

## **Moral Oppression & A Vision for Outlaw Emotions**

**Becky L. Noël Smith**

University of Alabama

*Actual freedom lies in the realization of that end which actually satisfies. An end may be freely adopted and yet its actual working-out may result not in freedom, but slavery...Only that end which executed really effects greater energy and comprehensiveness of character makes for actual freedom.*

—John Dewey<sup>197</sup>

### **A Reflection on Pedagogical & Moral Regret**

My colleagues and I were required to adhere to a “research-based” reading program called Success For All (SFA).<sup>198</sup> At a cost of tens of thousands of dollars each year, SFA provided our school with structures for testing, labelling, and categorizing students so that they and the teachers could be filed “neatly” into daily reading blocks.

Like many prefabricated curricular programs, it scripted nearly every one of the ninety minutes that I shared with my students. The one exception to this rule took place in a ten-

minute allotment called “Listening Comprehension.” This segment was the only unscripted part of the entire reading block, and in hindsight, it was often the only period that actually equated to any real learning. Teachers were “allowed” to choose any book to read to the kids during this time, and it was permissible even to allow curiosities and conversations to meander into unforeseen destinations. But, it was mandated that we stick to the schedule—any question or idea that threatened to expand beyond the specified allotment was expected to be pruned sharply at the ten-minute mark.

***My students were outspoken and quick-witted, and it became apparent by week two that they had reached the threshold of boredom, their faces and repeating voices numbed by tedium.***

This brief tease of autonomous bliss was, ironically, followed by ten minutes of mindless obedience to the Word Wall. SFA provided us with approximately ten words each week, and while one would assume that they were intended to challenge the children, they rarely did so. There was a ritual for the “learning” (or saying) of these words: teacher points to the word, teacher says the word, children say the word, and repeat. After all words had been said four times, there was a brief discussion on the definition of each word. This monotony was repeated with the same set of words for five consecutive days.

It is not difficult to imagine that children would rapidly lose interest in this process, especially if they already knew each word on the list. My students were outspoken and quick-witted, and it became apparent by week two that they had reached the threshold of boredom, their faces and repeating voices numbed by tedium.

<sup>197</sup> John Dewey, “Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics,” *The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 3* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 343. First published in 1891.

<sup>198</sup> To learn more about the problems the problems of SFA see Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

As a way to entertain myself and them, I attempted to speak the words with an exceedingly sarcastic enthusiasm, but their monotone responses were unmistakable: this was meaningless, it was degrading to each of us, and we all knew we hated it.

**We had about three weeks of luck before the reading coach’s daily rounds brought her to our classroom. She was puzzled by what she saw: our class had strayed from the SFA structure. It was well known by every teacher that such a move was forbidden.**

Assessing the situation and the abilities of my students, I decided that the best we could do was to one-up the vocabulary words SFA had rationed out to us. I told each of the students to grab a thesaurus off the bookshelf. Most of them had no clue what the book was or how to use it, and so they curiously dug in and toyed with the synonyms they found from their random explorations. They giggled at the sounds of newly-found words, they playfully constructed sentences around their discoveries, and they awed at one another’s abilities to sound out the “really big words.” After we surveyed the alphabetical layout of the book, I asked them to look up the first word on the Word Wall. As they turned to the correct page, they found delight in the abundance of descriptive and lengthy alternatives to the drab and unanimated words that just stuck, lifelessly, to our wall.

We decided to adopt a new and seemingly innocent activity to fill this ten minute segment each day: I would say the word on the wall, the students would look it up in the thesaurus, and then they would each share a favorite or more extravagant synonym for SFA’s word. Their

vocabularies were expanding, they were reading and decoding new words, they were honing their abilities to alphabetize, and we were all finally content with, and engaged in, that small portion of reading class.

We had about three weeks of luck before the reading coach’s daily rounds brought her to our classroom. She was puzzled by what she saw: our class had strayed from the SFA structure. It was well known by every teacher that such a move was forbidden. In fact, we were reminded numerous times each year by the principal, “SFA is not going anywhere. If you don’t like teaching it, I’ll help you find another job.”

Needless to say, I was not terribly surprised when I found myself being reprimanded by the reading coach at the end of the school day. I defended myself and my students by detailing the educational value of our activities, the rationale for my straying from the structure, and the hypocrisy of SFA’s claims regarding growth and learning. I finally abandoned the conversation with the reading coach in complete disgust.

The absurdity was disorienting: how could she ignore the fact that my students were not learning from the materials I had been required to use? Most disturbing was that she refused to acknowledge that her adherence to the structure was not only sacrificing the growth of my students, it was sacrificing my own, as the teacher. My argument and my logic went to waste, and I was ordered to return to the routine of stagnation.

Like many teachers who find themselves in similar situations, I shared this story with only my closest colleagues and my family as a way to vent and seek empathy for my frustrations. Then I closed my classroom door, went about my work, and found other ways to silently resist the system that was restraining my students’ growth and my own development.

## **Moral Oppression**

As should be obvious from the story shared above, this piece considers character education from a somewhat unconventional angle. It is my contention that the stilted atmosphere that abounds in too many of today's classrooms harms not only the learning and moral growth of students, but the professional learning and character development of the teacher as well.

