

Emotional Labor The Pink-Collar Duties of Teaching

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Abstract

Community college instructors play a critical role in educating economically and educationally disadvantaged students. Two-year institutions have an open-door policy giving any individual who desires an education an opportunity for post-secondary learning. Yet, I argue, this mission of leveling the “educational” playing field is made possible by the emotional labor that predominantly female community college professors perform. That is, female teachers spend more time nurturing and caring for their students by listening empathetically to their problems, providing social service information, and spending countless hours working closely with them, among numerous other “caring” tasks that sustain these students and keep them in the college system. Emotional labor is critical to the well-being of the student and to the institution. Unfortunately, it is overlooked and dismissed as a maternal (feminine) act of kindness. As a result, emotional labor is not seen as work and female instructors are not compensated for their valuable labor.

Keywords

emotional labor, invisible work, deep acting, nurturing, working-class

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Prologue

My 9:00 a.m. composition class is about to begin. I look over the lesson plan one last time, as if willing myself to cover all the points I have jotted down. Just as I am lifting myself out of my seat, a student knocks on the door looking tired and distressed. I have worked closely with this particular student, and have come to know her quite well. She has been with me for three semesters, two semesters of developmental English, and now my college composition course. Feeling comfortable with me, she has shared many stories about her twin boys and about being twenty-six and a single parent. Numerous times she has expressed gratitude for my gentleness and compassion. I am flattered when she tells me that I give her courage and inspiration to finish her degree, despite her constant fatigue from raising two toddlers and the insecurities of believing that she is not smart enough. So this morning I brace myself, knowing that this student has yet another personal obstacle facing her, preventing

her from finishing her paper that was due over a week ago. As I open the door to greet her, I am full of anxiety because she will ask for yet another extension that I cannot give her. I try my best to hide this anxiety in order to listen to her empathetically as she explains how she was up all night attending to her very ill son and as a result could not finish her essay. When she hears that she will not be granted another extension and will receive a poor grade for her unfinished paper, she says quietly, "I understand"; tears well up in her eyes, and she leaves abruptly for the restroom. I stand in my office feeling guilty and frustrated. Instead of thinking about today's lesson plan, I am wondering if I am being unfair and whether I should go to the restroom to calm her. I decide against following her and go directly to class, but throughout the session I am somewhere else, replaying the office scene in my mind, analyzing how I could have handled it differently.

Teaching Challenges at a Two-Year Institution

I begin with this narrative because it captures the emotional yet invisible work in teaching. I am an English instructor at a community college in Central Florida. My institution reflects the demographics of many community colleges in this region: the average age of students attending this college is twenty-four; half of them are the first generation to attend college; seventy-seven percent of the student body is white; the average family income is working class to lower middle class; and approximately sixty percent of the students take at least one developmental course to prepare them for college-level material. Every semester, roughly ten to fifteen percent of my students are labeled as nontraditional students, returning after several years' hiatus. Many of them are single parents, full-time workers, and the struggling poor.

Although the community college in South Florida where I taught previously was much more ethnically and racially diverse and the students overall were a bit

more cosmopolitan, the pedagogical strategies required to engage diverse learners and the amount of energy and caring invested into teaching were no different. Overall I find the students at a community college very needy and lacking a strong educational foundation, due to the open-door policy that accommodates below-college-level students. This does not mean that these students are less capable and talented than their peers at a four-year institution. Every semester I am amazed by the diverse talents found in one classroom: semi-professional dancers and singers, nationally competing surfers, local musicians, and computer-whiz entrepreneurs. But the reality is that many of these students are academically weak. I always have a group of students who are educationally prepared to handle more challenges and endlessly curious to sustain their enthusiasm through demanding work, but these students are the minority. Many need to learn basic skills such as how to manage time, study, take notes, and write complete sentences and coherent paragraphs, while learning the more advanced academic skills necessary for their college degrees. This makes teaching both rewarding and challenging: I have to teach college-level skills while at the same time trying to fill educational gaps so that my students can handle the material they are learning. This can be daunting and exhausting for the students and for me. I find that I need to take on various roles in order for my students to obtain both basic and college-level skills: mentor, advisor, teacher, and entertainer; and to play the roles successfully, I need lots of energy.

