

Emotional Fluency in Leadership: Can This Be Taught in the Classroom?

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As she began in her new role, our church's congregational moderator ordered several books on leadership to help equip herself for the challenges ahead. Her self-designed crash course in leadership assumed that the best and quickest way to learn about leadership is by gaining knowledge about strategies, obtaining a set of tools for analysis, and understanding behaviors related to leadership. Her initiative and commitment were commendable, and she served well in her role as moderator for the duration of her term. But what might have been missing in this approach to leadership development? What might she have gained by being in a classroom context focused on congregational leadership? If the class were primarily lecture-based, content acquisition again would have been framed as the most important path to leadership development. However, book knowledge and lecture material alone are inadequate for leadership formation. The argument of this essay is that for students to develop holistically into competent congregational leaders, the emotional dimension of personhood must be welcomed and attended to in the classroom.

As I've approached the challenge of teaching leadership in my own classroom, I've had the sense that the development of leaders had to involve more than giving my students information about leadership. This intuition has been fed by my reading over the years about the importance for pastors of attending to their own emotions.¹ It has also been fed by references to the emotional dimension that I've noticed sporadically in leadership literature.² This project emerges from my desire to flesh out that intuition for myself and for the sake of my students, who are the present and future leaders of our churches.

I will use the term *emotion* broadly to refer to the combination of a physiological response to a situation (e.g., a racing heart after being startled), feelings associated with that response (e.g., I'm scared), and secondary physical responses (e.g., body language). The terms *affect* and *feelings* will be used interchangeably with *emotion*, although I note the complexity in defining these terms both within and across various disciplines.³ My use of the term *emotional fluency* suggests that language acquisition is an apt metaphor for learning about our emotions. Emotional fluency involves going beyond learning a vocabulary to reach the point where the language of emotions and the meanings embedded in that language are used with fluidity to navigate the intersection of self and a given social context. I specifically avoid the term *emotional intelligence* because *intelligence* as commonly understood continues to privilege

¹One older work that has been important to me and that I still find remarkably relevant is: Gary L. Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984).

²For example, in: Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, "Know Your Tuning," in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 195-204.

³ For a good introduction to this complexity, see Sarah Rose Cavanagh, *The Spark of Learning: Energizing the College Classroom with the Science of Emotion* (Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2016), 15-21.

rationality.⁴ Additionally, the term *emotional intelligence* seems often to be used for the purpose of developing workplace effectiveness.⁵ The goal of my project differs from this.

Emotions are integral to who we are as people. We are created in the image of a God who expresses emotions ranging from delight to anger to compassion. In the life of Jesus, we see that he experienced a whole range of emotional expressions. Jesus was moved with compassion when he healed two blind men (Matt. 20:29-34). He was overcome with grief at the death of Lazarus (John 11:32-36). He describes his own joy, which he wishes upon his followers (John 15:8-11). He is flooded with anger (Mark 11:15-17). He gets stressed out in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). Then, as that night unfolds, he gets frustrated with his disciples who keep falling asleep (Mark 14:37-41). Finally, on the cross he experiences the shattering loneliness of being forsaken (Mark 15:34). Jesus is our example of the fullness of humanity, and in his example, we see a whole person who feels the full range of emotions. His life affirms that God designed people to be emotional beings.

Since leadership involves people, and people have emotional dimensions, good congregational leadership involves attending to one's own emotions and to the emotions of others. Leaders are obliged to be emotionally fluent. As Carson Reed puts it, "effective leadership requires an attentiveness to the varied dynamics of emotion in human relations. In other words, effective leadership requires affective sensitivity."⁶

Our modes of classroom education have historically worked against becoming more emotionally fluent. A long intellectual tradition in the West holds that rational, cognitive thinking is the best way to learn, to problem-solve, and to make decisions.⁷ Emotions have been viewed as clouding rational thinking and thus emotions have been seen as detrimental to the presumably best modes of learning and decision making. This has shaped our approaches to education. To give one small example, in a patriarchal system that equated reason with men and emotion with women, if a person cried in a classroom debate, that person was seen as moving outside the accepted and approved pattern of the dominant mode of discourse. Emotion has been assumed to hinder learning.