The above story is one example of the many infuriating institutional contradictions that have gnawed at me and my colleagues. Looking back on it now, it is much easier to isolate the problems and identify their ties to the power of oppressive technocratic and bureaucratic mentalities. Of course, expensive and hollow programs like SFA are reserved for schools with low-income and high-minority student populations—they and their use are inherently racist and classist.<sup>199</sup>

The ridiculousness of the technocratic and positivistic mentalities was underscored by the school's belief that the term "research-based" actually meant something of value. The flaw of the bureaucratic mentality was present in the dogmatic worship of structure, protocol, and hierarchy. How could professional educators ever be led to believe that a corporation (like SFA) was best equipped to tell the teachers and students how to act, interact, and how to think? The existence of scripted curriculum like those put out by SFA convey the belief that anyone *but* the individuals engaged in the learning process should be guiding and validating it. And again, the foundation for this belief is the drive to outsource the construction of knowledge, experience, and morality to someone or something else.

The example I provide above is clearly different from the blatant injustices of school closures, resegregation, and the disproportionate

attrition that has been forced upon teachers of color. When we consider the many injustices our society now suffers under, this problem may seem harmless. But scenarios like this are prevalent in schools, and they are significant and problematic because of a common, defining quality: they occur *silently*.

***In short, the intersectionality of this cage is so overwhelming that it is difficult for teachers to speak of this type of institutional oppression, to understand it, and to feel it as anything other than just plain wrong.***

That is, because these types of contradictions and exchanges occur between individuals and within an increasingly controlling public institution, those on the outside rarely hear about the detrimental restrictions that occur within. And if one desired to speak about the epidemic of this problem in general terms, what language could one use? Such a problem is related to so many forms of power – class, race, gender, and the oppressive corporate and techno-bureaucratic mentalities – that it cannot necessarily be named in any simple way.

In short, the intersectionality of this cage<sup>200</sup> is so overwhelming that it is difficult for teachers to speak of this type of institutional oppression, to understand it, and to feel it as anything other than just plain *wrong*.

Altering the environment to the benefit of one's students and to the best of one's abilities seems right and good. In fact, it seems morally

<sup>199</sup> This was the case across my school district, and it was a point well made by Kozol also. Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

<sup>200</sup> For further explication of the components of the cage metaphor utilized here, see Becky L. Noël Smith, *The Moral Oppression of the Teaching Profession: Learning to Transcend*, Masters Thesis, STARS Electronic Theses and Dissertations at the University of Central Florida (#2693), 2013, <http://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/2693/>.

obvious, and as Doris Santoro<sup>201</sup> has argued, such a practice is the exercise of Deweyan *intelligence*. But the story above details how easily a teacher's drive to do the right thing can be set in tension by both the institutional structures and the reactions of those who hold positions of power in schools.

These mechanisms, these ways of thinking about and running schools, these ways of raising the nation's youth, have all latched onto the institution in ways that are *morally oppressive*: they encourage one to ignore and suppress her morality, her moral impulses, and her moral way of knowing. In doing so, they invalidate the teacher's moral knowledge and her professional and personal character development. And by restricting a teacher's moral growth, these mechanisms and mentalities inevitably restrict students' growth.

This, then, is the essence of moral oppression. But what does it actually mean for a teacher to be moral? And how might she construct moral knowledge?

## Perceiving Emotion as a Moral Way of Knowing

The reflective process transitions into a phase of deliberation when the individual must determine *what* to do.<sup>202</sup> According to Dewey, deliberation typically focuses on choices which are primarily quantitative: "The value is technical, professional, economic, etc., as long as one thinks of it as something which one can aim at and attain by way of having."<sup>203</sup> For instance, one might deliberate over alternative routes to

work while she is sitting in rush hour traffic. She weighs the benefits of one alternative against another as she considers the meeting that cannot be missed and the impact her potential lateness could have upon her relations at work and upon her livelihood.

**One's actions are merely the external expression of one's internal attitude, meaning that only conduct can provide evidence for the character that lies within.**

The route of a person's daily commute may not say much about the individual; it could be said to lack moral value. However, the transportation the person chooses to utilize in getting to work might suggest something entirely different. It might hint at the inner workings of the agent, at the individual's emotional and intellectual disposition, or at the conscious and active concern for one's own health or one's impact on fellow beings and the earth's environment. In this way, values surrounding quality and "the outlook for something better" enter into our deliberations.<sup>204</sup>

Deliberation ranges in complexity and import, of course, but the process acquires a moral property when the weighing of values related to the self is combined with concerns about quality. In other words, morality is qualitative; it deals with the quality of one's self and one's concern for others. As such, moral deliberation is tethered to a question that seems both personal and simple: Who *am* I? The answer to such a question, though, is neither simple nor entirely personal, and an understanding of the relationship between character, conduct, and consequence play an integral part in such an inquiry.

In *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, Dewey stated that character is "an *attitude* of the agent

<sup>201</sup> Doris A. Santoro, "We're Not Going to Do That Because it's Not Right: Using Pedagogical Responsibility to Reframe the Doublespeak of Fidelity", *Educational Theory*, Volume 66, No. 1-2, (2016): 263-277.

<sup>202</sup> John Dewey, "Ethics," *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 273. First published in 1932.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

toward conduct, as expressing the kind of motives which upon the whole moves him to action.”<sup>205</sup> He went on to explain that character and conduct are not just intimately connected, but that they are essentially one in the same. One’s actions are merely the external expression of one’s internal attitude, meaning that only conduct can provide evidence for the character that lies within. As an individual’s character is born through conduct, it inevitably makes its way into the world in the form of consequence.

The tendency in many situations is to judge consequence as good or bad, as either positive or negative, but the weight of one’s actions is often revealed in ways which land on both ends of this spectrum. This factor undoubtedly lends toward the inherently unpredictable nature of consequences. Consequence manifests differently throughout every environment, and it extends for distances and in ways that can certainly overwhelm the imagination of someone who attempts to envision its reach and impact.

