

## PEDAGOGIES

### PEDAGOGY OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY: CONSTRUCTING SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE CRITICAL USE OF EMOTION

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While critical pedagogy begins to increasingly underscore the importance of using emotion in disrupting dominant ideology, the pedagogy of empathy believes that empathic reading and responding to texts could challenge traditional pedagogy and help develop critical thinking and knowledge. With its uncritical use of emotion, the pedagogy of empathy, however, oftentimes succumbs to the dominant ideology of emotion. The ideology of emotion works primarily not only through organising ‘an emotional world’ and inculcating ‘patterns of feeling that support the legitimacy of dominant interest’ but also through ‘mystifying and misrecognizing’ (Worsham, ‘Going Postal’ 223) emotion as ‘proof of human subjectivity’ (Terada 17). Instead of developing critical knowledge that could potentially reorganise and reconstruct the emotional world of the students and the teacher, many critical pedagogues are more concerned with ‘passing along “critical knowledge” to students than creating critical knowledge *with* students’ (Stenberg, ‘Liberation’ 282). Under the disguise of critical theory and knowledge, the pedagogy of empathy reproduces the same subject-to-object relationship between teacher and students produced by the dominant pedagogy that positions the teacher as the absolute authority, and by the radical pedagogy whose disempowerment of teacher authority only results in a more sophisticated sham that makes teacher authority invisible. This is because the pedagogy fails both to critically engage students’ emotions, teachers’ emotions, and emotions emerging between teacher and students and to position teachers and students as equal participants in the classroom interaction, who are equally open to the influence of ideology and equally in need of reconstruction of their emotional experiences.

This paper proposes a pedagogy of intersubjectivity that intends to construct intersubjects through mutual recognition and mutual agency. Specifically speaking, both teachers and students work to create a shared

space that allows both intersubjects to co-arise through interactions and exchanges, recognising and transforming each other's emotions without assimilating, consuming, or dominating each other. The pedagogy of intersubjectivity constructs the teacher-student or reader-author relationship as subject-to-subject. In the *constructed* space shared between subject and subject, both the teacher and the students see their emotions as cultural and social artifacts open to reconstruction and dislodge emotions from the attached subjectivity to form some common ground that invites both parties to collectively engage emotions from each other and *between* each other. To explain how the pedagogy of intersubjectivity works in the classroom, I will illustrate how the pedagogy of empathy continues to reproduce the traditional subject-object relationship, and then discuss how several pedagogies present from various perspectives the potential and strategies to make room for intersubjects to emerge in the classroom.

### **The Pedagogy of Empathy: Empathic Reading and Responding**

Teachers often invite students to develop empathy to characters in their reading and are called upon to display empathy to myriad emotions revealed in students' writing processes and writings. As an emotion widely 'constructed as a means of communicating or as a way of facilitating communication between teachers and students' (Richmond, 'Repositioning' 5), empathy is mostly used as a way to treat students as 'potential members of our community, as people whose ideas and feelings are just as worthy of attention as our own' (Richmond, 'The Ethics of Empathy' 41). Against its own impulse to demystify emotion, the pedagogy of empathy results in re-mystifying emotion: instead of producing intersubjects, it replicates the Cartesian subjectivity by reproducing a teacher-student, reader/author interaction as one-way traffic from an asymmetrical authority of the knowing subject to its object. In this section, I will use three examples to discuss how the pedagogy of empathy fails to develop mutual recognition and mutual agency in the writing classroom.

One of the major reasons why empathy has gained much momentum in recent scholarship is its potential in developing and improving social interaction. Empathy comes from the Greek *empathia*, or 'feeling into', and is a term initially used for the ability to perceive the subjective experience of another person (Goleman 99). Empathy was later defined by E.B. Titchner as 'motor mimicry' of the distress of another, which then evokes the same feelings in oneself (Goleman 99).

While similarly stressing its potential in transforming ‘the observed experiences of another person within the self’, Mark Davis stresses that such a transformation produces constructive and positive effects on social interaction (20).

However, empathy is constantly oversimplified in the pedagogy of empathy. For example, one empathic reading exercise that Laura Micciche sketches invites students to engage emotions at various stages — analytical, experiential, and reflective. In the first stage, students first read articles and discuss Mark Johnson’s ‘Embodied Reason’, focusing on how and why bodies matter for the study of knowledge, language, experience, and action. In the second stage, students experience emotions through oral reading and analyse them through group discussions: students in groups select a passage from their reading, each tape-records his or her own reading of the passage, and brings it to class to share, discuss, and analyse the emotions identified in the taped reading (Micciche 58). At the last stage, students perform the selected passages first in small groups and then to the whole class; then students have discussions or writing assignments that invite them to explore how emotioned meanings are embodied rather than explicitly evoked to make an audience feel a certain way.