This disdain of emotion is problematic, however, because, as James K. A. Smith states, "the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it."⁸ William Kondrath similarly challenges the privileging of rationality when he states, "We may have grown up in a family and a culture that said feelings are less than thinking. When we collude in that hierarchy, we exercise a form of oppression against

⁴ I was first made aware of this in a personal conversation with Bill Kondrath, and later saw his discussion of it in: William M. Kondrath, *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities* (Herndon, Virginia: Alban, 2013), 18.

⁵ See, for example, Robin A. Majeski et al., "Fostering Emotional Intelligence in Online Higher Education Courses," *Adult Learning* 28, no. 4 (2017).

⁶ Carson E. Reed, "Motive and Movement: Affective Leadership through the Work of Preaching," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 13, no. 2 (2014): 65-66.

⁷ For one treatment of this, see Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (London: Penguin, 2005), 247-252.

⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 47.

ourselves.”⁹ If we are to be set free to lead in more fully human ways, affective fluency must be a core goal of education and must therefore be welcomed into the educational endeavor itself.

While this historically prominent rationalistic construct still holds great sway, dramatically different perspectives on the nature of emotions and their role in learning are emerging. Growing bodies of educational neuroscience and educational pedagogy literature explore and affirm the role of emotions in the classroom learning experience. We turn now to the first of these bodies of research.

Mind, Brain, and Education

A field of research known as Mind, Brain, and Education is using the tools of neuroscience to look at connections between emotion and cognition in the learning process. As I began my research for this article, I was working with the assumption that while emotions are important to the learning process, they constitute a fairly separate domain from cognition. Research in neuroscience has required me to change my assumptions. Studies are showing that emotion and cognition are highly intertwined in fascinating ways in the learning process; conceptualizing them as separate domains may be helpful at times, but in reality, seldom does one of these domains function independently from the other. In fact, some research is concluding that *all* cognitive learning includes an emotional dimension. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, a leading scholar in this field, puts it this way:

“... a revolution in neuroscience over the past two decades has overturned early notions that emotions interfere with learning, revealing instead that emotion and cognition are supported by interdependent neural processes. It is literally neurobiologically impossible to build memories, engage in complex thoughts, or make meaningful decisions without emotion.”¹⁰

And so, “emotions are not add-ons that are distinct from cognitive skills.”¹¹ Rather than detracting from rational thought, emotions are integral to rational thought processes.

In support of this claim, Immordino-Yang and Faeth describe findings from research that makes use of the Iowa Gambling Task (IGT) to explore relationships between emotions and cognitive learning.¹² In the IGT, participants with normal neurological brain functioning are seated at a table with four differing decks of cards placed before them. Gains or losses of varying amounts are associated with different cards. They can draw cards from any deck in an attempt to win money. The decks with the highest-reward cards also have the highest-loss cards. The players are not told anything about the decks or how to maximize their gains, but they begin to develop strategies for success as they learn which deck has the best cards for balancing risk and gain as they attempt to win money and avoid losing money.

⁹ Kondrath, 19.

¹⁰ Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, ed. *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience* (New York: W W Norton & Company, 2016), 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹² Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Matthias Faeth, "The Role of Emotion and Skilled Intuition in Learning," in *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience*, ed. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (New York: W W Norton & Company, 2016), 93-105.

The connection between emotion and learning became evident when this initial set of participants was compared with a set of participants who have ventromedial prefrontal cortex damage. This part of the brain is an area that mediates between emotion and cognition. While they retained normal cognitive abilities and performed as well on IQ tests as the control group, these patients were not able to integrate their rational understanding of a strategy and their experience in the game into an applied strategy in the game. Researchers concluded that the difference between the two groups is a result of whether emotion and cognition are integrated. The first group of subjects was guided by their emotional responses to make future choices that eventually formed a cognitive strategy. Their positive and negative emotional responses to cards drawn and the correlating gains and losses directed them to cognitive choices that worked in their favor. This process doesn't happen for the ventromedial prefrontal patients because they lack nonconscious emotional responses to the results of their choices. The problem was manifest in their everyday lives as well: although they could describe a past experience, they were not able to apply a past experience to choices for managing their lives in the present and thus they were in need of constant supervision.