Thus, a person seeking to answer the question, “Who *am* I?” must take notice of consequence as it unfolds in and around her. Ultimately, she must examine whether her conduct and its resulting consequences align with her moral self-perception or the way *she* perceives her own sense of character. Through observation and attentiveness, through tweaks and adjustments, she comes to feel the ways her actions affect herself and her state of well-being.

A teacher, for instance, might see herself as a loving person. She feels intrinsically gratified by her work and prides herself on the affection and concern she feels for her students. The qualities of pride, affection, and concern can be very beautiful to the one who experiences them and attempts to express them. However, they are also very complicated ways of feeling.

Without periodic reflection and attention, these expressions can evolve into ways of acting that can mean over-protective, restrictive, or paternalistic consequences for others.

This potential is the very reason why it is not enough for an individual to only tend to the feelings as they are revealed, intuited, and interpreted within oneself. The teacher who desires to grow in a sense of love and care must check those feelings and her moral self-perception against the evidence that can be gleaned from those in the surrounding social environment.

By surveying the quality of human interaction as it occurs in, through, and around oneself a person can seek out the most basic moral element to character and conduct: emotional consequence. Mood, posture, facial expression, tone of voice, inflection, and even breathing patterns or sighs are the medium through which emotional consequence resonates. This resonance is influenced and shaped, of course, by the limitless variations of the people involved. Personal experience, selective attention, and conscious and unconscious judgements all blend and intertwine to create an infinite array of emotional timbres and connections: a unique kinship may develop between a student and a teacher, or an indescribable energy might congeal suddenly among the people who fill a classroom.

The emotional consequence that emerges from such relationships and interactions amass into patterns and tendencies, and they provide educators with what Jim Garrison called “sympathetic data.”<sup>206</sup> As such, emotion (as it is felt in oneself) and emotional consequence (as it is perceived in the responses of others) are tools which are crucial to learning and to honing the craft of teaching.

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<sup>205</sup> John Dewey, “Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics,” *The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 3* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 246. First published in 1891.

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<sup>206</sup> James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 35.

As Dewey's<sup>207</sup> work attests, emotion provides the foundation for learning: it provides the feeling that urges inquiry, and it is the fuel that sees learners to the intermitted resolutions of their intellectual quests. Thus, emotional consequence is vital to the learner, but it is equally important to the teacher as well. It can be interpreted by teachers to help them better understand their students, to meet their needs, to anticipate their developing questions, and to channel their energies and inquiries toward productive and beneficial ends. In some respect, working with students and the act of "conducting class" are really very similar to conducting a group of musicians: it is the art of reading, shaping, and working with the sounds, motions, and emotions that are created by a group of individuals in a given setting.

Verbal and written communication can certainly aid in the interpretations and conclusions a teacher draws from the perceived palette of sympathetic data. For instance, there are occasions when students are so emotionally and linguistically attuned that they articulate their thoughts and feelings with a bluntness that is both endearing and shocking. In such cases where little is left to the imagination, a teacher's reliance upon her emotional perception might relax somewhat.

However, one's emotional intuitiveness is particularly useful when interacting with neurodivergent students, with children who are very young, or with individuals who have endured traumatic experiences. This is because the persistent willingness to tinker with the emotional environment – to extract nuance out of it and to inquire into the interpretations one derives – can serve as a primary tool for discovering the aversions, sensitivities, needs, and desires that

impact a student's comfort level and, thus, her or his ability to flourish in that space.<sup>208</sup>

Moreover, emotional consequence can help one sense the sometimes subtle difference between *struggling* (a necessary and beneficial component of learning) and *suffering* (a cruel infliction of pain and frustration). The ability to distinguish between these two states is no doubt most important in school settings espousing the need for more "grit" and "rigour."

**Moreover, emotional consequence can help one sense the sometimes subtle difference between struggling (a necessary and beneficial component of learning) and suffering (a cruel infliction of pain and frustration). The ability to distinguish between these two states is no doubt most important in school settings espousing the need for more "grit" and "rigour."**

However, as a teacher cultivates an openness to sensing emotional consequence and the courage to interpret the sympathetic data that arise, the emotional timbre becomes much more than just an instrument for facilitating the growth of students. It becomes the resource for testing and experimenting with the effectiveness of one's own conduct, and in this respect, emotion contributes to a most basic human

<sup>207</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think* (Washington D.C.: Dover Publications, 1997). First published in 1910.

<sup>208</sup> See the case study of Anne and Sally for a good example of how one's perception of sympathetic data – instead of serving as a means of casting judgment – can serve not only as a catalyst for inquiry; it can be used to improve the living and learning conditions for the individuals in a teacher's care. Thomas Owren & Trude Stenhammer, "Neurodiversity: Accepting Autistic Difference", *Learning Disability Practice*, Volume 16, No. 4, (2013), 32-37.

understanding. As Dewey said, that is, “*Emotional* reactions form the chief materials of our knowledge of ourselves and of others.”<sup>209</sup> In other words, the emotions which flow from interactions *with others* come to provide some of the most fundamental evidence for gauging the quality of *oneself*. Thus, human interaction and emotional consequence are both essential to the development of an individual’s moral self-perception and moral growth.

This does not imply, however, that a person becomes morally self-determined by seeking the answers *from* others. Agency certainly plays its part, and thus morality cannot be outsourced anymore than it can be wholly individualized. Instead, the existing understanding of who I am is made clearer: it is shaped or validated, and it is set into question through the connections one makes and the actions one carries out *with* others. Through those interactions, emotional consequences provide the glimpses that allow a person to see and feel the accuracy of her or his own moral self-perception as it is reflected back through the communications, perceptions, expressions, and actions of others.

