

**“Feeling lore”: The “problem” of emotion in the practice of teaching**

CHRISTY I. WENGER

*Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, West Virginia*

*ABSTRACT: This paper investigates the current dismissal of feeling from teaching and learning in the college composition classroom. Drawing on the teaching experiences and the concept of lore, it argues that the practices and pedagogies of composition studies continue to produce a division between reason and emotion, denying the body’s epistemic potential. In order to revalue students’ emoting bodies and to authorise felt knowledge, it argues that we should bring the liveable theory of embodied writing pedagogies to bear on the field of composition studies. These pedagogies offer instructors and students alternative ways of thinking and being in the writing classroom and beyond.*

*KEYWORDS: Emotion, embodied, feeling, lore, writing bodies.*

*Danielle:* In a writing response, Danielle confides that she lost her father a year ago and that writing for our class is making her pay more attention to her feelings than she has since allowed. She notes that while it is hard for her to do, she thinks she needs to become more aware of what her “body is saying” since it seems to directly affect the meaning and tone of her papers. She knows I’ll be reading this, so I wonder if I should comment directly on the emotional impact of her statements, openly discussing her grief, or play it “safe” and respond only to the analysis accomplished in her response.

*John:* John hasn’t been participating since we started our gender unit. When I return students’ informal writings from our last class, he reads my comments. In them, I encourage him to explore the reasons why he has given his truck a masculine name as he works toward a longer draft. John responds by throwing his paper across the room, classmates looking on in amazement. Just as shocked as his peers, I wonder how I should respond to John’s anger.

These experiences, among others, collected over the last few years of teaching college composition, lead me to read with interest feminist theorist and educator Alison Jaggar’s (1989) comment that:

time spent in analyzing emotions and uncovering their sources should be viewed, therefore, neither as irrelevant to theoretical investigation nor even as a prerequisite for it; it is not a kind of clearing of the emotional decks, “dealing with” our emotions so that they not influence our thinking. Instead, we must recognise that our efforts to reeducate our emotions are necessary to our political activity. Critical reflection on emotions is not a self-indulgent substitute for political analysis and political action. It is itself a kind of political theory and political practice, indispensable for an adequate social theory and social transformation. (p. 164)

I appreciate the convergence between politics and pedagogy as a compositionist, prompting me to read Jaggar’s statements with a practical twist. Adding “pedagogical” alongside “political” drives home the implications Jaggar’s charge has for my writing classrooms. Through Jaggar, I accept the ways my writing pedagogy is as bound to emotional literacy as it is to critical literacy – and my responsibility to

attend to both. As a result, what drives me in this essay are the following two questions regarding the visibility and availability of feeling in our pedagogies: How do we articulate the constructive work of emotions in our classrooms? And, how do we make them publicly available to ourselves and our students? I am particularly interested in how embodied writing pedagogies, which view the body as a lived site of knowledge and not, primarily, as a discursive text, may help us legitimise emotional discourses as they bring the body back into view.

Jaggar’s charge can be understood as an indictment of the practices of many postmodern pedagogies within composition, which seek to do a kind of naïve “clearing out” of emotion so that the “real work” of reason and critical thinking can take place. Critical pedagogies<sup>1</sup> that have taken up postmodern theory have tended to narrativise the body inasmuch as they have understood our discursive consciousness as *the* site of struggle and agency; they have, in turn, fiercely controlled emotional expression or dismissed it altogether. In adopting these pedagogies, we have failed to articulate the meaningful work of feeling in the writing process and the writing classroom. In contrast, by starting from the perspective of the body, embodied writing pedagogy represents a hopeful alternative to mainstream methods that deny a writer’s corporeality by entextualising it. To reclaim writing bodies, or “bodies who aspire to write” (Kazan, 2005, p. 392), these pedagogies validate the importance of felt knowledge, or the “body’s knowledge before it’s articulated in words” (Perl, 2004, p. 1). If feelings and bodies are enactments of our materiality, then they are both necessary to reclaim.

In this spirit of inclusivity, I refuse the closure of defining feelings as entirely linguistic *or* organic and of delineating between cultural affect, psychological emotions or physiological feelings in what follows. Instead, I borrow education theorist Meghan Boler’s (1999) comprehensive definition of feeling as “in part sensational, or physiological: consisting of the actual feeling – increased heartbeat, adrenaline, etc.” and “also ‘cognitive’ or ‘conceptual’: shaped by our beliefs and perceptions. There is, as well, a powerful linguistic dimension to our emotional awareness, attributions of meanings, and interpretations” (p. xix).<sup>2</sup> Boler’s holistic definition appeals to me because it recognises the organic body’s shaping of emotion as well as the ways our feelings are always situated within a culture and a specific material placement in the world, a double gesture maintained by embodied writing.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Fulkerson’s (2005) “Composition at the turn of the twenty-first century” may be helpful here. Fulkerson overviews the scholarship of college composition studies and finds three main approaches to teaching writing: critical, cultural studies, which takes up postmodern theories of social construction to engage students in exploring the shaping powers of dominant culture and discourse; expressivism, which focuses on the student-writer’s ability to use language to come to voice and express personal truths; and procedural rhetoric, which is largely concerned with teaching academic argument through genre-based assignments, indicating a focus on discourse communities and a response to context.