Immordino-Yang and Faeth draw several conclusions based on their research.¹³ First, emotion guides cognitive learning. Emotional anticipation or emotional cues actually precede conscious decisions. These emotional antecedents influence the direction of a person's choices and learning. What may appear to be a purely rational choice is actually influenced by subtle anticipatory emotional responses, and so "emotion is guiding the learning of [a person] much like a rudder is guiding a vessel or airplane."¹⁴ For our focus on teaching leadership, this means that when a student reads about strategies for leading change, her cognitive embrace of an idea is influenced by which emotions connect for her to this domain. A subtle feeling of fear will likely influence her toward questioning or rejecting this change strategy, whereas a subtle feeling of excitement will likely influence her to learn more about this strategy and will likely lead to greater retention of the content knowledge.

Second, these emotions often function on the subconscious level. Participants in the studies could not necessarily identify their emotions during the game, but bodily responses like palm sweating indicated that emotions were present. So, although a person may not report feeling an emotion in relation to a decision or situation, emotion—however subtle—is still present. This means that if I ask a class how they are feeling about a discussion or a reading assignment and students do not report any emotional response, it does not mean emotions are absent. Indeed, they are inevitably present even though that presence is often unrecognized.

Third, the emotions connected with a given task or situation guide future behavior and choices in other contexts. So, for example, the emotional tone of feedback a student receives on a writing assignment will influence the student to look forward to or be wary of future situations that involve writing. In terms of teaching leadership, the emotional content generated by narratives and exercises in the classroom related to a certain strategy or paradigm will guide the direction of a student's choices when considering this strategy or paradigm in relation to a future real-life leadership situation.

Fourth, as educators, it is important for us to note the distinction between relevant and irrelevant emotions. A person may be excited or sad about something unrelated to the learning situation at hand, and in this case, the emotional content does not contribute to the

¹³ Ibid., 96-101.

¹⁴ Ibid., 97.

embedding of current learning and to future application. For example, a student whose mother just died may be feeling intense grief emotions during a class session that is focused on a leader's role in vision casting; because the student's grief is not a result of what is going on in the class, the grief emotion is not helpful for guiding the student's learning and future decisions related to vision casting. The need here in relation to learning is not for an instructor to try to eliminate emotions but to elicit and focus on *relevant* emotions. Being an effective teacher in this respect "involves skillfully cultivating an emotion state that is relevant and informative to the task at hand."¹⁵

A final conclusion drawn by Immordino-Yang and Faeth is that without emotion, learning is impaired. As the ventromedial prefrontal patients showed, factual knowledge without emotional connection does not lead to learning. Without an emotional connection to the positive or negative results of their choices in the game, they did not develop the anticipatory emotional responses that guide the development of strategies for success. Even when they were able to identify which decks of cards contained what type of cards, they were not able to apply this knowledge to successfully play the game. Immordino-Yang and Faeth link this point to classroom learning: "If emotions are not taken seriously when they occur and are not given appropriate room to influence decisions and thinking in the classroom, then the effective integration of emotion and cognition in learning will be compromised," and so little learning will actually take place and little application will be made in relevant contexts down the road.¹⁶

These conclusions should shape the way we understand the classroom context. Emotions are already present in our classrooms, whether we recognize this or not. Emotions in the classroom can be attended to, heightened, and reflected upon, but they do not wait for an invitation to show up. In fact, unless they are present—even unconsciously—no learning will take place. To enhance the learning of leadership, instructors need to consider how subject matter content is learned or becomes embedded by simultaneous emotional content.