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This means that the teacher who tends to the social and emotional environment with some element of conscientiousness, sympathy, and passion cannot help but see and *feel* the ways her or his own conduct affects oneself

<sup>209</sup> John Dewey, “Ethics,” *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 269. First published in 1932.

and one’s students. This is the case when the environment and interactions are healthy and thriving, as well as when they are toxic and damaging. It is unavoidable: “The admiration and resentment of others is the mirror in which one beholds the moral quality of his act reflected back to him.”<sup>210</sup>

Therefore, a teacher’s moral well-being—the understanding of who that teacher is—is unequivocally tied to one’s students and the status of *their* emotional and intellectual well-being. The system that expects teachers to suppress their own moral and emotional understanding—the one that coerces them to persist with practices they know to be meaningless, “mis-educative,” and harmful to their students—is actually asking them to engage in self-mutilation.<sup>211</sup> And sadly, there can be little doubt that such an environment also teaches the children to do the same.

## **Outlaw Emotions & the Other Side of the Classroom Door**

What many fail to realize is that the morally oppressive structures have created an entire culture wherein educators frequently feel compelled to break the rules for the *good* of their students. In such schooling climates, Garrison explained, the best teachers come to “violate the intent if not the letter of institutional laws, regulations, and rules of policy to actualize the values of their vocation.”<sup>212</sup>

<sup>210</sup> John Dewey, “Ethics,” *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 246. First published in 1932.

<sup>211</sup> “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.” John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 25. First published in 1938.

<sup>212</sup> James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 163.

These actions and desires comprise a moral underworld, so to speak: I say “moral” because many teachers are attempting to right injustices, and “underworld” because their methods are deemed unacceptable inside the corporate and techno-bureaucratic cage. For instance, the public does not hear about the teacher who, despite threats from her administration, refuses to write-up students for tardies and dresscode indiscretions because she knows classroom learning time is far more beneficial to her students than the zero tolerance policies that remove them from their classes. The public also does not hear about the teacher who risks being fired because, instead of letting the day’s uneaten yet perfectly edible food go into the dumpster as district protocol demands, she sneaks it out of the school and into the hands of hungry and homeless families.

Behind the classroom door, in the shadows, and under the radar, countless educators attempt to fight against the cogs of the massive social and economic system that seems set on subordinating, failing, and disposing of the human beings for whom teachers care. Thus, closing the door is a way to protect one’s students. It is a way to shield oneself from retribution and the institutional disapproval of their moral intelligence; and because a teacher’s moral self-perception is tied to the well-being of one’s students, breaking the rules is often the easiest way for an individual to engage in moral self-preservation.

The driving force behind the actions in this moral underworld is what Alison Jaggar called “outlaw emotions.”<sup>213</sup> Simply put, outlaw emotions are unconventional ways of feeling and perceiving the world. These are the feelings of smouldering outrage elicited by institutional policies that refuse to value children and their

uniquenesses, or those policies that restrict student growth, reserve the worst curriculum for the neediest learners, and attempt to hold children accountable for society’s neglect.

However, as Jaggar pointed out, by acknowledging “irritability, revulsion, anger, and fear,” and then seeking the meaning behind these feelings, teachers can “bring to consciousness our ‘gut-level’ awareness that we”—and, I would add, those we care for—“are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice, or danger.”<sup>214</sup> These nagging feelings—what might otherwise be called states of Deweyan disequilibrium—beg us to acknowledge and question the existing state of things, and in doing so, they urge individuals to envision and create a more humane world.<sup>215</sup> The catch, however, is that such visions can only come into being when pursued and realized *with others*.

This means that while outlaw emotions are the fuel for change, there is a moral calling to learn from these feelings, and that makes the act of closing the door incredibly problematic. For when intense feelings of personal conflict are “experienced by isolated individuals, those concerned may be confused, unable to name their experience; they may even doubt their own sanity.”<sup>216</sup> Because of this, expression, inquiry, and joint response are absolutely necessary to both understanding and resolving these feelings. In contrast, if one remains isolated and alienated, then healthy human interaction becomes constrained, muted, and thereby stifling to moral growth and personal character devel-

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<sup>213</sup> Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 145-171.

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<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>215</sup> John Dewey, *How We Think* (Washington D.C.: Dover Publications, 1997). First published in 1910.

<sup>216</sup> Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 160. For a further explication of outlaw emotions and breaking the rules for the good on one’s students see James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), Chapter 5.

opment. This means that the potential energy of outlaw emotions is rendered inert when the teacher closes the door, and as a result, this allows the bound and intense feelings to begin working on and harming the individual and, inevitably, her students.

So, to some, it may seem like closing the door is a silent and dignified act of resistance—it may seem safer and easier than open resistance or cooperative civil disobedience, and in some cases, it may seem like the only option. But, while closing the door might help relieve one's own feelings of frustration, one person's resolved feelings will never resolve institutional injustices.

Resorting to this tactic means that we actually *closet ourselves*, and in doing so, we also shield the illogical and harmful realities of the institution from the outside world and from the citizens who are most capable of helping us teachers change it: fellow educators, family and community members, and education activists. Thus, by hiding in silence and isolation, we take an active part in the oppression of our own moral knowledge and our abilities: we suppress the power to help ourselves and others, and we stunt the potential to struggle together against the misery and the unjust state of things.