Students performing emotions in their reading passage fit well into the popular images of empathy, ‘walking in another’s shoes or putting ourselves in another’s skin’; like the technique of motor mimicry, these images vividly evoke the ‘psychological activities of identification and projection’ (Teich 145). However, this popular understanding of empathy as identification and projection, as Carl Rogers points out, should not be the whole story of empathy. As he writes, ‘empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition’ (140–41). The popular concept of empathy, as in the above-described reading exercise, obviously loses the ‘as if’ condition and simplifies empathy to ‘just feelingful identification with another person’ (Teich 146).

The oversimplification of empathy unfortunately prevails and reduces it to sympathy and compassion. In ‘Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion’, Martha Nussbaum suggests that active engagement of pity as a compassion in novel-reading can enable students to imagine others’ lives, for instance, the lives of the homosexual man, the African American man, the working-class man. Although she rightly evokes Aristotle’s concept of emotion — pity, in this case — by emphasising that pity is not a private but a social and cultural project, the empathy or

compassion that she proposes here is clearly identification: ‘the pitier’s own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer’ (qtd. in Boler 159). Her conceptualization coincides with that of Kia Jane Richmond, who defines empathy as ‘sensitivity to the feelings of others and the ability to imagine that something that is not actually happening to oneself at that moment’ (‘The Ethics of Empathy’ 39).

The empathy used in these two reading exercises neither transforms the self nor moves the self toward any action. The empathy evoked in this kind of reading, ‘despite its apparent other-directedness, is too often a comforting and comfortable sentiment...that confirms the virtue of the person who feels for the pitiable other’ (Worsham, ‘After Word: Moving Beyond the Sentimental Education’ 161). Instead of transforming the self through others’ experiences and emotions, it simply confirms the self. This kind of empathy is also passive, as Megan Boler points out in *Feeling Power: Emotion and Education*. Situating empathy in the reading process, Boler argues that the agent of empathy is a fear for oneself (159). Feelings accompanying empathy — such as fear and pity — are more about me than about you and allow the reader, the teacher, the authority, or the psychoanalyst to ignore mutual responsibility to each other. Moreover, this reader–author interaction is not symmetrical or transformational on either side. Passive empathy is constructed on the ‘binary between self and other that situates the self/reader un-problematically as judge’ (Boler 160). The identification with another’s emotions results not in a recognition of difference between self and other but ‘feeds on a consumption of the other’ through claiming that the self can know the other’s experience through mine (Boler 160). Passive empathy, as Boler contends, produces ‘no action towards justice but situates the powerful Western eye/I as the judging subject, never called upon to cast her gaze at her own reflection’ (161). In a large sense, the confessional reading, as suggested by Micciche and Nussbaum, allows the reader the privilege not only to consume others’ emotions but also to ‘take a position of separation and distance, to remain in the “anonymous” spectating crowd and abdicate any possible responsibility’ (Boler 184).

The same kind of empathy is widely recommended for teachers to use in their response to emotions students have in their writing processes and in their writings. In *Notes on the Heart*, Susan McLeod asserts that teacher empathy contributes to student achievement. Teacher empathy is an ability not only to ‘understand students’ affective world but also to communicate such understanding to students in a sensitive, caring way’ (McLeod 114). To be empathic, teachers need not ‘be deeply involved with the personal problems of each student’ (which is the case

with sympathy); teachers need to ‘maintain some distance in order to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning as well as to survive emotionally’ (McLeod 114). Karen Surman Paley develops such teacher empathy as a way to ease the well-cited concerns that the use of first-person emotional narratives demands confessions from students and invades the privacy of their emotional experiences. In her ethnographic study at the New Hampshire Summer Writing Program, Paley observes how a teacher conferences with a student on her personal narrative written in third person and argues that such a ‘conference provided an example of a composition teacher maintaining the boundaries around her role in the face of an essay that was clearly related to an unresolved personal trauma experienced’ by the student author; ‘rather than personalize the character or give direct emotional support’ to the student, the teacher shows empathy (203). Paley reminds us that ‘writing teachers ought always to refer to the I of the essay as the narrator’, so that teachers can separate their critique of the essay from what could be seen as an attempt to revise either the student’s life or the student’s perception of a life experience’ (207).