Emotions and Pedagogy

This perspective on emotion and learning that is emerging from neuroscience is corroborated in current education and pedagogy literature. Educational methods that assume that the primary purpose of education is the transmission of information are being challenged. This means that the lecture format, long assumed to be the best way to teach, is having its privileged role challenged. While many of us still find a role for lectures, bell hooks argues that "the monologue [is] the least useful tool for the transmission of ideas."¹⁷ Her conception of "transmission" is not one-way, but involves an "engaged pedagogy" involving interactive relationships and mutual participation in the classroom.¹⁸ Her conception of "ideas" goes beyond cognitive knowledge and includes the experience of a de-colonialized classroom informed by feminism. Within this pedagogical framework, "emotional awareness and the expression of emotions *necessarily* have a place in the

¹⁵ Immordino-Yang and Faeth, in *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience*, 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁷ bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 44. This is the third book of her teaching trilogy.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

classroom.”¹⁹ The classroom remains a valued location for learning, but the way learning occurs is reconceptualized and includes an essential role for emotions.

Recognizing that emotions are present and important in the classroom is a start. The next step is proactively attending to them. As Cavanagh argues, instructors need to not only *recognize* the role of emotions in learning, but to actually *target* emotions if we want to motivate and educate students.²⁰ The richest learning occurs when we pay attention to or harness emotions in the classroom.

At a deep level, education is about making meaning. This task is limited by the raw materials at hand (the possibility of constructing a brick fireplace is ruled out if all you have on hand are wood planks). The meaning making process has significantly greater horizons of opportunity when emotions are validated for use in the process. As Shari Stenberg puts it, emotion should be “understood as one feature of meaning making, equal to other features, and thereby deserving of a legitimate role in pedagogical settings.”²¹ Aparna Mishra Tarc also connects emotion with meaning making: “The means by which the teacher regulates emotion affect students as people as well as their potential and emerging relationships to and productions of knowledge.”²² And so, Tarc says, “I want to suggest academic teachers attend to their practices of soliciting, supporting or denying emotion to analyse what emotion or its lack does to the learning enterprise and to our chance for making meaning of the objects we encounter in classrooms.”²³ Here we are challenged to consider the results of *not* attending to emotion in the classroom. Framing the challenge affirmatively, Tarc states, “A pedagogy that acknowledges thinking’s debt to feeling tends to the depth of the epistemological and social wounds that unfeeling and seemingly objective knowledge creates as well as to the infinite possibilities for an altered humanity that ‘being affected’ by learning promises to give.”²⁴ The meaning making endeavor has much greater potential when emotions are connected to it.

Shaping the Classroom Experience

To build on these perspectives regarding how emotion and cognition are connected in the learning process, we turn now to exercises and strategies for making visible and embracing emotions in the classroom.

Given the dominant constructs of education, many of our students do not view emotions as welcome in the classroom context. Therefore, instructors need to find ways to normalize the presence of emotions in the classroom in order to help students experience the value of attending to the emotional domain in the classroom context. One way to do this is for professors to simply state their views on emotions in the classroom and to describe why surfacing emotions can be important for the educational process. Sarah Cavanagh

¹⁹Ibid., 81. My italics.

²⁰Cavanagh, *passim*.

²¹ Shari Stenberg, "Teaching and (Re)Learning the Rhetoric of Emotion," *Pedagogy* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 360.

²² Aparna Mishra Tarc, "‘I Just Have to Tell You’: Pedagogical Encounters into the Emotional Terrain of Learning," *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 21, no. 3 (2013): 397.

²³ Ibid., 398.

²⁴ Ibid., 400.

makes the case that when professors are transparent with students regarding the reasons for choosing the various components of the learning environment, students have significantly better learning experiences.²⁵ So students benefit not only from being invited to respond emotionally, but also from being informed as to why this is important for the learning experience.