<sup>2</sup> While Boler (1999) provides a holistic definition of emotion in line with my treatment of it here, she does prefer the term “emotion” to “feeling” while I use these interchangeably in order to underscore the social as well as bodily ways in which emotions are navigated and shaped. Boler chooses emotion as her primary term, because it functions within our everyday, ordinary language, and because she fears that the way feeling has been aligned with the sensational will restrict her attempt to bridge the cognitive, moral and aesthetic domains of emotion theory within philosophical psychology and philosophies of education (p. xix-xx). An example of the separation between feeling and emotion to which Boler alludes is Damasio’s (1999) preference to denote the “private, mental experience of an emotion” as a feeling “while the term emotion should be used to designate the collection of responses, many of which are publicly observable” (p. 42).

In what follows, I will dialogue personal experiences with professional examples of lore and theory to explore the importance of re-evaluating the significance of student emotion. I will argue that instead of responding to the expression of feeling with ignorance or dismissal, we should teach students how to use their feelings toward a stance of “critical being” in the world and to approach awareness of them as a skill equally necessary for writing and for living. Jaggar indicates that hopes for transformation are futile if we do not seriously entertain emotion and the ways our political practices are inscribed with feeling. Similarly, any pedagogue interested in student growth and self-conscious of her pedagogy’s political agendas should consider the role of feeling in learning and meaning-making.

### FEELING LORE AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF EMOTION

*Maria:* We are out of time in my honour’s writing seminar, and I am returning my students’ graded papers. Maria grabs hers when I call her name and immediately flips to the final page. Because I anticipate her unhappiness, I watch her reaction. Her open disappointment doesn’t last long. When her classmates have left and I’m erasing the board, Maria sheepishly approaches me. She admits that she knew her paper wasn’t strong, but that she didn’t set aside enough time to revise before it was due. Maria begins to cry and looks to me for consolation. I try to comfort her verbally, but her tears only quicken their pace. I feel for this student, so that even though reasons I shouldn’t hug her pass through my mind, I do anyway.

Aligning criticality with thinking and consciousness with discourse has often had the unfortunate effect of maintaining the displacement of affect from the process of learning to write. This displacement is canonised by David Bartholomae (1995) in the pages of the composition studies journal, *College Composition and Communication*. Because his article, a response to another compositionist, is called upon so frequently and represents a recorded dialogue of “teacher talk”, it has taken on the status of lore, or common knowledge, in the field. In it, Bartholomae indicates that the means by which critical, constructivist teachers help students unpack the master narratives that dictate the meaning they ascribe to their experiences is by “being dismissive” of students’ personal lives.

While other compositionists reviewing this canonical article have tended to collapse the category of affect into that of the personal (following Bartholomae), I would like to concentrate on how feeling is constructed as a handmaiden of the personal in this argument, nullifying its powerful presence. Bartholomae uses his comments on a student’s essay about her parents’ divorce to explain his stance on the personal – and with it, emotion – in student writing:

In the course I teach, I begin by not granting the writer her “own” presence in that [divorce] paper, by denying the paper’s status as a record of or a route to her own thoughts and feelings. I begin instead by asking her to read her paper as a text already written by culture, representing a certain predictable version of the family, the daughter, and the writer. I ask her to look at who speaks in the essay and who doesn’t. I ask her to look at the organisation of the essay to see what it excludes. And I ask her to revise in such a way that the order of the essay is broken – to write against the grain of the discourse that has determined her account of her family. (p. 85)

The analytical process prescribed here is attractive because of the ways it ignores the messiness of emotion. Rather than entertaining this student’s feelings about her parent’s divorce, Bartholomae concentrates on the logic of discourse in order to train his student to bypass her emotions. He pushes her to focus on the intellectual and to discover the ways she is culturally written by unpacking how her reaction to her parents’ divorce is predictable and socially scripted, not “personal”. While coded as a request, Bartholomae’s suggested process of revision reveals itself to be a set of commands that the student must follow in order to be validated; calculated critical thinking will merit her acceptance into the academic discourse community, while reflections on emotions will not. Denied her emotions and her “own’ presence”, she is literally a no-body, or a brain removed from the particularities of her embodied, emotioned experience. Critical distance here means distance from the body and its feelings.