What Paley proposes here evokes several concerns around empathic responding. The first concern is the power structure in teacher–student interactions. Stressing that teachers should be more aware of the changes they might cause to students, and move away from ‘force-feeding students an ideology’, Paley argues that teachers should abandon confrontational empathy that oftentimes not only creates hostility when different emotions clash but also forces students to compromise their own positions to align with their teacher’s (176). Instead, Paley adopts the non-confrontational style, which allows students to explore and express their own emotions on their own without the guidance of other people’s theories (176). While it is important to allow students to experience and express their own emotions through writing, it is equally important to encourage them to use their emotional experiences as a departure so that they can ‘locate their own affectively structured experiences’ ‘within more integrated understandings of social structures and identity formation’ (Lindquist 188). Referring to the I in the essay instead of the student herself or allowing an anonymous reading of this essay to the class does not, however, make the teacher less of an authority figure; it instead remystifies emotion by further confining the student’s emotion as well as the teacher’s emotional response to the student’s emotion to their respective subjectivity.

Second, the emphatic responding model evokes the importance of responding to emotion with emotion. The teacher during the conference shows empathy to the traumatic feelings narrated in the essay and notices

the empathy the class shows to the student writer. However, during the empathic responding, both the teacher and the class are passive consumers/readers of the emotions of the student writer. Neither the teacher nor the class goes beyond the quick I-know-how-you-feel-through-mine identification. Paley neither situates the student writer's emotion in a larger social and cultural context nor reflects on whether she will feel the same in similar situations. Additionally, Paley fails to invite the class to investigate why they feel the way they feel about the emotions in the student essay. Under the assumption that the student is free to express any emotion regarding race, class, gender, abortion, or homosexuality while the role of the teacher is simply to create such a space for such expression, the teacher-student interaction does not generate new meanings about the emotions or address emotions emerging in the interaction. The empathic responding is in essence an objective and rational treatment of students' emotion: the teacher would say to the student, 'I totally understand your feelings, but now we need to take an objective approach to your writing; that is, let's focus on the structure, style, and grammar of this piece of writing in front of us'. It is worth noticing that the teacher throughout the conference remains unchanged and unaffected by the emotions displayed in the student essay, taking the position of a spectator, distanced and separated.

Obviously, the teacher uses empathy to downplay teacher authority; however, such an uncritical use of empathy not only reinforces objectivity but also ultimately replicates a subject-object relationship: on the one hand, students remain confined within their own private and isolated emotional world, pure and intact from the master hand of the teacher; on the other hand, the teacher remains unexamined, unaffected, and untransformed. Instead of decolonising students from the ideology of emotion, this pedagogy diminishes emotion in its active role in effecting changes and reduces emotional experiences to expressions of individuality, evidence for arguments, or sources for generating 'neutral' knowledge.

### **Pedagogy of Intersubjectivity: Making Room for Intersubjects**

In challenging the pedagogy of empathy, many scholars and educators have proposed different ways of reading and responding that invite critical engagement of the emotions of the teacher, the students, the author, as well as emotions emerging between readers and author, between students and teachers. Their pedagogy of intersubjectivity presents from different perspectives strategies and potentials for

constructing intersubjects in the classroom. Positioning emotions from students and teachers and between them as social and cultural artifacts open for reconstruction, the pedagogy of intersubjectivity allows the readers, students, and teachers to dislodge their emotions from their respective subjectivity and consequently construct some common ground and create some shared space, where an intersubjective interaction emerges. Unlike the passive empathy that fails to transform or to move the readers, students, and teachers, the pedagogy of subjectivity transforms and empowers both students and teachers through mutual recognition and mutual agency.

Megan Boler proposes a pedagogy of discomfort that calls for both educators and students to go beyond the confessional reading and spectating — the passive empathy — and adopt testimonial reading and collective witnessing, which ask us to ‘turn our gaze equally upon’ the cultural structures, the dominant ideology, the historical moments, as well as upon ourselves (177). Boler’s strategies of testimonial reading and collective witnessing can be used for all writing classrooms — where reading, writing, and responding to other’s (including students’) writings are taking place — to develop an intersubjective reader–writer interaction. A testimonial reading leads not only to a collective demystification of the cultural patterns of emotion but also to a collective awareness of how ‘our emotional selectivity shapes what and how we see’ (Boler 182). Such a critical reading does not simply ask readers to recognise the emotions of the characters in their readings; more importantly, it asks them to see the large cultural and social patterns that shape or produce the emotions. The strategy of collective witnessing further encourages readers to refuse to see themselves and the other in a guilt–innocence binary; it invites us to embrace a willingness to turn the gaze upon ourselves and to examine the emotions emerging between the readers and writers. By examining the social and cultural patterns that shape the characters and the readers, these two strategies help develop an intersubjective reader–writer relationship that transforms the emotional world of the readers.