An approach I use to welcome and normalize emotions in a seminary course I teach on leadership is an “emotions as messengers” exercise developed by William Kondrath.²⁶ The exercise involves putting signs up on the walls around the classroom with the names of six different families of emotions: powerful, joyful, peaceful, mad, sad, and scared.²⁷ Each family of emotions is then described to the class, as well as the primary message connected to each emotion and the problem of emotional substitution. Then students are invited to get up and stand next to the emotion they were *most* allowed to express in their family of origin. Time is taken to hear from a few volunteers as to why they chose where they’re standing. Next, students are asked to move to the emotion they were *least* allowed to express in their families of origin and time is allowed for debriefing. Finally, students are asked to move to the emotion they tended to *substitute* for the least allowed emotion and further debriefing occurs. This exercise usually leads students to reflect and process on numerous levels, but in relation to leadership specifically, students who equate being a good leader with always feeling (and appearing) competent are invited to realize that in a given situation, their deepest feeling may in fact be fear, and this feeling is valid. Recognizing and allowing themselves to own that feeling will actually empower them to be better leaders than if they substituted the feeling of fear with the feeling of being competent or powerful. They will be better able to care for themselves in the midst of future situations and they will be better able to own their limits. Unpacking the full range of formation that flows from this exercise is beyond the scope of this essay; the point here is that the exercise and the space to process it communicate strongly that emotions are welcome in the context of this classroom. These sorts of strategies, exercises, and comments help send the message that emotions are not ancillary to the learning process.

Tension

We’ve seen from neuroscience research that positive emotions are significant for guiding the development, retention and implementation of rational choices. Positive emotions also lead to higher motivation among learners, and when students view an instructor positively, they learn more from a course.²⁸ Additionally, a student’s positive emotions in relation to a topic increases curiosity, which leads to further learning.²⁹ But emotions that are often viewed as negative or uncomfortable, such as fear, anxiety, and anger, also play an important role in learning.

²⁵ Cavanagh, 213.

²⁶ William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry : Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2008), 98-99.

²⁷ These families of emotion are described fully in Kondrath, *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities*. I note here that the “powerful” family of feelings is connected to a sense of agency and competence, not to power over others.

²⁸ Cavanagh, 43-56.

²⁹ Immordino-Yang and Faeth, in *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience*, 101-102.

Discomfort, in particular, seems necessary for transformative learning to take place. Brookfield and Hess claim that the catalysts for formation “are often perceived as uncomfortable and unsettling by the learners concerned.³⁰ Jack Mezirow, writing on adult education and transformation, calls this a “disorienting dilemma.”³¹ Similarly, John Dirkx, in his work on emotion and transformative learning in a Jungian perspective, refers to these catalytic situations as “psychic dilemmas.”³² These types of situations often provide the richest points of learning and are often seen as a destabilizing force that may be required for students to learn new perspectives or to reconsider their current views.³³

Strategies

The challenge for educators, then, is to find ways to create emotional discomfort in the classroom and then lead students in reflecting upon it. In this section, several strategies for doing this will be described.

One approach to introducing discomfort in the classroom is by selecting readings, guest speakers, movies, or video clips that are provocative and emotionally charged. In response to these, the professor can lead a discussion not just of the content matter, but also of the emotional responses to the content matter. One conflict resolution instructor asks her students these questions in relation to a reading assignment: “What was your gut level reaction? What was your emotional reaction to the text?”³⁴ A second instructor described another way of using these situations to surface emotions. After a provocative classroom event, she asks students to write down an emotion on a piece of paper without putting their names on the papers. After the papers are collected and re-distributed, the students are then asked to relate to or respond in some way to the emotion listed on their sheets.³⁵

A slightly different strategy, offered by Stephen Brookfield, is more direct: the instructor simply makes a contentious opening statement. Then the class is invited to

³⁰ Stephen Brookfield and Mary Hess, "How Can We Teach Authentically? Reflective Practice in the Dialogical Classroom," in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions*, ed. Mary Hess and Stephen Brookfield (Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing, 2008), 12.

³¹ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 153.

³² John M. Dirkx, "Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungian Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning," *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, no. 109 (Spring 2006): 17. Dirkx is drawing on the work of Robert D. Boyd, *Personal Transformations in Small Groups: A Jungian Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

³³ Joy Meeker, "Engaging Emotions and Practicing Conflict: Emotions and Teaching toward Social Justice" (Ph.D. diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2012), 134, 157-161.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

examine it and respond to it.³⁶ The statement does not need to be one that the instructor agrees with. The point is to make a statement that creates discomfort, a statement that is likely to generate reactions in students' emotional domains. The statement as well as the emotions that arise can then become the focus of class dialogue.