Early critiques of the displacement of emotion in composition studies – the kind evidenced by Bartholomae – focused on an essentialist-cognitive model, but these have fallen out of favour. Through the recent work of compositionists such as Laura Micchie (2007) and Lynn Worsham (2001) among others, attention to emotions has become an accepted field of study for critical pedagogues interested in social conditioning, like Bartholomae, but unwilling to dismiss the importance of the individual. This has helpfully brought a new wave of attention to emotion, but has continued to do so at the cost of entertaining the body as an agentive emoter, a feature of embodied writing pedagogies. What remains surprising is that with a surge of new scholarship on the discipline and maintenance of our affective lives, the traditionalist contrast between reason and emotion continues to resonate in our teaching practices and the lore surrounding our discipline. If lore reflects a physical enactment of our theories, our teaching literally embodies the dismissal of emotion from our classrooms.

If we understand lore to account not only for the dissemination of knowledge in our field, but also the production of it, as Patricia Harkin (1991) calling upon Stephen North does, the persistent denigration of emotion as reason’s inferior (female) mate is extremely concerning. If our rituals and practices of teaching writing do not account for the emotional experience of writing, learning and meaning-making, we do ourselves and our students a great disservice and justify the suppression of the body in composition studies. I am concerned with “bringing lore to light” (Harkin, 1991, p. 138), not only to give needed merit to the embodied labour of teaching, but also to expose the faultlines between our practice and developing theory, or how recent efforts to theorise constructive models of engaging students’ and teachers’ emotions as part of the work validated and valued in the writing classroom have not yet revolutionised these classrooms.

What I am pointing to is the disjoint I see between exciting, new approaches to understanding emotion in composition scholarship and the embodiment of these theories in our teaching practice, as reported through anecdotes and lore which spread through various forms of teacher talk. I was reminded of the distance between our practice and our theory in a recent conversation with a colleague. As we were sharing tales of memorable classroom experiences, nostalgic at the end of yet another semester, my colleague noted that she recently had a student cry in her presence.

When I asked her how she responded, she looked confused and claimed that she “ignored it and did nothing” as if that were the only appropriate response available. She seemed shocked to hear me tell stories of my own teaching encounters, many of which validated and even encouraged student emotion.

My colleague’s surprise is understandable when placed against the larger backdrop of my field. Regularly included on the litany of instructors’ complaints is students’ insistence on bringing up their feelings in class. I hear often an echo of “I don’t care what my students’ feel; I just want them to think.” When I hear this frustrated response, I must admit that I hear teachers’ unacknowledged emotion short-circuiting valuable moments of potential learning. It has always been curious to me the ways this compliant hides how students *are* thinking using the language they have at hand but aren’t being heard. Teachers’ tend not to listen because of their own indoctrination in and gatekeeping of dominant pedagogies reliant on emotion’s absent-presence, to borrow Worsham’s (2001) language. Too, what we hear is often filtered by our clichéd understanding of students’ limited analytical powers, as Dawn Skorczewski (2000) observes in her analysis of student writing and cliché.

I am interested in what changes when we begin to seriously listen to and encourage student emotion, viewing it as a critical, embodied engagement in the learning process. When we authorise emotional discourse, we open up our discussions of critical thinking to include feeling and thereby start to admit it into the ordinary language of classroom talk. This is exactly what needs to happen in order for embodied writing pedagogies to live up to their promise of engaging in liveable theory and worldly practices. To begin, we must, however, recognise the limitations of our current practice.

A telling example of a failure to listen to students’ emotions can be found in a recent 2009 “Observer” article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. I will examine this response piece in depth precisely because I believe it showcases the kind of lore that shapes our composition classes and, generally, our interactions with writing students. This editorial contains so many of the same critiques of emotion I’ve heard in local teacher talk that it serves as a tangible distillation, allowing me to respond in a more sustained way than if I were to follow the fragments of conversations I’ve collected over the years. I have no interest in an *ad hominem* attack on the writer of the *Chronicle* editorial to which I turn; rather I am interested in using his (emotional) argument to highlight the ways the lore surrounding feelings remains in stark contrast to a growing body of recent theoretical work by feminist educators like Jaggar (1989) neurobiologists like Antonio Damasio (1999) and compositionists like Worsham (2001), work that dismantles patriarchal divisions of affect and thought. As a result, I have chosen not to include the author’s name in the narrative of my text even though conventions dictate full citations throughout and in my references. My choice to avoid naming where possible points to how this author echoes a tradition of teacher talk or lore surrounding the feeling rules within learning environments, making the representative nature of his statements more valuable than his particular identification with them.

As a collective example of lore, the article serves as a frame for the issues with which I am concerned in this essay. In rather stark contrast to the response rate of similar editorials published in the *Chronicle*, this article has drawn few comments and most

indicate agreement with the author.<sup>3</sup> The lack of dissent over the article’s conservative treatment of emotions in the places and spaces of higher education may, I fear, indicate the ways we have continued to cordon off emotion from learning and refused to productively and constructively address it in our practice – even as it begins once more to rise to the surface within our theory.