I do not resent taking on these extra roles. In fact, I delight and take pride in them. I enjoy teaching immensely, and particularly enjoy the contact I have with the students, both inside and outside the classroom. I also feel an obligation to advocate for students and assist them in any way possible, especially the nontraditional students such as the young woman I mentioned earlier. I identify with them: I, too, come from a working-class family and was the first generation to attend college.

In general, I find my female colleagues who also come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are the ones willing to mentor and nurture their students. This does not mean that my middle-class counterparts are not advising and counseling their students. Rather, it is the working-class identification that makes working-class teachers hyperaware of their students' struggle to fit into academia while dealing with the economic chaos in their lives. In addition, the gender socialization of womanhood reinforces the ethos of caring that influences female teachers to nurture their students. Women learn and are expected to be caretakers from a very early age, from the toys they are given, such as dolls and kitchen sets, to the television programs they watch that identify girlhood with caring for friends and maintaining social networks. Thus, at the intersection of class and gender, working-class female academics bring a certain sensibility to their classroom and to their teaching that seeks to connect on both a professional and a personal level with their students. Working-class professor Laura Weaver (1993) states, "I have a natural empathy for students with working-class backgrounds" (p. 118), and she expresses this empathy by spending large amounts of time mentoring them indefatigably. This does not mean, however, that I nurture and advise my students solely because of my working-class background. Perhaps I do it more willingly and eagerly than some of my colleagues; yet to a certain degree, we are all expected to comfort and nurture our students. This is particularly true for female instructors because of the social expectations of women as caregivers, regardless of whether we fulfill these responsibilities with compassion or resentment. Because many of our students are so academically needy, we have to invest more into nurturing and guiding them if they are to be successful.

Teaching: Ethos of Caring

In my sixth year of teaching at a community college, I can unhesitatingly say that my primary

role as an instructor is to nurture: that is, to perform emotional labor. The term "emotional labor" was first coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her pivotal book, *Managed Hearts* (1981; 2003), where she explores how certain jobs, mainly those in the service sector and those predominantly held by women, demand that their workers "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7). Building upon Hochschild's definition, feminist scholar Amy Wharton (1999) writes that "emotional labor refers to the effort involved in displaying organizationally sanctioned emotions by those whose jobs require interaction with clients or customers and for whom these interactions are an important component of their work" (p. 160). Further exploring the social ramifications of this term, professor of sociology Ronnie Steinberg and professor of economics Deborah Figart (1999) argue, "Emotional labor emphasizes the relational rather than task-based aspect but not exclusively in the service economy. It is labor-intensive work; it is skilled, effort-intensive, and productive labor. It creates values, affects productivity, and generates profit" (para. 2). It may be sound curricula and polished scholarly work that provide institutions of higher education their credibility and prestige, but it is emotional labor that brings in and retains the students. Simply put, emotional labor keeps institutions of higher education accessible to everyone, particularly the educationally and economically disadvantaged; it invests in poorly prepared students and students who have not yet discovered their place in academia and sustains them through difficult and demanding course work; and it builds a connection between instructor and student, creating a relationship that is mutually rewarding and fulfilling. In "Emotional Labour in the Classroom" (2001), Heather Price underlines the importance of emotional labor, claiming that "teachers have to be emotionally alive and present in the relationships they have with their pupils in order for creative learning to

take place” (p. 162).

I am not claiming that content knowledge and pedagogy play a secondary role to emotional labor. Rather, I contend that emotional labor is an integral part of teaching and course content, particularly at a community college. For example, many of my students would feel intimidated, overwhelmed, and put off by the material I teach, if I did not present it as a game or as an entertaining fact connected to popular culture. There is nothing inherently frightening about, say, thesis statements or dangling modifiers, but a sizeable and growing percentage of community college students lack foundational skills, and, hence, a two-year institution becomes a three-year-plus program to get the students ready for college and then deliver college material to them. And within this time frame, many community college students’ lives are jam-packed with work and family obligations. For some of my adult students, the time they sit in class may be their only time all day off their feet. Needless to say, they are tired—bone tired. Learning about paragraph formation while fighting fatigue and worrying about incoming bills is indeed a Herculean challenge. Kathleen Sheerin-Devore, an English instructor at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, intimately understands the daily struggles community college students are encountering. She writes, “While middle-class and upper-class students work within the safety net of financial security, most students in the two-year-college system work without a net, as they precariously balance on the razor’s edge of economic instability” (2007, p. B34). And, unfortunately, economic instability creates emotional crisis: the inability to pay the rent leads to fear of eviction, homelessness, vulnerability, and shame. So it is not realistic to think that students leave their emotional baggage at the door when they enter the classroom. As much as a nagging headache can distract one’s attention, so can a gaping heartache and an empty pocket.

