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FYC Students' Emotional Labor in the Feedback Cycle

Kelly Blewett

Abstract: *This essay explores the emotions first-year composition students experience when receiving feedback on their writing. Culling data from 32 hours of interviews with students, as well as two different data streams students provided regarding their emotional reactions to feedback, I argue that students undergo what Arlie Hochschild calls transmutation as they process feedback on their writing. Two implications are suggested: first, that future studies should utilize non-alphabetic tools for capturing emotion; second, that teachers wishing to assist student reception of feedback should be attentive to building rapport in the classroom. Finally, the essay calls for additional study of the impact of positionality on rapport-building and, in turn, the feedback cycle.*

In his contribution to the book *Encountering Student Texts*, Charles Bazerman indicates that a first draft of his essay presented a picture of “the teacher in control of a complex set of relationships” (140). The subsequent revision, however, which emphasized the changeableness of the teacher’s self-presentation, reminds Bazerman of the mythic hero Menelaus’s attempt to capture the sea king Proteus in order to gain passage across the water. In the myth, Menelaus’s task is difficult because Proteus is unstable, constantly shifting shapes. Menelaus eventually imitates Proteus’s guises. He successfully grabs Proteus’s hands, and then, as Bazerman concludes, “the god assume[s] a stable shape and reveal[s] the way home across the sea” (146). Both figures in the myth are involved in an act of transmutation, or changing from one form to another. Bazerman suggests the same is true of teachers as they read and respond to student writing.

But feedback in the writing classroom is a recurring situation that can cast students and teachers into rigid roles and arouse a range of emotions. Lisa Ede notes that she dreads her students’ responses to her feedback before she even writes it (152). Nancy Sommers refers to the day of handing back papers to be “the loneliest” she experiences as a teacher, fraught with uncertainty about what her students will do with the comments she’s painstakingly produced (x). Nonetheless, she seeks to find pleasure in responding to student work.

Sommers’ attempt to find pleasure when reading student writing while keeping what we might deem inappropriate emotions (boredom, disgust, exhaustion, anger) at bay also suggests transmutation, as Arlie Russel Hochschild has used the word in her discussions of emotional labor. For Hochschild, transmutation means “the link between a private act, such as attempting to enjoy a party, and a public act, such as summoning up good feeling for a customer” (19). Understanding how such labor takes place—and its attendant affects—is difficult. Scholars of affect such as Kathleen Stewart use words like “slides” and “snaps into place” and “becomes a something” to describe the “surges” of affect that make up the texture of daily life (6, 15, 9).

As these words suggest, and as Bazerman’s essay demonstrates, considering feedback and emotion at the same time entails a commitment to studying inferred dynamics,

vibes, relational perception, and the essential changeableness that underlies these phenomena. This article will share how I attempted to uncover these aspects of feedback through a qualitative study at a large Midwestern university that prioritized student/teacher relationships and feelings.¹ My study is instructive for those of us committed to understanding the flows of emotion through which students and teachers inhabit their expected roles and through which student writing is mediated. I'll ultimately argue that studying the kind of emotional labor inherent in receiving feedback requires methods that move beyond particular vocabularies of emotion—even words informed by emotion studies—and should include nonalphabetic modes for students to communicate their emotional reactions to teacher feedback.

In the following paragraphs, then, I will first make the case that studying students' emotions as they read teacher feedback is a worthwhile pursuit, one that responds to longstanding calls within response literature, and takes us into the very heart of the communicative interchange of teaching writing. Next, I'll present the methods I used to try to access students' affective responses to feedback, which included 32 hours of one-on-one interviews with students and a collection of written data that featured two ways of tracking emotion—one by words (which were gathered after the student had processed the feedback), and one by images (which were gathered as the student was receiving the feedback for the first time). Disparate streams within the data set will be traced to suggest that how and when we ask students to comment on their emotions have a strong governing effect on the types of emotions they report, which I interpret as evidence of transmutation in action. An examination of one first-year student, Joseph, vividly illustrates the movement from the internal protean swirl to the stable, public face which students have been schooled to perform. Ultimately, I demonstrate that students undergo a process of transmutation that mirrors what Bazerman and others (Sommers; Ede; Murray) have discussed from the teacher perspective. Periodically, I will offer snapshots from the data—glimpses of particular students using nonalphabetic or metaphoric modes for discussing feedback—to show what a reliance on vocabulary alone misses: an emphasis on intensities and surges, a stronger and more ambivalent mix of positive and negative emotions, and a desire to use language that feels more accessible, vibrant and personal.