## Conclusion: Outlets for Outlaw Emotions

*We wish the fullest life possible to ourselves and to others. And the fullest life means largely a complete and free development of capacities in knowledge and production—production of beauty and use. Our interest in others is not satisfied as long as their intelligence is cramped, their appreciation of truth feeble, their emotions hard and uncomprehensive, their powers of production compressed.*

—John Dewey<sup>217</sup>

As an educator comes to examine the work done by her own hands, one must hope she finds the courage to ask of herself, “*What am I doing?*” “*Why am I doing this?*” Such questions indicate that she has stumbled upon a most personal and deeply felt problem. These questions and the emotions that encompass them, while devastating in the moment, are saturated with an amazing and beautiful potential.

***It is a loving and moral way of knowing that yearns to be reunited with a loving and moral way of acting because one's soul can no longer ignore the mass quantities of sympathetic data she has collected from students' tears, groans, boredom, and restlessness.***

Such questions reveal the birth of a harrowing awareness that one has very nearly severed from herself the power and humanity that extend from her core. And this is a key step in learning to move beyond moral oppression because it signifies the desire to trust and utilize one's innermost power: a type of knowledge that finds its value and emergence in love, compassion, and the passionate connection that comes with shared human growth.

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<sup>217</sup> John Dewey, “Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics,” *The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 3* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 246. First published in 1891.

The teacher's ability to use these data is rooted to her or his desire to care and to inquire, both of which are indispensable to a teacher's work.<sup>218</sup> But in the case of oppression, to care and to question is simply not enough.<sup>219</sup> Liberation commands love, and true love demands risk.<sup>220</sup> It begins with the risk of being honest, with oneself and with others, about what is perceived inside the institution: the unwarranted pains teachers sense in their students and the ways teachers are frequently coerced to go against their own moral grain.

Love also demands the risk of letting go of oppressive ways of knowing, which of course also means taking the risk of replacing those broken beliefs with a faith in the expressions and perceptions of others. It demands the restoration of faith in our own experience, knowledge, and moral growth.<sup>221</sup>

And, finally, building the bridge between a moral way of knowing and a moral way of acting involves the risk and vulnerability associated with seeking help in solidarity and shared struggle *with* others. Moral oppression necessitates finding ways, wherever possible, to join others in stepping out from behind the door—all so teachers, students, and communities can unify feeling and productive action.

Fortunately, outlaw emotions are common within the schools, and so is the moral underworld. Thus, there are many constructive direc-

tions in which to channel these energies. Many families, for instance, share teachers' frustrations with the corporate and technobureaucratic mentalities that view their children as test scores and as financial assets or liabilities. And, of course, students are also very much aware of the harms inflicted on them by institutionalized practices.

Even though this awareness may be present, many people may not have the language to articulate the frustrations they feel and observe. Therefore, one thing teachers can do to better understand these mechanisms is to join and direct their allies to the vast networks of students, teachers, families, and communities who are actively advocating to free public schools from those practices that are so detrimental to humane learning environments. Many of these people coalesce in grassroots organizations, state-based opt out movements, and local teachers and students unions, which can be found online and in social media.

Through a range of modes—via blogs, online discussion groups, internet radio shows and podcasts, e-newsletters, webinars, and conferences—these organizations provide concerned citizens with information about the structures that bind the public schools. They also provide members with support spaces where they can share their stories. But more importantly, perhaps, they serve as networks for discussing what has been done and what types of direct actions might be pursued next.

Some national and grassroots organizations that provide excellent information and a variety of actions related to education are Journey for Justice Alliance, Forward Together Movement,<sup>222</sup> the Badass Teachers Association, Save Our Schools March, Network for Public Education, and Fund Education Now. State-based opt out movements are another great place to channel outlaw emotions. While opt out

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<sup>218</sup> See M. F. Belenky, B. M. Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger, & J. M. Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 29–56.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p. 41–42. Garrison argued, "People learn to grow in relationship with others, but only if they are vulnerable...The deeper and more intimate our relationships, the greater the potential risk and the greater the potential for growth."

<sup>221</sup> Becky L. Noël Smith, "Teaching in the institutional cage: Metaphor and collateral oppression", *Critical Questions in Education*, Volume 5, No. 2, (2014): 76–92.

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<sup>222</sup> This organization is also known as the Moral Mondays March or HkonJ.

movements have primarily been geared toward resisting high-stakes testing in the past, they have recently started turning their efforts toward resisting competency-based education models and the push to technologize teaching and learning, assessment, curricula, and behavior management.

Thus, teachers, students, and families are increasingly putting their outlaw emotions to work in these networks to help support one another and cooperatively devise opt-out strategies and localized political and legal actions. United Opt Out National, The Opt Out Florida Network, Save Our School NJ, and NYS Allies for Public Education are a few recommendations for readers to contact if they have an interest in finding or starting their own localized groups.

**... current schooling practices have grown so controlling and technologically-oriented that teachers are increasingly blocked from this important source of moral reflection.**

Finally, whether educators like to admit it or not, teaching is a political job on both macroscopic and microscopic scales: pay raises, job security, school funding, how we teach, what we teach, and who runs our workplace—all of these come down to politics, broadly understood. Teachers can certainly put their outlaw emotions to productive use by participating in their local teachers union, but another effective use might be running for local office or school board. In fact, the recent growth and support of social media networks committed to democratic participation in school politics has made this option much more feasible for family members, educators, and academics.

Another way that teachers can maintain political action in their communities is by offering support to a local students union. Some stu-

dents unions around the country—Newark, Boston, Providence, and Philadelphia to name a few—have done some amazingly progressive organizing in the last couple of years. When approached with an open mind, adults stand to learn much from the insights of these youth movements and the ways they utilize their outlaw emotions.