Addressing the disjoint, I’d like to use the remainder of this article to examine three key justifications that writing teachers use as reasons to dismiss emotion from the “proper” terrain of the classroom. While there are certainly arguments to be made about others, I have sought to condense these for the sake of space and in light of the ways the following categories tend to envelop many others. Overwhelmingly, we feel that:

1. *Emotions are personal and private*: Validating emotions is akin to valuing solipsism. This fear is rooted in the traditional critique against personal writing and our pedagogical devaluation of the body.
2. *Emotions have no meaningful place in learning interactions and therefore only cause trouble*: While unavoidable in personal or family relationships, they can be successfully disengaged in learning environments like the writing classroom or writing centre. If we attend to them, we foolishly invite the teacher-student relationship to morph into a parent-child one. This belief echoes constructivist pedagogical concerns about meriting the individual and the local over the social and the culturally symptomatic, ignoring how the family can be seen as a microcosm of the social sphere.<sup>4</sup> This belief also triggers a fear of emotion which suggests that distance from our emotions (and thus our bodies) prompts critical thinking rather than seeing the possibility for growth and change when emotionated discourse is allowed and approached skillfully in the classroom.
3. *The value of emotion is primarily therapeutic not hermeneutic*: This means, finally, that as inherently private, emotions are best dealt with privately in therapy with trained psychoanalysts – not writing teachers in the public domain of the classroom. This fuels a disdain of so-called confessional narratives, a term often overused to denote any text that incorporates emotional discourse. Such a critique misrecognises the ways in which the body is an epistemic origin of knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> As of 6/27/10, only 17 comments were posted online, most indicating agreement with the author. While a comprehensive review of these comments is beyond the scope of this text, the tenor of the responses maintains a disdain for emotion and the desire to purge it from our classrooms. For instance, one commenter says, “There seems to be an epidemic – at least in my classes – of this emotional “meltdown” among students, re. critical thinking and writing. So while I enjoyed this article, I do wish we could find more feasible “quick” (and lasting) fixes to this serious problem.” The much-outnumbered commenter who speaks most loudly against the article remarks, “Given the animosity and patronising attitude with which the author and so many of the commenters’ approach their students, I’m not surprised that their teaching methods are faltering. Consider that your students’ emotional responses are valid, and find a way to channel them into passionate critical argumentation. Logos is necessarily accompanied by ethos and pathos because it’s a human endeavour.” For the online version of this article see <http://chronicle.com/Freshman-Comp-Tantrums/48431/#comments>.

<sup>4</sup> As a therapist-turned-compositionist, Karen Paley (2001) recognises the value of the family narrative and uses this line of thought to fuel her reappraisal of expressivism and personal writing in *I Writing*.

What joins these justifications to keep emotion locked out of the classroom is a traditionalist discourse that naively assumes we can and should separate reason and emotion, since critical thinking doesn't require both processes as mutually constitutive. While I don't advocate a view of writing teachers as therapists or parents, I do believe emotions are always present in the writing classroom; for, where there is reasoning and analysis, there is emotion.<sup>5</sup> To know as a body *is* to feel. Simply put, emotional expressiveness deserves our explicit attention for its embodied entanglement with meaning and the ways it inflects our writing and learning encounters. Writing teachers need to understand how to create a public space for feelings in their pedagogies and how to navigate constructively the emotional encounters they are bound to have with students. In this spirit, if the *Chronicle* article reflects problems with our current methods of schooling students' emotions, it too suggests, in relief, the ways in which we can resist these methods by substituting an embodied politics of emotion that encourages passionate engagement instead of “malestream” critical distance.

## THE MANAGEMENT OF STUDENT EMOTION

*Michelle:* It's the end of the semester, and my colleague and I are reflecting on the highs and lows. Michelle remarks that after attempting to let down her guard this semester, she is going back to teaching behind a “wall of defence”. She claims that while she developed stronger relationships with students, she felt too vulnerable to their critiques and too conscious of her shortcomings as a teacher. “I am sick of hearing their feelings anyway,” she notes, “when all I want is for them to become critical thinkers.”

The author, a writing instructor and writing centre director, of the *Chronicle* editorial “Freshman Comp Tantrums” provides us with a variety of scenes to illustrate how his students' “uncontrollable” emotions shut down their ability to think critically and analytically. That these emotional experiences are flippantly referred to as “tantrums” in the title, either by the editor or the author himself, reveals the negative value placed on students' affective lives. In the author's words, what binds these students together and crystallises his problems with them is “...immaturity. They were displaying emotional reactions that had nothing to do with the college tasks of developing critical-thinking skills. They had never been trained to respond critically, were unable to contain their emotions, and thought all their interactions revolved around them” (Backus, 2009, p. B24). His conservative critique and the portraits of the students in question tell a story of teaching lore that needs to be questioned if we are to constructively engage students' emotions within embodied writing pedagogies and respond to the recent scholarship that places feelings in the centre, and not the periphery, of teaching composition.