Literature Review: Emotion and Feedback

Those familiar with response literature in composition know the long history of examining the written comments outside of a classroom context, either by having many teachers look at and respond to a single student paper (Batt; Daiker; Connors and Lunsford; Smith; Straub and Lunsford) or by having students respond to decontextualized feedback on a sample student paper (Bowden; Straub, "Exploratory"). Such studies do little to tell us how students receive and interpret specific feedback. Richard Straub has argued that this is not actually the point of work like *Twelve Readers Reading*: "the goal is not to determine how . . . the student would likely understand it. The proposed analysis

1. Following Laura Micciche, I do not distinguish among the words feelings, emotions, and affects. See "Staying."

is concerned with the way the teacher creates himself in his comments, his persona as it may be construed from the words on the page” (*Practice* 84). His remark leaves a reader wanting to see students grappling with particular feedback from particular teachers.²

The unsatisfactory nature of these studies led Jane Fife and Peggy O’Neill to argue that on the topic of response our theories and methodologies need to do much more to acknowledge the complexity of the classroom scene. When conducted, such studies have upset established notions of how feedback works. For example, Carol Rutz studied the classroom of Luke, an experienced writing teacher. In addition to collecting samples of his commentary, she attended his class and took notes, interviewed Luke, and interviewed two students in his class. After the term was over, she gave student drafts from his class to a team of three raters.

The graph of Luke’s responses yields a graph similar to the reader profiles obtained by Richard Straub and Ronald Lunsford. . . It displays important information about Luke as a responder, to be sure, and the patterns are revealing—in part. However, this stark, two-dimensional assessment of Luke’s work as a reader of student texts lacks the context, including the dimensions of space and time, that better and more completely inform the relationship that Luke and his students developed during the fall of 1996. (126)

She contrasted the “two-dimensional” impressions of the assessors with the impressions of Luke’s students, who interpreted feedback from Luke in light of a lot more data about Luke—how he spoke in the classroom, how he framed and explained assignments, the feedback he offered to class as a whole. In short, they regarded his feedback through his classroom persona. The incorporation of their perception of Luke as a teacher made a significant improvement in their ability to interpret Luke’s comments. In Luke’s words, which Rutz borrowed to title her chapter, students became “marvelous cartographers,” adept at mapping the connections between the classroom and the paper’s margins. Studies like Rutz’s reveal the impoverished nature of feedback scholarship. I reported a similar finding in my own study, which followed the feedback cycles of two teachers, including Elise, who at the time had eighteen years of experience. Elise made a comment on a student paper that I perceived as ambiguous, even potentially aggressive (“It’s not that your introduction is ‘bad,’ it’s just that it needs work”). As I considered the comment over time, my interpretation hardened, especially as outside sources confirmed my impression.³ The teacher’s actual student, Kaari, however, was unperturbed by the comment, because, she told me in an interview, she “imagined my teacher saying it in her voice.” The teacher’s voice, in Kaari’s mind, was kind. Thus, Kaari rightly concluded “[The professor] didn’t mean any harm by [the comment].” Data beyond the decontextualized comment made up a gap in a way that worked for the student and sustained a productive feedback cycle. Codes are insufficient. Language cannot be understood in a vacuum.

These research stories suggest that emotion is an important dimension of the “marvelous cartography” of Luke’s students, though Rutz doesn’t explore emotion much.