Cognizant of how the struggles of life spill

over into the classroom, Bellas (1999) articulates the ever-expanding role of the instructor to meet his/her students’ growing emotional and academic needs, stating, “As at other levels, postsecondary teaching involves far more than simply imparting knowledge. Professors help students mature intellectually and emotionally; to motivate and stimulate student interest. In short, professors *nurture* young minds” (p. 98). One of the five components Bellas (1999) cites as engaging students is entertainment: “in other words, put on a show. Being knowledgeable about one’s subject matter is not enough; professors must convey that knowledge” (p. 98). This type of entertainment takes energy—lots of energy—and creativity, both aspects of emotional labor.

The academic challenges that community college students bring to the class require that their instructors be pedagogically creative and dynamic in order to engage them in conversation and make the material they are teaching relevant to their day-to-day realities. Many community college students have polished other forms of knowledge, whether they be dancing, painting, or navigating the welfare system. Several of my students, particularly the non-traditional students, are street- and life-savvy. The fact that they are in school proves this: they have survived years of poverty, bad marriages, bounced checks, and unreliable cars. Unfortunately, their forms of knowledge are not valued as much as the traditional cognitive knowledge of reading and writing. These are the authorized ways of knowing in academia. This is why several of my students are anxious and unsure of themselves. My role is to reassure them that indeed there is a space for them in academia, while providing them the critical skills to be successful so that they can remain in college. This is not an easy feat, nor did I expect it to be. But what I did not expect was that I was going to spend 60% of my time nurturing and cajoling and reassuring. As I mentioned earlier, I do this eagerly. There are days when I feel completely connected to my students, as if we are

sharing an invincible force carrying us throughout the day. But I would be dishonest if I did not admit that there are days when I do not have the time or energy to comfort and nurture my students. I am depleted; I have just enough energy to make it through the end of the day. I merely want to teach subject-pronoun agreements or omniscient narration. Period. That is it. But student A just lost her grandmother to breast cancer, student B is working two jobs to keep his family above poverty level, and student C broke up with her boyfriend. I am not teaching automatons but real people who feel.

Community college students present unique challenges to the instructors. Their lives are complicated and some are just one step ahead of an economic or psychological crisis. Although I have a growing population of younger students who come from stable, middle-class families, I still have a sizeable number of students whose lives are a constant struggle. Community colleges are unique in this sense because these institutions, unlike universities where the tuition is much higher and the environment is much more competitive, are among the only remaining places where these educationally and economically disadvantaged students can go for a higher education.

In the past three semesters, I have had: one student whose abusive boyfriend was on campus looking for her; another student who came to my office after class and cried hysterically for an hour, pleading that I help her find a shelter for the night, because she had been kicked out of her house and had nowhere to go; and, just last week, a woman in my developmental English class who came into my office to explain to me why she was behind in her work and told me that she could barely keep her family out of poverty and that her car—her only means to get to work and school—was about to be repossessed because she was five months behind with her car payments. In the first case, I had to lock the student in my office and call the police. In the second, I called the women's program at my

institution and obtained a directory of social charities and organizations that I now keep posted next to my computer screen in my office. (So far I have used this list five times.) I was able to find her a temporary place, and somehow she managed to stay in school for the remaining semester. And in the third case, I called my mother, a former social worker, to see what organizations were available to her for assistance. These are only three incidents, but I can list numerous others; and although these were not typical encounters for me, they were not atypical, either. The reality is that many students at a community college are under tremendous emotional and economic pressure, and it is impossible as an instructor to not be affected by the challenges that face them.