The author-instructor opens with a telling picture of a freshman composition student, Devon, whom he tutored at the writing centre: “Devon's face flushed. His lips began to quiver. A tear formed in the corner of his right eye, and he wiped it away with the back of his hand before hastily shoving his paper into his book and standing up. ‘I'm

<sup>5</sup> See A. Damasio (1999), *The feeling of what happens*. London, England: Heinemann.

leaving now,’ he said” (Backus, 2009, p. B24). What caused such a reaction? The author tells us that Devon’s “tantrum” resulted from an instruction to ignore his emotional response to an article questioning gender training on which he was writing his paper, an article that deeply offended him. This author, working as a tutor, tells Devon that there is no room for an emotional reaction in his writing, because it would not be in service to academic discourse, “it had no place in an academic paper,” even though it could be shared in a phone call with his mother (Backus, 2009, p. B24). Equating emotioned writing with “diatribes”, the author shares the description of critical analysis he gave Devon as that which “while it may begin with an emotion, is a practice that requires keen observation, sharp reflection, cold-hearted logic, crisp reasoning, icy discernment and cool evaluation” (Backus, 2009, p. B24). And when the author finds out that Devon has indeed called his mother after his disconcerting tutoring appointment, he says he is “stunned” to find out that Devon’s mother validated her son’s ideas as “good and right” (Backus, 2009, p. B24).

### **Feminised and ostracised**

There is much I can say about the reaction to Devon’s emotion. To start, this response is heavily gendered, a plainly feminised construction of a male student who can’t “handle” the intellectual machismo of heavy, academic “weight-lifting” and must rely on the emotional labour provided by his mother. Worsham (2001) argues against the Western tradition of separating the affective and cognitive realms in “Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion”, precisely because it fuels the unrecognised, feminised emotional labour of “tending wounds and feeding egos” (Bartky, 1990) which keeps patriarchal systems from the family to the composition classroom running. In this tradition, the excess of emotion is embodied by women who become metonyms for the passions of the body, freeing men to take on a rationalist subjectivity unhindered by the biasing markers of the flesh. This abjection creates a division such that “[e]motion [is] not alone on the ‘bad side of the fence – women [are] there too” (Boler, 1999, p. xv). And when men display emotion, as Devon does here, they jump that fence. Devon’s tutor criticises him because he violates dominant “feeling rules”<sup>6</sup> which dictate what counts as appropriate, gendered reception and expression of emotion within a given learning culture, such as critical pedagogy.

If this example highlights the double dismissal of the body and the emotional as they become metonyms for each other, it is especially interesting given the nature of Devon’s assignment. The instructor-author notes that the article so offensive to Devon is Paul Theroux’s “The Male Myth”, which challenges the confining nature of Western stereotypes that construct a heterosexist masculinity, wherein “real” men must “be stupid, be unfeeling, obedient and soldierly, and stop thinking” (2000, p. 293). The irony of Devon’s effeminate narrative persona placed in dialogue with the instructor’s stated respect for Theroux’s work highlights not only the instructor’s gender anxieties but also the ways in which our theory both uncovers and veils, creating gaps in our practice at the level of our bodies. In real, bodily ways, our allegiances sometimes remain divorced from our practices as teachers. Like my colleague, the instructor here reveals a central premise that could be called a primary,

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<sup>6</sup> I borrow this phrase from Peter N. Stearns (1994). *American cool*. New York: New York University Press.



pedagogical feeling rule in the academy, one that equates validating students’ emotions with promoting solipsism not critical analysis. The instructor says this much in his damning critique when he equates the sharing of emotion with the self-indulgence of thinking all “interactions revolved around” the students in question.

No doubt, part of our job as writing teachers is getting students to think about diverse audiences and differing worldviews. So what I do relate to in this instructor’s critique, as many will, is the struggle to engage students in productive encounters with difference. In this struggle, teachers often expose their students to methods of writing and discourses that can reach a variety of audiences with differing viewpoints based on class, race, gender and varying life experiences. Without doubt, we should attempt to expand our students’ thinking by teaching them to pay attention both to the ways they are situated and to the differential positioning of others. This opening process allows them to see the limits of their own point of view. Indeed, embodied writing pedagogies are engaged in this process of investigating knowledge as situated, socially *and* materially. But to do so responsibly, our pedagogies should begin from a position of acceptance and respect of students’ own positionings and their response to these, emotioned or otherwise.