Ultimately, what I have attempted to pursue in this paper is the idea that a teacher's professional and personal growth develops through close attention to the lives of her students. In this respect, the "sympathetic data" of students and colleagues urges teachers to reflect on their practice. Yet current schooling practices have grown so controlling and technologically-oriented that teachers are increasingly blocked from this important source of moral reflection. Perhaps, by reconnecting with youth and communities *outside* the school doors, teachers can regain the energy and support that is deeply needed if we are to turn our schools into humane places.

As it often does with the act of teaching, the energy we use in supporting spaces for student growth and agency very often comes back around to rejuvenate us in our own desire to keep pushing onward.

*Becky L. Noël Smith is a former public school teacher, a mother, and a doctoral student at the University of Alabama. She has the privilege of putting her teaching and learning experiences to use in her work with future teachers in her university's undergraduate program. Becky advocates for democratic policies and practices in the public's schools through her work as a board member of Save Our Schools March and as a co-founder of The Opt Out Florida Network. Her research interests focus on philosophy of education, history of education in the U.S., social theories, and the persistent struggle to make public schooling more humane.*

## Éduquer à la démocratie et au militantisme

Anne-Marie Duclos

University of Montreal

La Philosophie pour enfants de Matthew Lipman (PPE) est un programme pédagogique et philosophique pour lequel je me passionne depuis près de quinze ans. Aujourd'hui doctorante en psychopédagogie et superviseuse de stage à l'Université de Montréal, j'offre des animations en Philosophie pour enfants dans les écoles et centres à la petite enfance, ainsi que des formations aux éducateurs et enseignants. Alors que d'autres auront un bagage davantage axé sur la discipline de la philosophie, la mienne est plutôt ancrée dans la pratique et la formation avec les élèves, les enseignants et futurs enseignants. Savoir concilier la philosophie, mais surtout la pédagogie me semble être idéal pour animer des séances de Philosophie pour enfants. Dans ce texte, je présenterai brièvement la Philosophie pour enfants de Matthew Lipman (PPE) ainsi que le néolibéralisme en éducation pour ensuite expliquer en quoi la PPE s'inscrit dans la nouvelle éducation au caractère.

### La Philosophie pour enfants

Le programme lipmanien<sup>223</sup> se compose de quatre principales étapes. Il s'agit de 1) lire un conte philosophique; 2) collecter les questions des enfants par rapport à l'histoire; 3) réfléchir et discuter ensemble sur la question choisie; 4) s'autoévaluer. Le conte philosophique, con-

trairement au conte non philosophique, possède des tensions, des dilemmes, des conflits non résolus qui laissent place à la réflexion et qui provoquent les pensées critique et créatrice. La période de questions permet de mettre en évidence ce qui a marqué ou touché les enfants par rapport à ce conte. Ils sont alors invités à voter pour la question de leur choix puisque la discussion leur appartient.

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On vise à ce moment une discussion philosophique qui est caractérisée par la recherche commune d'un objectif à atteindre, soit de tracer des propositions réfléchies en lien avec le questionnement de départ. Lors de ces discussions à visée philosophique, l'enseignant est un guide qui amène les participants à pousser leurs réflexions et à s'enrichir des idées des autres selon l'approche socioconstructiviste. Finalement, les participants sont invités à s'autoévaluer sur des habiletés sociales et/ou intellectuelles qui auront été préalablement déterminées en groupe. Avec mes élèves du préscolaire jusqu'en sixième année du primaire, j'ai longtemps animé des séances hebdomadaires selon la méthode Lipman. Voici un court extrait d'une séance de PPE sur le thème du partage avec des enfants de 5 ans :

*À qui est la nourriture dans le réfrigérateur et dans le garde-manger à la maison?*

Enfant de 5 ans: *à toute la famille.*

*Est-ce que vous partagez la nourriture?*

Enfant: *Oui, mes parents partagent avec moi et me donnent la nourriture dans une assiette.*

<sup>223</sup> Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

*Et est-ce que toi, tu partages la nourriture avec eux?*

Enfant: *Oui, quand je n'ai pas fini mon assiette.*

*Est-ce qu'on peut partager ses vêtements?*

Enfant : *Oui, quand on devient plus grand et que l'autre est resté petit.*

Plusieurs paroles des enfants me font rire, mais elles sont aussi parfois très profondes, simples et tellement honnêtes:

*Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire « être courageux » ?*

Enfant de 5 ans: *Ça veut dire s'entraîner à ne pas avoir peur.*

*Ou Quand papa maman n'ont pas le temps d'écouter leur enfant qui veut leur demander quelque chose, qu'est-ce qu'ils devraient faire?*

Enfant de 5 ans : *Ils devraient lui dire doucement « attends » et après revenir le voir et dire « maintenant j'ai du temps ».*

Malheureusement, la plupart de ces discussions n'ont pas laissé de traces écrites, mais elles sont souvent surprenantes et très enrichissantes pour les enfants (et pour l'animatrice) qui sont fiers de partager leurs réflexions sans qu'un adulte leur fasse la morale. Pour moi, l'expérience de la Philosophie pour enfants l'emporte sur les connaissances théoriques de cette méthode. Il en est sûrement de même pour l'expérience de la démocratie, voire du militantisme, que je tenterai ici de relier à une notion d'éducation au caractère.

En effet, je pense qu'il est possible de réaliser des séances de Philosophie pour enfants (PPE) qui mènent à une expérience démocratique plus grande et à une nouvelle éducation au caractère plus ancrée dans l'action critique. Par expérience démocratique, j'entends une expérience où chacun et chacune participe activement à la rencontre d'un lieu ou d'un but commun en respectant, dans la mesure du possible, ses désirs et aspirations, tout en considérant l'autre et la collectivité dans son ensemble avec empathie et sensibilité.