2. See Knoblauch and Brannon, who make similar points in “Emperor.”

3. See Garber on the rhetorical effect of scare quotes.

The emotions students have when they receive feedback seems to be tied to the way they perceive their teachers and to what kind of relationship they have with their teachers. A long history of scholarship in K-12 emphasizes that students who have stronger relationships with teachers tend to do better in school, to like it more, and to go farther in their education (see Raider-Roth). Relationships and emotions are less often studied at the college level. Yet they are central to the writing classroom, and it is impossible to properly understand how feedback works without attending to them. In her introduction to *Composition Forum's* special issue on emotion, Laura Micciche writes, "emotion remains viable for investigating relationships writ large—what I take to be the general province of emotion studies." Far from an extra feature of communication, emotion is central in getting things done. If emotion studies can help us understand how feelings mediate the psychic and the social, the individual and the collective (Ahmed 119), then these acts of transmutation merit our attention.

As I've already suggested, existing work highlights the emotional transmutation teachers enact (consciously or subconsciously) when responding to student writing. Lad Tobin also explores teacher/student relationships, laying bare his own efforts to maintain the tone of a supportive coach in his comments, while also suppressing emotions and reactions that would undermine that performance. He writes: "I find it an almost constant challenge . . . to perform the role of an infinitely curious reader, even when I might be feeling bored or disapproving. Fortunately, while being and performing may not be exactly the same thing, I've always found that each naturally follows the other" ("Strategic" 203, emphasis added). His emphasis on "performing" his way to having the right feelings echoes Hochschild's point that when we "manage feeling we contribute to the creation of it" (18). Managing emotions is exactly what Piper Murray argues that teachers do when responding to student work:

I would be willing to bet that the more we may be feeling like lodging accusations in our students' margins (cliché! overgeneralization! awk!), the harder we work to prevent those accusations from actually making their way anywhere near our students' writing—the more careful we are, for example, to carefully *transform* such impulses into expressions of interest rather than frustration . . . (99, emphasis added)

For Murray, emotional labor of transmutation is required when outlaw emotions—blame and anger, in this case—threaten to bubble to the surface. While Murray and Tobin relied on their own experience to direct their investigations, Jacob Babb and Stephen Corbett have investigated, via surveys, the emotions professors experience when they issue a grade of F to a student. One of the most common sets of feelings was disappointment and self-doubt; the teachers sensed that they had not supported the students enough. This might be another way of articulating concern that they didn't properly fulfill their role. Less scholarship has examined transmutation from the student point of view, although some work points in that direction.

For example, Chris Anson, Deanna Dannels, Johanne Laboy, and Larissa Carneiro's "Student Perceptions of Oral Screencast Responses to Their Writing: Exploring Digitally Mediated Identities" surfaces the concept of facework, borrowed from Erving Goffman. This term explains what is at stake for students during an evaluative situation such

as receiving critical feedback. Students need to protect themselves from face threat by focusing on aspects of the response that are affirmative—for instance, on the fact that the teacher likes them as a person, likes their writing generally, or is motivated to help them. Thus, the student may receive the criticism with openness. Thomas Newkirk similarly focuses on how students' feelings—specifically, embarrassment and shame—influence their educational experiences. He writes, “the emotional underlife of teaching and learning deserves as much attention as technique or procedure” (13). When students' egos are threatened, learning may slow or students may shut down.

Likewise, Dana Driscoll and Roger Powell examine the role of emotion in writing development in college. Through a qualitative, longitudinal study of thirteen writers, Driscoll and Powell argue that students' emotional states, traits, and dispositions have great impact on their ability to transfer lessons about writing from one context to another. Ultimately, they argue that teachers should work to foster positive environments in their classroom in order to purposefully circulate positive emotions, which can then facilitate student learning. They zoom in on response as one such intervention point: “Faculty, in our study, often gave good feedback from the perspective of improving the draft but not necessarily from the perspective of managing a delicate writer; the effect of this feedback did not always result in generative emotional states.”