Because he isn’t being similarly validated by this instructor, limits are likely all Devon sees. Devon’s passionate response points to a high probability that he feels alienated by the article on which he is to write and then doubly so when his response is shut down by this instructor. Whether he is conscious of it or not, Devon’s very body may feel vulnerable since the Theroux text makes him question his embodiment of masculinity (a process that threateningly doubles back when his tutor too questions the appropriateness of his gendered performance). Like so many students, Devon struggles to engage with an argument that puts his identity at risk, and such vulnerability naturally prompts emotional expressiveness in his writing and his writing appointment. Dismissing Devon’s emotioned response is not only negligent but is potentially dangerous to his growth and learning attitude and may discourage critical engagement and investment. Because both his grade and his body are “on the line”, disengagement will only deepen the divide between his body and his mind. Without a forum in which to explore his embodied, emotional response to this text, Devon may not be able to constructively use his feelings as a way into the text; instead, he may viscerally feel locked out and may intellectually shut down.

When teachers do not provide psychological support, students will rush to friends and family as Devon does. These are moments when we as teachers must be adept at our own emotional flexibility, balancing our fear of student emotion with our knowledge of writing as a process of working though and responding to our feelings. Devon reminds us that dialoguing with difference as a writer is both a critical and an embodied emotional experience, a double gesture the author-instructor of this editorial likely wouldn’t support, since he suggests that a writer cannot be emotional and critical at the same time. A “clearing of the emotional decks” and transcendence from the writing body is mandated. But, this is a view that necessitates an untenable division between the body and mind. In consequence, this instructor views Devon’s inability to control his emotions as a weakness that compromises his agency as a writer and thinker, as opposed to an agentive and intentional embodied response that can be skilfully deployed to make meaning and generate writing.

By labelling Devon’s emotions as private, the instructor makes them unspeakable and unnavigable. In Worsham’s (2001) view, the ways emotion has been disciplined to remain “just beyond the horizon of semantic availability” so that we are taught a limited means of emotional expression and identification are a primary form of “pedagogic violence”, meant to uphold the status quo in composition studies (p. 240; 232). That is, Devon’s feelings become a “phantom limb” he must learn to suffer in silence (pp. 247-51). The violence of a sundered limb highlights how we are unable to “adequately apprehend, name and interpret [our] affective lives” and thus are left to view emotion as a private, dangerous and mysterious threat to public reason (p. 240). While Worsham reminds us of the difficulties of discussing emotion with students given our limited vocabularies, I wonder what the outcome of this tutoring experience would have been had Devon been guided to use his emotional reaction to generate meaning in his textual analysis. Simply asking Devon questions about what emotions the article provoked, how his body responded viscerally and why he thought the text prompted certain physical reactions and not others could have gone a long way in this tutoring appointment and could have begun a process of recognising the shaping powers of the body.

Instead of suffering in silence, Devon could benefit from exploring his emotions as a writer, questioning their cultural placement as well as their connection to his lived experiences and felt knowledge. He could also be guided to become a careful reader, looking for places in the offensive text where the Theroux’s emotion inflects his argument, and Devon could use these inflections to understand that where there is reason present, there is emotion as well. Unfortunately, Devon is instead drawn a picture of academic discourse as more a convenient fiction – an absolutely frigid reasoning process (“sharp”, “cold”, “crisp”, “icy”, “cool”) – than a practice engaged in by people living in real communities, dialoguing with one another.<sup>7</sup> What the author-instructor of the *Chronicle* article misses is the ways in which a “clear and coolheaded” approach toward writing is just another emotional stance so that he is merely valuing certain emotions over others as opposed to advocating for the dispassionate argumentation he seems to think possible.

In sum, guidance could show Devon how to use emotion as a critical, embodied lens and teach him to view it as a powerful force and not just a subjective bias that shuts down critical thought or interrupts learning. The most effective pedagogies are ones that provide students cognitive *and* affective support: “by creating learning contexts to address learners’ emotions and thereby lessening defence, instructors can help students make more conscious and therefore more powerful composing choices” (Chandler, 2007, p. 67). The development of their writing and their writing bodies is on the line.

### **Emotions and the role of the personal**

It is this myth of bodily modesty that Jane Tompkins (1987) tackles in her yet-important “Me and My Shadow”, as she calls for us to give up the pretence of the disembodied and impersonal voice in our writing and accept the real body, “the

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<sup>7</sup> This kind of “cold-hearted logic” is also dangerous in that it may reproduce models of adversarial argumentation. See Jane Tompkins (1992). *Fighting words*. In *West of everything* (pp. 227-33). New York: Oxford University Press, and Deborah Tannen (1999) *The argument culture: Stopping America’s war of words*. New York: Random House.

human frailty of the speaker...his emotions, his history” that supports the writing persona as well as the “moment of intercourse with the reader – acknowledgement of the other person’s presence, feelings, needs” (p. 175). Far from simply advocating a “touchy-feely” pedagogy, Tompkins highlights the importance of paying attention to feelings as they reflect our socio-historical placement in order to understand how they shape our values and perceptions of reality – and thus, the voices within our writing. Our continuing preference for impersonal academic discourse over Tompkins’ brand of hybridised, personal narrative-cum-argument exhibits our underlying fear of emotion, a fear that ultimately denies students the possibility of passionate investigation and argumentation.<sup>8</sup>

