy’s potential to create classrooms where learning is not just intellectual but deeply felt. However, challenges remain, including educator resistance and cultural variations in

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