This intersubjective reader–writer relationship can also be developed, I believe, through a different reading response assignment that Laura Micciche details. In an undergraduate honours seminar entitled ‘The Culture of Eating Disorders’, Micciche asks her students to do reading response papers and journals that will help them to transform their varied emotional responses — empathy, anger, frustration, suspicion, disgust, and resentment — to eating disorders into critical thoughts on eating disorder issues. Realising that students’ papers seem to reiterate the entrenched notions of eating disorders as personal

struggles and of emotion as natural, pure, honest, and unmediated, Micciche suggests that conferencing, large group discussion, and performance can combine to move students from this position into a more critical one that sees how both eating disorder and emotion are constructed. In her conference, Micciche encourages the students to use their emotional responses — for example, anger toward fasting female saints — as a basis for reading critically into historical contexts. The subsequent group discussion focuses on questioning ‘our discounting of emotion as credible and valuable resource for critical thinking’ (68). She also describes an interactive performance exercise on one particular emotional response to eating disorders, which ‘might get students further involved in the characters’ emotional worlds as well as in each other’s interpretations of these worlds’ (70). Instead of seeing the character as an object whose emotion is ready for our consumption, the performance aims to help students ‘conceive the role of emotion as lived and produced, not just there in the characters’ (70). As described, each group selects a scene in the reading in ‘which emotional meanings are discernible’ and performs it to the class without interruption; then, the group performs it again, but this time with constant interruption from other groups when they find the performance misinterprets or misrepresents the emotional meanings. Members from other groups might excuse the performing group, stop the action, and pick it up from there. Following the interrupted performance by each group, students are further encouraged to discuss how their first emotional responses are constantly revised (70). Ideally, ‘in this way emotion is shifted from its designation as a ‘first place’ to a negotiable, fluid aspect of meaning-making that can and should be the object of critical thought, achieved through analytical as well as playful, performative, and inventive means’ (70).

In challenging both confrontational and non-confrontational empathic teaching, the strategic performance of empathy, as argued by Julie Lindquist in her article, ‘Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy’, develops an intersubjective relationship between teacher and students. She argues that ‘in order for teachers to enable students’ affective work, they must begin by staging their empathy, knowing all the while that the price of successfully persuading students of their (the teachers’) emotional commitments may well be that they succeed in persuading themselves of these commitments’ (201). She calls for teachers to ‘resist easy theoretical alignments, becoming, for the moment, staunchly flexible anti-ism-ists’ (193). To centralise emotive processes at the center of students’ learning and to meet students in a productive emotional space,

Lindquist suggests that teachers use the classroom interaction as a platform and deep acting as a technique to perform strategic empathy. Deep acting, according to Linquist, could allow teachers to refrain from being too disengaged or too emotional and consequently summon emotions that support students' engagement of emotions. For example, Lindquist describes how she successfully encouraged students to engage emotions about the war in Iraq through strategic empathy:

First, in seeking advice about how we should conduct discussions about the war, and then later (when working hard against my own emotional need to negatively evaluate some of the perspectives I was hearing about the war) I worked to communicate empathy for their positions as affective responses. In the end, these students gave me permission to complicate their understandings, to help them get to the kind of knowledge they now identified as necessary for a greater understanding of issues. (204)

Foregrounding emotion as social and cultural products, Lindquist carefully constructs with the students a space where critical knowledge is co-created by both the teacher and the students. The strategic use of empathy clearly recognises the students as subjects, as 'the idea of deep acting as a pedagogical stance gets us into a place where we can begin to imagine how students' experiences of class can have heuristic potential' (Lindquist 205). Although Lindquist stresses that the need to perform emotions expected from students is pedagogically effective in effecting changes in students, the deep acting of strategic empathy does not only require 'acts of will and social imagination' (201) but also depends on shifting oneself to new positions, even temporarily. As emotion is a constitutive part of our belief system (Olson and Worsham 154), a strategic performance of emotion necessarily requires a shift in beliefs and values. This shifting is not only a sign of recognising the students as subjects who share the same authority and agency in knowledge-making processes but also a gesture of strategically positioning the self as a dynamic process open for construction and reconstruction. In this respect, the pedagogy of intersubjectivity is different from both teacher-centred pedagogy and student-centred pedagogy in that it intends to position both the teacher and the students as centres of the learning process, where both are learners in the collective engagement of emotion. As Lindquist puts it, 'teachers should be willing to enable affective learning by doing this kind of "deep acting" students do' (206).