I build on this work and connect the personalized accounts of transmutation reported by teachers when reading and responding to student writing with a study designed to explore how emotional labor works for students receiving teacher feedback. Such work is long overdue in feedback studies and connects contemporary conversations around emotion and learning to the feedback cycle in the writing classroom. The questions I approach through this study are as follows:

1. What emotions do students experience when they receive feedback?
2. Do students transmute the emotions they experience when receiving feedback?
3. What research methods might shed light on the emotional transmutation of students in composition classroom?
4. What can teachers do to make it more likely that students will stick with the writing process in the midst of difficult feedback?

Study Overview and Methods

This study took place at an urban university in the Midwest in the fall of 2016. In order to understand the interplay of relationality and feedback in first-year writing, I pursued a purposeful sampling of writing teachers and first-year students. Teachers were selected based on their course evaluations; previous classes had “strongly agreed” with the following statement from their course evaluations: “My teacher provided effective feedback in this course.” As I will explore in the discussion section, I came to question the role that bias played not only in the course evaluations of the teachers I selected, both of whom were cis-gendered, able-bodied white women, but also in impacting the way students perceived these teachers, starting on the first days of the class. Students were invited to participate in the study based on how they scored on a Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, an instrument designed by educational researchers at the

University of Michigan to measure student motivation in relation to particular academic classes (see Duncan and McKeachie). In each class, two students who scored in the top quartile of respondents and two students who scored in the bottom quartile were chosen to enroll in the study. In addition to difference in degree of writing motivation, the eight students were also diverse in terms of race, gender, and intended career path. The goal in pursuing such a sample was not to make study results generalizable, but rather to increase the likelihood that I would study information-rich examples of the feedback cycle in action. Data collected consisted of 32 hours of student interviewing in accordance with Irving Seidman's guidelines in *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (four interviews per participant, spread out over the course of the semester), all graded writing from the course, and sixteen prewriting activities, which primed students to discuss their emotional reaction to teacher feedback.

The goal of the interviews was to understand the feedback cycle from the students' perspective. I was drawn to phenomenological interviewing because it prioritizes the subjects' meaning-making, regarding them as the experts on the phenomenon at hand. The first interview (around week three of a fifteen-week term) attempted to understand the students' history of receiving feedback on their writing, as well as their initial impressions of their composition class. The second and third interviews took place after students had received professor feedback on two different assignments. I had copies of their graded work on hand when the students came in, and we conducted a detailed interview that asked the students to reflect on how they received the feedback, what they thought about particular moments in the feedback, and what they would do next. The purpose of these interviews was to gather information about students' reception of feedback in action, as close to the moment it happened, and to give them tools to unpack their reactions in ways that would make the interviews comparable to each other. While I wanted the interviews to be semi-structured, mainly around a discussion of the marked-up paper, I also wanted to give the students room to reflect on the feedback before they arrived at the interview. For this reason, I asked the students to complete a prewriting exercise before the second and third interview. Through the process of analyzing my data, I came to regard the prewriting exercises as useful sources in themselves, particularly because they offered seemingly incongruent data on the emotions students experienced.

Prewriting Activities: Word Banks and Emoji Stickers

Before the second and third interviews, students completed a required prewriting exercise. From a word bank the students were asked to choose a word representing the dominant, strongest reaction they had to the feedback they received on their writing. The words in the bank were informed by scholarship regarding the range and relationship between various emotional states (McLeod, Parrott, Plutchik, Raider-Roth, Shaver, and Tobin), as well as words already used by the students in the first interview to describe reactions they had to feedback they'd received in the past. In its approach, the compilation of this word bank is not dissimilar from other studies that have attempted to use words to stand in or represent affective states. Babb and Corbett write of designing their own survey:

We offered nine options for emotional responses: disappointment, sadness, frustration, anger, joy, vindication, concern, surprise, and confusion. In an attempt to provide an element of cross-research comparison, these options are the same as those Nicole I. Caswell used in her 2011 study (like ours, including a WPA listserv survey) of teachers' expressed negative emotions while responding to their students' writing assignments (with the exception that we included "vindication" and "frustration" and omitted "disgust").