Women and Emotional Labor

This emotionally complex and exhausting job called teaching is predominantly being handled by women. Since the 19th Century in the United States, teaching has been a pink-collar job: that is, it has been seen as a woman's job. Nancy Folbre, author of *The Invisible Heart* (2001) notes that by 1888, 63% of American teachers at the primary and secondary level were women and schools had shifted their focus from discipline and independence to the "ethos of nurturance" (p. 34). Teachers at community colleges and technical schools, which are seen as extensions of secondary school, are also viewed as pink-collar workers. Universities, however, are held to a higher standard, where scholarship, as opposed to teaching, is the primary focus. And since the professor at a four-year institution spends less time in the classroom managing students than in his or her personal office focusing on scholarly writing and publishing, the job is not perceived as pink-collar, but as prestigious and respected work.

This historical division between primary and secondary teaching and college professorship explains the gender gap: "Teaching at the college and university level has traditionally been a male-dominated field"

(Kemp, 1994, p. 223), while teaching at lower levels has traditionally been a female-dominated field. In the past two decades, this has changed, though only at the college and university level. Since 1991, women have made great strides in academia, comprising close to 50% of the faculty in certain institutions (p. 223). “However,” as Kemp (1994) reminds us in *Women’s Work: Degraded and Devalued*, “women are concentrated in the lower paid, less prestigious disciplines, at the lower academic ranks, and in the lower status, state institutions” (p. 223-4). This means that female professors and instructors teach more courses, deal with more students, and have less time to invest in scholarly work. In many ways, they are seen as teachers first, then scholars, which means they are expected to do the emotional labor—that is, to nurture and engage students—while their male colleagues have more time away from students and from dealing with the complexities of their lives to think and write. And in institutions where individuals are rewarded for their publications, and not for the number of students whom they successfully mentor, these low-ranked female professors are denied recognition and value. They are merely cogs in the wheel that carries and moves academia. Hence, they are penalized: fewer promotions, less personal time, and less money.

Moreover, the emotional labor involved in teaching is not viewed as true labor, but as instinctual. Thus, teaching as labor is stripped down to its barest form: passing on content knowledge and then evaluating the content through exercises and tests. The components of emotional labor—the nurturing, caring, reassuring, and entertaining aspects of teaching that make it possible for students to actually hear and absorb what we are saying—are perceived as personal attributes and personality traits that come from the heart.

Of course, male professors at elite research universities may (and I am sure some do) perform emotional labor. One could argue that they are more popular with the students if they are good entertainers and show

interest in their pupils. Yet their student interaction is viewed as a bonus, if you will, to their must-have qualities as thinkers, researchers, and writers. The bottom line is, they are scholars. Emotional labor is not a part of their unwritten job description, and they will not lose their jobs if they refuse to perform it. Simply put, they choose when and how to nurture, assure, and entertain their students.

In contrast, low-ranked professors and instructors, predominantly women, as mentioned earlier, are required to perform emotional labor if they want tenure or a renewed teaching contract. In this sense, they have little control over their emotional labor. They must put on a smile, soften their voices, and silence their anger when dealing with difficult and tiresome students, to appear inviting and nonthreatening. If they do not, there may be serious consequences.

Low Ranking of Emotional (“Invisible”) Labor

Although I am in a community college where pedagogy is the primary focus, so that there is no penalty for not publishing, I still find the teaching vs. scholarship duality disturbing. First, it positions teaching as if it were a mere distraction from the real intellectual work—writing and publishing. And second, it perpetuates a hierarchical power structure where those at the top teach less and publish more and those at the bottom teach more and publish less. The top is prestigious in title, time, and money; the bottom is the contrast. It models the bourgeois professorship vs. the proletariat instructorship: the bourgeois professors “own the means of production,” in that they claim ownership of ideas delivered at conferences and published in scholarly journals, while the proletariat instructors “own only their ability to work,” teaching behind closed doors in relative anonymity where they are evaluated by students and department chairs (Kemp 1994, p. 93). This hierarchy continues to be heavily gendered. The higher up one goes, the more males one sees ensconced in tenured professorial positions. Equally, the lower one goes, the

more females populate untenured, year-to-year contract teaching positions, teaching five and more courses a semester. Forty-nine percent of faculty at community colleges nationwide are female, compared to only twenty-four percent of faculty at universities (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twmbly, 2007; Banerji, 2006). There are more female instructors teaching at community colleges and as part-time employees at universities. Hence, gender plays a critical role when one is talking about community college teachers.