Je pense que la démocratie est impossible si certaines personnes sont laissées pour compte et où l'individualisme et l'intolérance règnent. Cela rejoint d'ailleurs les fondements de la méthode Lipman, soit de réfléchir à une question commune par l'engagement de tous et toutes, en faisant preuve d'empathie et d'entraide. Loin de vouloir promouvoir la conformité aux normes déjà établies par nos sociétés actuelles comme peut le suggérer une forme d'éducation au caractère, je désire plutôt, par le biais des séances de PPE, que soient contestés les conditionnements, les mythes reçus et la pensée unique. Cette expérience démocratique se reflète aussi dans l'action puisqu'elle peut guider les conduites et influencer nos choix citoyens.

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Mais plaçons-nous d'abord dans le contexte global du néolibéralisme, logique dominante, si ce n'est qu'unique à l'échelle internationale, ainsi que ses implications au niveau de l'éducation. Cela permettra de mieux comprendre pourquoi je perçois les pensées critique, créatrice et empathique que suscitent les discussions à visée philosophique comme une expérience contestataire.

## **Le néolibéralisme en éducation**

Le néolibéralisme serait l'idéologie du capitalisme radical contemporain utilisé pour légitimer la supériorité de la logique de marché sur la

démocratie au nom de la liberté individuelle et économique. Cette idéologie dominante s'imisce dans toutes les sphères de la vie humaine, y compris l'éducation.

À cet effet, selon Nico Hirtt,<sup>224</sup> les effets pervers du néolibéralisme attaquent notamment les fondements démocratiques de l'éducation, soit de 1- garantir l'égalité des chances en vue d'une émancipation sociale, 2- favoriser le développement intégral de la personne et dévoiler son potentiel maximal et 3- former des citoyens et citoyennes critiques, responsables et libres, aptes à participer à une société démocratique.

Bien que les conséquences désastreuses du néolibéralisme en éducation soient moins prononcées au Québec qu'aux États-Unis, par exemple, elles sont tout de même suffisamment présentes pour que nous soyons très inquiets de l'avenir de notre système éducatif. Par exemple, la déresponsabilisation de notre gouvernement provincial envers l'éducation se constate à plusieurs points de vue : coupes importantes et drastiques, modification de la Loi sur l'instruction publique sur laquelle repose notre système éducatif qui établit des objectifs mesurables à atteindre et responsabilise (dans une moindre mesure) les enseignants des résultats de leurs élèves, large financement de l'état aux établissements privés, augmentation des élèves à besoins particuliers sans service dans les classes régulières, fermetures de classes afin de maximiser les ratios d'élèves par enseignant, précarisation de la profession enseignante, et j'en passe.

Ayant des répercussions sur le système éducatif, les réformes éducatives et le travail enseignant, les conséquences du néolibéralisme en éducation ont aussi un grave impact sur les élèves d'aujourd'hui et les générations à venir. En effet, en plus du désengagement de l'état envers l'éducation, on constate une reproduc-

tion des inégalités sociales à l'intérieur des murs de l'école dues à la compétitivité et la logique de marché, ainsi qu'une économie du savoir où le gouvernement supprime les cours qui ne correspondent plus aux besoins des grandes entreprises.

***les enfants et adolescents se retrouvent devant une perte d'humanité,***

Par exemple, au cours des dernières années, un nombre alarmant de cours universitaires ont été retirés des programmes puisque leurs impacts économiques n'étaient pas assez importants. Ces cours se rattachent principalement aux disciplines des arts, des langues, de la littérature, de la musique et de la philosophie. On retrouve un constat semblable aux ordres primaire et secondaire où les arts plastiques et dramatiques, l'éducation physique et la musique sont graduellement éliminés. Bref, les enfants et adolescents se retrouvent devant une perte d'humanité, comme le mentionne Martha Nussbaum,<sup>225</sup> au profit de l'individualisme et de la logique managériale. Ici, non seulement les droits et libertés de la majorité des citoyens et citoyennes ne sont pas pris en compte, mais ils sont bafoués par cette pensée hégémonique qui ne profite qu'aux plus puissants. De plus, le droit à l'épanouissement de son potentiel personnel et à l'affranchissement social qui constituent les fondements humanistes de l'éducation sont complètement méprisés par le néolibéralisme qui prône plutôt la liberté individuelle économique, c'est-à-dire le droit de s'enrichir sans contrainte en faisant fi de la dignité humaine et environnementale.

La méthode de Lipman représente une forme d'éducation au caractère, vu ici comme

<sup>224</sup> Nico Hirtt, "Markets and Education in the Era of Globalized Capitalism," in *Global Neoliberalism and Education and Its Consequences*, ed. D. Hill and R. Kumar (Routledge, 2009).

<sup>225</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

« toutes activités éducatives implicites et explicites qui aident les jeunes à développer des forces personnelles positives appelées vertus. »<sup>226</sup> En effet, plutôt que de devenir des moutons noirs qui reproduisent les effets néfastes de nos sociétés en perte de sens, la Philosophie pour enfants nous apprend à penser par et pour nous-mêmes, comme le dit Michel Sasseville.<sup>227</sup> Elle permet de développer la capacité à questionner la pensée dominante, à réfléchir à de meilleures options et à participer ensemble à un projet significatif commun. Pour moi, c'est une forme de militantisme. En discutant ensemble d'un idéal à atteindre basé sur des valeurs universelles et, dans sa forme, sur des habiletés sociales telles que le respect, la solidarité et le partage, les participants sont activement impliqués dans ce qu'on appelle une communauté de recherche philosophique. En ce sens, les participants sont des militants qui arrivent à appliquer en paroles et en gestes des valeurs à défendre au moyen et à la suite des discussions à visée philosophique. Et, de par ce dont j'ai été témoin durant les années où j'animais régulièrement des séances de PPE avec mes élèves, ces résultats sont bien tangibles.