Comparing the list of emotional states offered in my word bank to Babb and Corbett, as well as Driscoll and Powell, I find myself wondering why I didn't include disappointed or confused. Nonetheless, variations of those words—frustrated, disgusted, angry, annoyed—did make the list. In all, students chose fourteen dominant words from the word bank. The word bank included the following emotions: angry, accepting, amused, annoyed, bored, disgusted, distracted, frustrated, interested, happy, peaceful, proud, sad, satisfied, surprised, and trusting.

As I looked at the fourteen completed word bank selections, I immediately saw patterns emerging: many students chose the same words after reading their feedback (trusting, accepting, satisfied). This similarity across high-and-low motivated students and across two classrooms raised interesting questions about what kinds of emotions "stick" (a term I borrow from Ahmed) to productive working relationships in first-year composition and how students seek to manage their emotions to perform the expected student role. The exchange might be plastic, easily fungible, and managed by the kind of politics of politeness Wendy Ryden highlights in her study of kitsch in the writing classroom. The writing teacher, perhaps, becomes a "simplistic symbol for ready and pre-digested consumption," or, in other words, a teacher from whom the student can easily receive feedback (Lugg qtd. in Ryden 84).

However, the easy representation of a static interchange, in which teachers and students inhabit easily recognizable roles, is undercut through the second prewriting activity: the application of emoji stickers next to specific marginal comments to reflect student reactions to each comment. According to Merriam-Webster, emojis are "any of various small images, symbols, or icons used in text fields in electronic communication (as in text messages, e-mail, and social media) to express the emotional attitude of the writer, convey information succinctly, communicate a message playfully without using words, etc." At the request of one of the student participants, emoji stickers were purchased and made available to all students to use during the second and third interviews. During the second interview, seven of the eight focal students opted to use the stickers to tag their emotional reactions to particular teacher comments. During the third interview, however, the number went down to four. I emphasized in my communication with students that using the emoji stickers was optional, while the word bank was required. It was after the study concluded, when I examined the emotions expressed by the stickers and the emotions expressed by the word bank, that I noticed a difference in the two data sets. I argue these differences suggest a stickered trail of transmutation.

Results: Disparate Streams of Data

In her study about the emotions that sorority sisters experience when they move from pledges to full membership, Faith Kurtkya suggests coding emotional language in three ways: positive, negative, or mixed. She found that coders could agree on these categories, while other attempts to break down and analyze emotions were more difficult to validate. (These three categories seem to overlap with those used by Powell and Driscoll: generative, negative, and mixed.) In my study, when we apply those three categories to the emotions students listed in response to the prompt, we see that all dominant emotions identified by students were positive, with the exception of one.

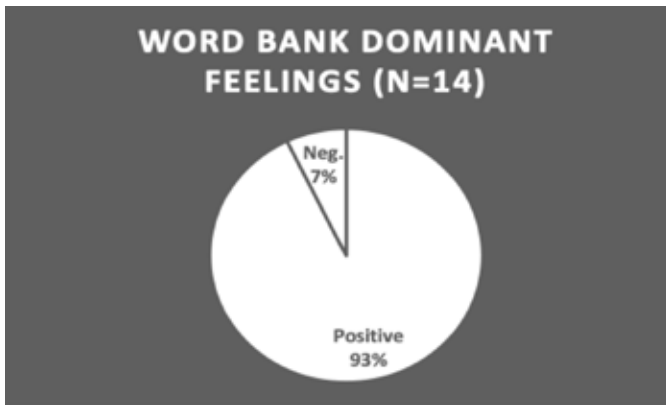


Figure 1: Positive (n=13) and Negative (n=1) Dominant Emotions from Word Bank.