That emotions should have such a public pedagogical role is denied by the author-instructor in question. His denial highlights a reactive fear that acknowledging emotion encourages a role transfer from teacher to parent, inviting a level of intimacy that prompts confession. After relating Devon’s emotional “outburst”, this instructor discusses two additional instances of anger expressed by other students to show the rampant epidemic of these so-called tantrums. The first involves a male student in his writing class who refused to discuss a paper, because he disagreed with this instructor’s definition of freedom, and the second was upset when this instructor suggested she complete an alternative assignment on Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972) because of an absence. It seems this female student disliked the Atwood novel so much that she believed the assignment to be an unfair punishment. The instructor has less to say about his male student’s display of anger than his female student, which may validate the ways anger is gendered in patriarchal systems so that male anger, even when undesired, is understood as righteous, whereas female anger is considered selfish and dismissed.<sup>9</sup> It is nonetheless worth noting that the author makes visible a display of female anger, even if the difference between representing it and validating it remains. Noting how his female student’s offence surprises him, given his understanding of her as a “good” student prior to this “tantrum”, the instructor describes this student as acting “like a 3-year-old who’s been handed a bowl of spinach” (Backus, 2009, p. B24).

As his gendered infantilisation of this student underscores, this instructor reimagines himself as her parent. In doing so, he seems to insist that to accommodate student emotion is necessarily to situate ourselves as nurturers. But “receiv[ing] the language of the student and attempt[ing] to work with it”, as Elizabeth Flynn (1989) recommended years ago, does not necessarily feminise our role as teachers. Listening to and genuinely validating this student’s anger does not entail passive acceptance or simple validation; however, it does require us to follow up on these emotional

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<sup>8</sup> Personal writing, the kind of writing I can only assume the author of “Freshman Comp Tantrums” would find unacceptable, is, of course, an established method of validating the self as a thinking *and* feeling being. Expressivism has a history of honouring writers’ attachments and feelings and recognising the constitutive link between affect and thought. As iconic expressivist Peter Elbow (1990) has argued, “[b]ecause personal writing invites feeling does not mean that it leaves out thinking; and because it invites attention to the self does not mean that it leaves out other people and the social connection” (p. 10). Expressivism may work upon different epistemological tenets than embodied writing pedagogies, as it claims the self as mind and not necessarily body-mind; however, both approaches share an appreciation of thinking and feeling as co-authors of meaning.

<sup>9</sup> In her essay, “Anger and insubordination,” Elizabeth Spelman (1989), beginning with Aristotle’s discussion of anger, points out that the prohibition on women’s anger maintains their subordination and encourages their silence in patriarchies.

responses by asking students *why* a particular text angers, encouraging them to use their emotions to generate a response that is not only critical but is also impassioned. A balanced reaction could mitigate the instructor’s fear that he may not be “teaching students but...raising overgrown kids. I would have never guessed that teaching would come to feel like being in a dysfunctional family” (Backus, 2009, p. B24).

## GATEKEEPERS OF EMOTION

*Jim and Laura:* Two of my most dedicated students from a first-year writing class approach me at the conclusion of our final class meeting. Both express their gratitude at what they’ve learned over the semester and claim to identify as writers as a result of the class. Jim shakes my hand and leaves. The emotional expressiveness he’s been taught because of his gender feels acceptable here. However, Laura looks at me, pauses awkwardly, looks away and then says, “OK. Well, thanks again.” I understand that the pause was the space for a friendly embrace or words of affection neither of us can muster. As it is, we both feel unable to navigate our roles and our mutual appreciation. I can’t help but feel a sense of loss.

If we ignore the ways emotion is always present in student-teacher relationships, we might conclude, as the author of the *Chronicle* article does, that attending to student emotion is a sign of a defunct classroom. But if we accept the ways the teacher-student relationship is always already interpersonal and embodied, we may begin to receive it as a site of feeling. Lad Tobin (1996) suggests this, when he investigates his anger at reading the male students’ personal narratives, which tend to rely heavily on gendered stereotypes. Rather than simply dismissing these narratives as uncritical and cliché, Tobin remarks, “if I can be patient enough to withstand the initial angry response many male students have to my authority and the initial angry response that I in turn have to their behaviour, I often find that a different student and different narrative emerge” (p. 173). Tobin’s recommendation presupposes a teacher who is not only patient, but one who is also aware of his/her own emotions and the affective nature of the classroom environment. In simple terms, to take Tobin’s advice seriously means we must be aware that our resistance to and sometimes denial of students’ feelings is an emotional reaction based on our own embodied discomfort and normalised uptake of feeling rules as gatekeepers of the academy. Like Tobin’s initial responses to his students, when we respond to students’ anger or other emotion with incredulity, we only reinscribe a privatised understanding of emotion as better left to personal affairs and not as a viable resource for public rhetoric. In so doing, “we become resisting readers, unable or unwilling to read behind and beneath the conventions” (Tobin, 1991, p. 163).