Un garçon qui règle ses conflits différemment sur la cour d'école, une petite fille qui ira parler à une amie pour lui dire ses sentiments et lui demander les siens à la suite d'une chicane, un élève qui dénonce une situation d'intimidation ou une autre qui devient particulièrement touchée par les enjeux environnementaux tout en étant en mesure de justifier ses positions. Apprendre à élever sa voix, s'opposer à ce qui nous semble être contre nos valeurs, propager notre empathie et sensibilité aux autres ; ces paroles et comportements ne sont-ils pas empreints de caractère?

Mais pour arriver à cela, il faut avoir pensé, il faut avoir pris du temps pour réfléchir et discuter avec les autres et c'est ce que permet de faire la PPE. Par le développement des habiletés sociales pendant les séances de PPE (écoute, respect des idées des autres, entraide, etc.), les participants apprennent à prendre soin des autres. Tandis que par le développement des pensées critique et créatrice, ils deviennent de plus en plus aptes à nuancer leurs propos, questionner les sources d'informations, ériger un argumentaire qui respecte les règles de la logique, etc. À mon avis, tout cela fonde le caractère de citoyens et citoyennes qui cesseront de se faire bernier par les détours intellectuels qu'utilisent les médias, politiciens ou firmes de relations publiques de ce monde.

**Apprendre à élever sa voix, s'opposer à ce qui nous semble être contre nos valeurs, propager notre empathie et sensibilité aux autres ; ces paroles et comportements ne sont-ils pas empreints de caractère?**

Pour moi, les exemples cités précédemment ne sont pas uniquement dus à la maturité naturelle, mais surtout aux compétences de sens critique et empathique développées par nos communautés de recherche philosophique. Mon mémoire de maîtrise sous la direction de M. Michael Schleifer et Mme Marie-France Daniel, avait d'ailleurs montré qu'un groupe d'enfants de 5 ans ayant expérimenté la PPE pendant 8 mois à raison d'une fois par semaine avait connu une amélioration de la compréhens-

<sup>226</sup> Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, *A framework for character education in schools*, (traduction de A.-M. Duclos), <http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf>

<sup>227</sup> Michel Sasseville, *La Pratique De La Philosophie Avec Les Enfants*, 3 ed. (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009).

sion des émotions significativement supérieure à celle d'un groupe contrôle.<sup>228</sup>

L'interdépendance entre les émotions et la cognition, démontrée notamment par les recherches du neurologue Antonio Damasio,<sup>229</sup> est bien présente en PPE. Autrement dit, lorsqu'on ressent mieux, on pense mieux, et vice-versa. Les discussions à visée philosophique impliquées dans l'approche Lipman contribuent à ces deux aspects intrinsèquement reliés. J'ai aussi noté de mon expérience sur le terrain que les élèves en difficultés de comportement et/ou d'adaptation sont très réceptifs aux séances de Philosophie pour enfants. Je n'ai pas trouvé de recherches sur cet aspect précis, mais je soupçonne que ce soit parce que ces élèves en difficultés possèdent une sensibilité particulière que les autres n'ont pas toujours. Étant donné leurs réalités parfois plus dures, ils peuvent peut-être développer davantage leur empathie. La principale limite que j'ai pu observer durant les séances de PPE est la suivante : un nombre d'élèves souvent très élevé en classe fait en sorte qu'il est difficile de donner la chance à tous et à toutes de prendre la parole. L'expérience générale des séances de PPE demeure toutefois bénéfique à mon avis.

## Éduquer à la démocratie et au militantisme par la PPE

Finalement, comme je l'ai souligné, l'éducation dans les filets du néolibéralisme ne peut plus se baser sur des valeurs aussi vides de sens que la financiarisation de l'économie au profit d'une classe dominante. Il devient maintenant nécessaire de développer les pensées critique et em-

pathique qui s'opposent à l'endoctrinement et l'individualisme. Pour une nouvelle formation au caractère critique, je souhaiterais une éducation aux vertus qui implique l'engagement social dans l'espoir d'une reconstruction démocratique plus combative. Habiler les enfants à remettre en question la pensée dominante, se méfier de la pensée unique et chercher des alternatives qui respectent la dignité humaine et environnementale est primordial. En plus d'éduquer au développement d'habiletés sociales, nous devons donc éduquer à la démocratie et au militantisme. Je propose que la PPE soit un moyen pour le faire afin de contribuer à un dépassement nécessaire de l'idéologie dominante dans nos sociétés. La PPE est une pratique en soi qui peut amener des changements de pensée et d'action dont nous avons grandement besoin aujourd'hui.

*Anne-Marie Duclos est enseignante de formation. Elle a enseigné pendant 10 ans au préscolaire et primaire et supervise maintenant des futurs enseignants au Centre de formation initial des maîtres de l'Université de Montréal. Doctorante en psychopédagogie à cette même université, elle offre aussi des animations et formations en Philosophie pour enfants.*

<sup>228</sup> A.-M. Duclos, *La Philosophie Pour Enfants Comme Outil De Compréhension Des Émotions* (Sarrebruck, Allemagne : Presses Académiques Francophones, 2012).

<sup>229</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Spinoza Avant Raison* (Paris : Odile Jacob, 2005); Antonio Damasio, *L'Erreur De Descartes : La Raison Des Émotions* (Paris : Odile Jacob, 2006).