Speaking of opening statements, one instructor in Meeker's research described a time when she experimented by introducing herself to her class in this way: "My name is Hanna and I am white." She could immediately sense an alertness in the classroom. She then asked the class to introduce themselves without giving them any instructions on what to include. The students followed her pattern by identifying their race as they introduced themselves. The time of introductions was emotionally charged. An elevated emotional environment had been created. The instructor was then able to use this introduction exercise as a way to enter into a dialogue about why naming race in this way felt awkward and how that connected to course material on racial injustice.³⁷ The emotional discomfort moved students into a mode of learning that was much more profound than what would have been the case if the instructor had merely said, "My name is Hanna and we're going to talk about racial injustice in this course."

A quite different strategy for bringing in emotion is a yelling exercise I use when teaching students about the need for leaders to push their comfort zones.³⁸ As students are paired up, they are asked to identify for themselves a situation or topic that makes them mad or frustrated. Then the first partner is instructed to yell at the second partner about this at the top of her lungs for one minute. Then the roles are reversed. To give students a sense of the intensity I desire, I often demonstrate the yelling for them before asking them to do it themselves. In the midst of their yelling (and inevitable uncomfortable laughter), I exhort them to increase their intensity if they seem to be holding back. After the exercise, we debrief about how it felt for them. Most students report being uneasy doing the yelling. The exercise opens up numerous avenues for discussion (e.g., how this connects with personal histories, how it is experienced by those from cultures where this sort of behavior would be shocking). In relation to the leadership idea they have read about for that day—pushing one's comfort zone in leadership—the learning that occurs through this exercise and the subsequent discussion goes far beyond the learning the students get from the reading alone.

Case-in-point teaching provides another useful approach to this work. This method, most associated with Ron Heifetz and his teaching of leadership, uses the sociality of the classroom itself as an immediate, living case study for analysis. Students are led to explore their own behaviors in the classroom in real time as a way of developing as leaders. While

³⁶ Stephen Brookfield, "How Do We Invite Students into Conversation? Teaching Dialogically," in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions*, ed. Mary Hess and Stephen Brookfield (Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing, 2008), 36-37.

³⁷ Meeker, 160.

³⁸ I have adapted this from an exercise described in Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 236.

Heifetz uses case-in-point teaching for much more than learning about emotions, emotions are an explicit part of what he seeks to attend to during the course of a class.³⁹

[Extended case study to be inserted later]

Ethics of Discomfort

The goal of creating emotional discomfort raises ethical issues. Is it acceptable for an instructor to draw students into these scenarios without permission? Would students choose to avoid these situations if they were given the option beforehand? And if so, are instructors being coercive in constructing these experiences? Brookfield and Hess pick up this line of inquiry:

How can we practice respectfully what Baptiste calls an ethically justified pedagogy of coercion? After all, the ways we come to reinterpret old experiences and create new meanings from them often depend on being forced to review them through radically new lenses—lenses, moreover, that we either chose to ignore or were previously unknown to us. One can argue that a respectful treatment of students as people with potential for growth and development involves presenting them with activities and materials that will animate this progress even when they are reluctant to engage them.⁴⁰

The language they use of “coercion” and “being forced” goes beyond what I find to be ethically justifiable, although I wonder if these authors say more than they mean at this point. This possibility is suggested by their subsequent language of “respectful treatment of students as people” and “presenting them with activities and materials.” Instructors must attend to the tension between bringing these experiences into the classroom and simultaneously positioning them more as offerings that may be accepted or not. I navigate this in my own classroom in this way: I do not ask students’ permission before moving into one of these exercises, but in unpacking the experience I explicitly say that they are welcome to respond at whatever level they are comfortable with, or they are welcome to simply say nothing. No one is forced to be self-reflective or self-revelatory. Students seem to hear this as creating a gracious space and most will stay with the process and share their thoughts and feelings as we go.