Furthermore, as an English instructor, I am aware of the gendered hierarchical structure that places the field of humanities at the bottom. Tokarczyk and Fay (1993) contend that teaching in the field of humanities is “a service-oriented profession” (p. 15). Referring to colleges as “patriarchal families” where administrators function as the father, natural science as the eldest son, humanities as the mother, and students as the children, Dominick La Capra (1993) states, “The role of the humanists is to stay at home and take care of the kids, usually in and through a teaching schedule that is significantly heavier than that of the natural, or even the social scientists . . .” (as cited in Tokarczyk & Fay, p. 15). My department reflects this: out of twelve full-time professors, only one is male. We are the only department in our college, outside of the nursing program, that is predominantly female, and I would argue that we are one of the most labor-intensive departments on campus: for a normal load of five courses with twenty-two students in each, we read over the semester the required amount of six thousand words per student. This means that every semester we are expected to read and comment on 660,000 words written by 110 students.

This vertical power structure that locates emotional labor at the very bottom and a complete removal from caring and nurturing at the very top is a problematic one. Let us imagine another power structure, one that is horizontal, where teaching is not seen as a dreaded feminine task that keeps one from indulging fully in

scholarship, but is rather seen as a craft that requires creativity, talent, and knowledge and receives respect and recognition for the important responsibility of preparing the next generation for an ever-changing world. It is a horizontal power structure that recognizes the time and energy required to teach a class full of eager and not-so-eager minds, and so ensures that everyone is given a course load that does provide ample time for ongoing interactions with students. And this power structure, in contrast to a competitive vertical one, allows instructors time to think creatively, so that they remain not only abreast of their fields, but also alive intellectually and psychically, fresh for their students. Unfortunately, this horizontal power structure does not exist: well, not entirely. Community colleges certainly come closer to this paradigm than any other institution of public, higher education that I am aware of. Yet even community colleges fail to uphold this ideal, since their teachers are loaded down with too many courses and too many service commitments, such as committee meetings and student advising. Because their emotional labor is seen as a labor of love, one that women do instinctually, their time spent with students or dealing with their problems is not looked upon as rigorous, demanding, and valuable work.

Developmental Course Operating on Emotional Labor

There is plenty of literature on the gendered work of teaching. My colleagues and I are familiar with this literature and we know that we are not fully compensated for our work, but we continue to care and nurture because we choose to. Even if I were paid an extra \$5,000 dollars a semester, I would not care more. But in order to get monetarily compensated, we must first be recognized for performing real and important **labor**. In particular, we deserve recognition for our emotional labor, since we are enabling at-risk students not only to obtain associates' degrees but to progress to four-year institutions. We ensure that the doors of academia are kept wide open to students of all socio-economic levels.

It is we, community college professors, who level the playing field of higher education. We do so because we have solid content knowledge and effective pedagogical tools, but mostly, because we spend hours upon hours caring and nurturing.

Bellas (1999) contends that emotional labor in itself is not negative or negatively experienced. I find it extremely rewarding. I treasure the exchanges I have with my students. I also enjoy the diverse personalities in my classroom. I see myself as the maestro trying to bring a cacophony of different backgrounds and ideologies into a harmony of class discussions and activities. But this is no small feat. There are times when I have to monitor my own body language closely so as not to appear frustrated or disappointed.

This is especially true for the developmental courses I teach that requires an excessive amount of emotional labor. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, it is untenured female instructors who teach these courses. Developmental courses are extremely challenging for various reasons: the students' immaturity, their diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disabilities, and the huge gaps in their education. My current English developmental course this semester is a perfect example. I have twenty-one students whom I meet twice a week for an hour and fifty minutes, teaching basic grammar and writing. Close to three-quarters of them have Attention Deficit Disorder. A couple of the older students, who have come back to school after raising a family, need a refresher in grammar. The majority, however, were poor students in high school who somehow got lost in the system and did not get the academic attention they needed. So here I am, with all twenty-one of them in a class that I am expected to run smoothly, teaching a subject that, as one student told me clearly on day one, "sucks." Oh boy! And I somehow have to deliver engaging lesson plans on grammar to a large and poorly skilled classroom of students for close to two hours. I jokingly describe my role as a mother who has to serve broccoli with lots of

cheese over it to hide this green vegetable so that her children will eat it. So I "hide" grammar behind games: concentration, jeopardy, matching, and poker. I also find that I have to be the endearing mother who cheers on her children to create enthusiasm for these learning games: I cheer, laugh, jump, and cajole. By the end of the class, I am not merely tired, I am completely worn out. I have to engage in all these histrionics just to teach parallelism and relative phrases. In my developmental courses, I spend most of my energy on emotional labor. I would even say that their success depends on it. If I simply taught parallelism and then quizzed the students on it, half the students would flunk.