The mutual recognition is built on a common ground shared by teachers' discourse and students' discourse. For example, instead of dismissing the students' religious faith as abnormal, Stenberg argues that we might benefit from the premise that religious discourse is radical (280). In her senior-level literacy course, Stenberg listed religion or faith as one potential literacy and found that in their reading responses students often regarded faith as a central 'primary discourse' (280). On this common ground, students like Molly could explore how family, friends, schools, and social groups affected her faith and consequently become more aware of both the power and limitations of the cultural, social, and ideological structures of faith, and more curious about other possibilities.

The goal of mutual recognition is mutual agency. Put differently, both teachers and students are capable of and responsible for deciding how they interact and how much they want to be transformed through the interaction. Although Molly's literacy narrative shows that her beliefs and values were affirmed, instead of being challenged, Stenberg reminds us that 'the process of inquiry is as important as the outcome' (285). This is because the goal of our pedagogy should be less about challenge, conversion, conclusion, and consensus and more about possibilities, transformations, mobility, and agency. In the end, Molly developed awareness of the discursive construction of her emotional attachment to faith and showed more openness to others' opinions of her faith. Whether she will continue her faith or not does not determine whether this teacher-student interaction is a failure or a success. What matters is that Molly has learned the discursive formation of her faith and understands where her agency is. Instead of eliciting a closure, conclusion, or conversion, which is frequently an uncritical willingness to meet the teacher's expectation (Seitz 154), we might consider Molly's literacy narrative as possibility unfolded both by herself and the teacher; we might position Molly as an intersubject, whose construction is both co-created and open for new construction. Positioning students as intersubjects ultimately allows students more epistemological mobility, a mobility making critical engagement in the classroom and survival in real life possible.

### **A Pedagogy of Multiple Pedagogies: Attending to Mixed Emotions in the Classroom**

Unlike postmodern or critical pedagogy's failure to address emotions emerging during the process of critical engagement of the emotion, the

pedagogy of intersubjectivity invites teachers and students to critically engage the emotions — such as fear, anger, frustration, loss, shame, guilt — produced in their collective engagement of emotions on certain issues. Whether we like it or not, the omniscience of emotion in the process behooves us to deal with it, for ignoring it oftentimes sabotages the very learning goal of our pedagogy. Moreover, the frequent depiction and conception of these emotions as students' resistance aggravates the teacher's frustration, fear, and anger. Also, the categorisation of emotions as either negative or positive does not help students with their writing process not only because most writers 'seem to draw strength from emotional antitheses' (Brand 15) but also because our emotions about many experiences are mixed and ambivalent (Weigert 88).

Instead of simply dismissing them as negative emotions we are obliged to dispel, both teachers and students will find it fruitful that they position these emotions at the centre, inviting each other to analyse the discursive formation of these emotions. For example, anger is one of the most common emotions present in critical discussions of emotion. As Megan Boler aptly points out, anger in this situation is mostly a defensive anger, for the person feels anger about an issue — the holocaust, homosexuality, abortion, eating disorders, etc. — not so much because he or she is wronged or slighted as because the argument in the reading or discussion poses a threat to his or her cherished assumptions, beliefs, values, and emotions about the issue. Instead of simply aligning defensive anger with moral feelings, Boler suggests that we recognise it as the protection of precarious subjectivities (191). As we tend to assume we are what we believe and we are what we feel (Olson and Worsham 154), these emotions are the signs of a clash between different beliefs and emotions. As the pedagogy of intersubjectivity aims to disrupt the connection between emotion and fixed, interior, private, autonomous, and split subjectivity, we might consider anger and all other emotions not as resistance but as gestures that possible changes are under way. Finally, as Boler reminds us, we will become less frustrated if we remember that because emotions are discursively constructed, their deconstruction and re-construction cannot be accomplished single-handedly by one teacher, one course, or one individual student.

As a final note, I want to add that the pedagogy of intersubjectivity is not proposed as a counter-discourse to critical pedagogy, or to the pedagogy of empathy, because a counter-discourse usually repeats the same mistakes from the discourses it intends to counter. The pedagogy of intersubjectivity is not suggested as a universal pedagogy easily applicable to all situations. In a classroom where gender, race, class, sexuality, and cultural differences are already in play, this pedagogy may

serve only as a broad theoretical framework that allows writing teachers to integrate multiple pedagogies in real classroom teaching.

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