The choices an instructor is able to make regarding the use of these exercises point to the power an instructor has in that context. Instructors get to choose which experiences,

³⁹ Sharon Daloz Parks unpacks’ Heifetz’ case-in-point approach in: Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2005). Helpful articles on case-in-point teaching include: Michael Johnstone and Maxime Fern, "Case-in-Point: An Experiential Methodology for Leadership Education and Practice," *Journal of the Kansas Leadership Centre* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2010); Robert M. Yawson, "The Theory and Practice of Case-in-Point Teaching of Organizational Leadership," *American Journal of Management* 14, no. 1/2 (2014); Cristina de-Mello-e-Souza Wildermuth et al., "Walking the Razor's Edge: Risks and Rewards for Students and Faculty Adopting Case in Point Teaching and Learning Approaches," *Journal of Leadership Education* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2015).

⁴⁰ Brookfield and Hess, in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions*, 11-12. Their mention of Baptiste refers to this work: Ian Baptiste, "Beyond Reason and Personal Integrity: Toward a Pedagogy of Coercive Restraint," *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* 14, no. 1 (May 2000).

emotions, and topics are highlighted and which are given little or no attention. They have the power to direct conversations toward or away from various emotions and perspectives, and thus they communicate which emotions, if any, are valid sources of knowledge and meaning.⁴¹ This means that instructors continually face the “dilemma of imposition,” that is, the danger of imposing their own views and values upon students.⁴² Instructors who use these approaches report that constant self-reflexivity is required to be aware of how one’s own values and assumptions may be experienced by students as imposed upon them through a pedagogy of discomfort.⁴³

Other Considerations

Most of us who teach came up through a system that focused on subject matter acquisition and we got the message that learning content matter is the purpose of the classroom. If we are going to invite emotions into the classroom, our perspectives will need to shift, because the exercises and strategies described above reduce the time available to deliver content. Speaking from their context as neuroscientists, Immordino-Yang and Faeth point out that “in times of standardized testing and curricula packed to the brim it might sound like sacrilege, but from an affective neuroscientific perspective, the direct and seemingly most efficient path turns out to be inefficient, leading too often to heaps of factual knowledge poorly integrated into and therefore ineffective for students’ real lives.”⁴⁴ To avoid this, instructors will have to become comfortable with covering less subject matter in a given course in order to make time for attending to emotions in the classroom. The trade-off is deeper learning.

Instructors must discern whether they themselves are equipped to respond to emotional expression in the classroom. bell hooks suggests that most professors are ill-equipped to do this.⁴⁵ Moving into this pedagogical frame involves a learning curve for most instructors. In that learning process, even an instructor’s underdeveloped ability to respond to emotional expression can become a tool for learning if the instructor is willing to be vulnerable, name this weakness, and invite the class to reflect on why this might be, how not being competent at this might feel for the instructor, and how the instructor’s skills might be improved.

Conclusion

This essay began by affirming that God has created people as affective beings. To be in touch with the fullness of who they and their parishioners are created to be, congregational leaders need to develop emotional fluency. Much of our formal training for congregational leaders takes place in the classroom. In light of this, we explored the question of whether emotional fluency can be taught in that context, which has historically privileged cognitive content while seeking to minimize the role of emotions. Research from neuroscience is showing that emotions are actually always present in the classroom whether we are conscious of them or not. Writers attending to educational pedagogy are also

⁴¹ Tarc, 397.

⁴² Meeker, 234.

⁴³ Ibid., 235.

⁴⁴ Immordino-Yang and Faeth, in *Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience*, 102.

⁴⁵ hooks, 81.

highlighting the role of emotions in learning, and several of their voices were brought into the conversation. Instructors and students are best served by being aware of these emotions and recruiting them for enhanced learning.

Building on these bodies of research, we looked at ways to shape the classroom experience in order to welcome emotions into the learning process. While this endeavor provides significant opportunities for transformational learning, it is not without its problems, and so ethical issues related to engaging emotions in the classroom were considered.

For many instructors, shifting toward these sorts of pedagogical strategies requires a significant re-conception of how learning happens and what dimensions of personhood are deemed normative for the classroom context. Although this requires hard work and much learning, this shift will greatly enhance the opportunity for students seeking to grow as leaders to develop greater emotional fluency through their classroom experiences.

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