I do not want to walk away from teaching, but I do need the time to "regroup" for another challenging encounter; unfortunately, with 150 students and six courses, I do not always have time to do so. I am often so tired at the end of the week that I can barely do anything over the weekend but stay very still and read.

Consequences of Emotional Labor: Burnout

What if I do not handle arrogant and difficult students with what they might perceive as maternal care, and do not make my developmental courses exciting and entertaining? What happens is that I get penalized at teacher evaluation time. Bellas (1999) contends that "students expect female professors to be nicer than male professors and judge them more harshly when they are not" (p. 99). Moreover, in "The Feminine Critique," Lisa Belkin (2007) captures the conundrum female professionals find themselves in, listing the unwritten rules women are expected to follow: "Don't get angry. But do take charge. Be nice. But not too nice. Speak up. But don't seem like you talk too much" (p. G1). These socially scripted gender roles are ingrained in our students. I know that those students who are coming to my office talking about abusive boyfriends, difficult job schedules, crappy old cars, and unpaid bills are not going to their male professors to share their vulnerabilities. Although I am barely old

enough to be their parent, so that I am not yet seen as their away-from-home mother, I am and I do play the older, caring sister. Being a woman, I naturally assume this role; that is, their expectation of me to nurture and care is projected upon me, and I have been socialized to take on this role. Feminist scholar Ivy Kennelly (2007) reminds us, “women and men operate with different moral orientations, with men focused on separation and women focused on connectedness” (para. 8). Men are expected to fill the role of authority, whereas women are expected to fill the role of nurturer. There are penalties for both groups if they fail to carry out these roles.

I do have a choice to nurture, though. I consciously choose to do so because I genuinely care about my students as full human beings. Not only have I been socialized to take on this role, but I have also been shaped by my working-class background, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Like Sheerin-Devore (2007), “when the challenges of poverty interrupt students’ work, I see it as my job to help them complete their assignments amid the chaos of their lives” (p. B34). However, although nurturing is a choice, it is also a task that I am expected to perform, so that if I do not perform it, or if my students feel that I am not caring enough, I am penalized by poor teacher evaluations. The fact that these evaluations are in my permanent teaching file does play a role in whether I get another year’s contract to teach, means that the choice to nurture is not really a choice. To put it bluntly: I must perform emotional labor if I am to remain gainfully employed.

While I may gain some sense of security by performing emotional labor, it comes at a personal price: burnout. There is a plethora of literature exploring the causes and effects of teacher burnout. In a study entitled, “Beyond Demand–Control: Emotional Labour and Symptoms of Burnout in Teachers” (2006), Gerard Naring, Mariette Briet, and Andre Brouwers contend that surface and deep acting lead to teacher burnout. They write, “Teaching is a profession that requires

almost constant interaction with students. . . . In order to perform these tasks [teaching, grading, disciplining, praising] adequately, teachers have to show or exaggerate some emotions” (p. 303). Expressing emotions that one does not genuinely feel or concealing emotions that one feels strongly is exhausting, they argue, and, if this is done repetitively, without ample time to recuperate and replenish oneself, it can begin to take a physical and psychological toll on one’s well-being. This is a serious issue. Burnout among teachers can lead them not only to appear mechanical, as if always on autopilot, but also to become completely disconnected from their environment, unaware of how their students are absorbing and understanding the material being taught. A burned-out teacher is one who is in danger of becoming apathetic, unable to handle any complications outside of class that can have a direct impact on the student’s performance in class.