Dawn Skorczewski’s (2000) analysis of teachers’ reactions to student cliché might be helpful to remember here. In her analysis of students’ struggles to stitch together old knowledge with new, she finds that students often use easy clichés in their academic writing to the frustration of their teachers. But, lest we jump to judgement, Skorczewski’s remarks that “critical thought [may be] a kind of safe house for us in the same way that cliché can be for our students” (p. 234). In other words, teachers judge our students’ conceptions and expressions of self based on the ways we have ourselves been taught to mistrust personal and emotional language in favour of the discursive certainty of the critical, poststructuralist self. Acknowledging the limitations of this model of subjectivity and replacing it with a notion of writing

bodies via embodied writing pedagogies may encourage us to revise pedagogical rules that dismiss emotion and may prompt awareness of emotional positioning as a teachable skill in the writing classroom. Simply recognising the clichéd manner in which we approach student emotion is a step in the right direction: “the teacher who acknowledges the beliefs she brings to the conversation is equipped to listen to her students more carefully than the teacher who holds her beliefs so closely that she can no longer see them as beliefs” (Skorczewski, 2000, p. 236).

The flippant ending of the editorial I’ve been covering reveals the author’s inability to do just this. As such, it highlights a final, related fear regarding the presence of emotion in writing pedagogy. If emotions are understood as the private, sole property of the individual and not situated, embodied knowledge, then they are better left for the therapist and not the teacher. The *Chronicle* article echoes this viewpoint by closing with the instructor’s self-consolation that, even if he can’t teach students to respond critically, perhaps another teacher will. As for him, “if nothing else works, there’s always therapy” (Backus, 2009, p. B24).

While flippant, the instructor reminds us of an important congruency here. Even if it makes us uncomfortable to investigate it, the teacher-student relationship shares much with the psychotherapist-patient relationship. Tobin (1991) explores writing teachers’ deep anxieties over therapeutic models of teaching and claims that there is much to be learned from these models as they make use of the unconscious and highlight the workings of interpersonal relationships. He notes that these relationships are both dyads contingent on an authority figure and certain hierarchies of power that invite transferences of emotion (p. 341). Because these dynamics are inevitable, Tobin advocates awareness of them as opposed to naïve denial, simply because compositionists find such emotional terrain frightful. It’s not as simple as hoping that if “we don’t talk about this, it will go away” (p. 342). While he never suggests that writing teachers think of themselves as therapists or encourage their students to do so, he recommends analysing the ways we “meddle” with our students’ emotional lives and the ways they meddle with ours (p. 342).<sup>10</sup> The risk lies not in the emotional experience occurring but in failing to acknowledge and deal productively with it.

Ultimately, though, the therapy model is itself handicapping as it encourages us to think of emotions as private and cognitive, often by specifically connecting them to unconscious drives. As she searches for suitable modes of inquiry to investigate the role of emotions in education, Boler (1999), from whom I take my definition of emotion, argues that psychoanalytical models tend to overemphasise the master discursive categories of desire and the unconscious, leaving these terms rather empty and haplessly detached from the actual practice of teaching. Instead, she argues for “complementary theories of emotions as they shape our material experience” (p. 16). I agree with Boler’s deployment of alternative, materialist rubrics for emotion. Recognising the material situatedness of emotion productively complicates the view of pedagogy as therapy, since it introduces the matter of the classroom, namely the

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<sup>10</sup> Wendy Bishop (1993) agrees with Tobin’s message in “Writing In/As Therapy. She advocates this kind of awareness and reminds us that psychoanalytic discussions about writing may never be comfortable ones for writing instructors, but that they do point to the reasons why we teach writing in the first place, to help students uncover something about themselves and about the world in which they live.

texts or physical objects of knowledge represented by the text as well as the materiality of bodies, all of which challenge the dyadic nature of the therapeutic confessional session with an inherently more public, connected and fleshy structure.

Attending to feelings in embodied writing pedagogies not only insists that the body is involved in our meaning-making processes, but also that it conditions our system of knowledge from the very start. This recognition positions authors as writing bodies, and positions feelings as sources of embodied knowledge. A focus on writing bodies challenges the lore of our field and indicates a concern with how writers *experience* their embodiment and *practise* it, starting with the felt experience of being a body in the world. As we develop these pedagogies, the capacity of feeling can help us to construct an embodied praxis of writing that engages both body and mind. And a holistic approach may encourage our students to view their writing as “real world” writing and not just another performance in the interest of “doing school”. Along the way, this embodied method of writing may help students find balance and compassion as writers. The formation of an embodied ethics of writing starts at the level of our feelings, understood to generate more possibilities than problems.

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