One solution to this problem of burnout is to teach and enforce self-advocacy skills. Professor of Early Childhood Education Jennifer Sumsion (2000) contends that teachers who listen to and absorb their students’ pain and heartaches and then counsel them how best to address these problems are doing a disservice to the very ones they think they are helping. First, she argues, “assumptions that caring requires disclosure and emotional intimacy ignore the power imbalance between students and university teachers” (p. 172). Teachers are ultimately the authority figures; they must set clear guidelines and evaluate students accordingly. In order to do this ethically and fairly, instructors have to assert their authority; that is, they must provide a stable foundation for their students wherein rules, criteria, class etiquette, and teacher-student relationship are rooted. Ignoring these formalities can create confusion for the students who may not be aware of what is expected from them and what is appropriate behavior.

Furthermore, students who are encouraged or allowed to “dump” their problems onto their teachers

may not be learning to advocate and take responsibility for themselves. An instructor who searches for answers to help address or alleviate the student's problem or who grants permission for extensions and revisions with few and lax guidelines is not adequately preparing the student for a market, whether in school or in the workforce, that demands accountability and productivity. A student who repeatedly misses class because of, say, a sick child and is excused every time, is being set up up to expect her future employers to do the same. She may not have a realistic understanding of her role in the competitive job market. Moreover, she may not fully understand how formal relationships operate between those who supervise and evaluate and those who follow rules and meet deadlines. This does not mean that instructors should follow rigid rules, but Sumsion argues that they must find a balance between flexibility and authority.

This balance, however, is sometimes quite difficult to achieve. Sumsion (2000) acknowledges this, stating, "I struggle to enact my belief in the importance of caring, without being drawn into the abyss of endless and ultimately disempowering emotional labour that caring can enact" (p. 172). Committed to helping her students while not exhausting herself, Sumsion (2000) envisions "caring [that] revitalises rather than depletes," where it is "not a one-way enterprise, but as a process of mutual empowerment and growth that takes place within the context of relationships that are *mutually* engaging and rewarding" (p. 174, her emphasis). This "collaborative caring" reminds teachers that their students must meet them halfway; that is, the teacher provides the tools but leaves it up to the student to use these tools to do their share of the work, whether that be meeting an extended deadline, finding a babysitter in order to attend classes, or making an appointment with a counselor to deal with painful personal issues.

Sumsion (2000) asserts, "I acknowledge the importance of students' well-being," but not at the expense of

myself, disputing the "implicit assumptions that their [students'] needs must always take precedence over my needs" (p. 172). This means that in a caring profession where I am expected to nurture and comfort, I have to remain vigilant about how much I am investing in my classes and in my students and to establish boundaries, even if it means saying no to a student or telling a student that she/he needs to confide in a counselor and not in me. Not only do I have a responsibility to encourage and promote self-advocacy skills for my students, but I also have an obligation to them and to myself to remain an intellectually fresh and vibrant instructor. This means that I must be in control of my emotional labor. Therefore, I have to be the one to speak up for myself and say, "I cannot help you now," despite feeling that I am failing my students. I have to live with this uncomfortable and conflicting emotion.

Epilogue

A few months ago, discussing with a colleague how needy some of my students were, I mentioned the student who came to my office requesting another extension and left in tears when she was not granted one. I shared with her how I cared for this student but was beginning to feel used, as if she was expecting me to make exceptions to fit her lifestyle. When I asked her how she would have handled this, she responded, "I want to nurture my students." Feeling guilty, as if by admitting fatigue I was a "bad," uncaring teacher, I immediately replied, "I do, too." End of conversation. But it is not the end of the conversation. I do want to nurture my students, but not every day. On some days I am emotionally capable of it, on others, I am not. Equally, there are times when I can be flexible and grant an extension or alter an assignment, and other times when I cannot.

Regardless of whether I want to nurture or not, nurturing is **labor**: work, energy, and time—lots of time; and I believe that I should be compensated for it. I deserve this, like every other teacher who does the

same. It is female work that needs to be recognized by more than a pat on the back and a “Wow, you are great with your students.” It is real work, and real work requires tangible rewards: more time and more money. Expecting compensation for my emotional labor does not make me more of a caring teacher. I am acutely aware of the myriad tasks of teaching and of the time and space I need to perform them successfully. I am also aware that until my work is valued and compensated as real labor, I am solely responsible for setting clear boundaries for my students and developing a “collaborative caring” relationship that “encourages students to become responsible and self-supporting” (Sumsion, 2000, p. 174). Still, time-starved and penny-short, I continue to connect with my students, knowing that at the end of the day indeed I have every right to feel bone-tired: emotional labor is hard work. ■■

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