Overwhelmingly students' reactions—as reported and reflected on during the interview—were positive. The most often used words included “accepting” and “trusting.” Of course, this is exactly how students are indoctrinated to perceive their teachers. As Lynn Worsham has written, “all education is sentimental, [and] all education is an education of sentiment” (163). The students themselves talked about the generic nature of the trust they have for their teachers. Here are some representative comments on this point:

- “I trust almost all the professors I have and the feedback they give us. I feel like they're professionals at it. It's really hard not to believe them or to say they're wrong instead of you're wrong.”
- “I wouldn't want to think negatively about a teacher's comment because I know it's their job to help me improve, not to make me feel like I'm not doing good.”
- “Whether or not you were one of their best students, they all care about their students, as long as you're showing up and trying. You haven't given up, they haven't given up.”
- “I don't know if I've ever not trusted a teacher.”
- “I'm usually very trusting . . . I don't distrust. The acceptance is pretty much the same all around.”

These comments suggest that trust is a relational state that most students enter with all teachers, or at least they seek to enter that state. They also hint at something more: for trust to be established and maintained, the students remind themselves of the teacher's authoritative role, which is to provide expert feedback geared toward improvement. They see the teacher's role as essential to the transaction of the classroom: "you haven't given up, they haven't given up." These students are essentially articulating how they stay, as Sommers puts it in "Across the Drafts," "open and receptive" to teacher feedback (253).

Trusting a generalized teacher—following this emotion rule—is key to maintaining the expected student role, which Sommers has argued is one of the most important indicators of whether a student will be successful in college. The students are talking about the student responsibility to accept what the teacher says. This is the inverse of the teacher responsibility Bazerman describes: "we as teachers have a responsibility to accept that piece of [student] writing according to our best lights" (142). For the student, "accepting" feedback on their writing "according to [their] best lights" may involve believing that the teachers are there to support them and to help them improve. They must embrace the role of the novice, at least initially.

While trust emerges as a key, if generic and plastic, and, as Wendy Ryden might say, "kitschy," affect that circulates between students and teachers, the word bank responses alone do not sufficiently reflect the transmutation process students went through as they prepared to inhabit this role. As we move to the emoji responses, more negative emotions appear with nearly half being negative (see figure three).

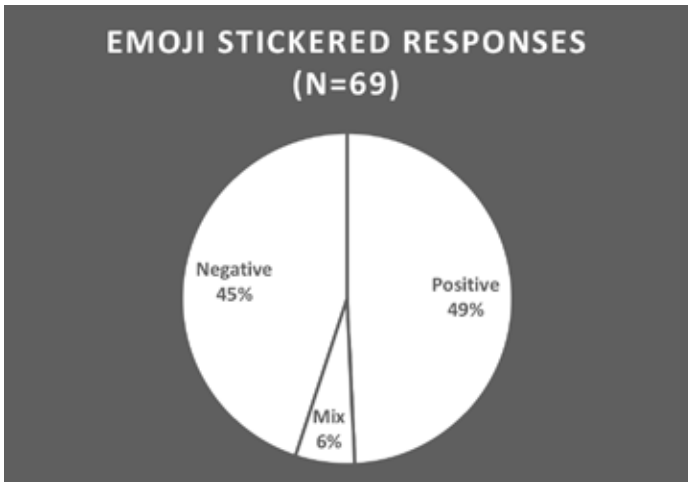


Figure 2: Positive (n=34), Mixed (n=4) and Negative (n=31) Emojis

As figure 3 shows, there is a much more ambivalent mix of positive and negative emotions reported in the emoji prewriting than in the word bank prewriting. Admittedly, the sample size for this data set is small. Of the eight students, only half completed the emoji sticker prewriting prior to the second and third interviews. Nonetheless, I find the gaps between the data sets compelling, particularly when supplemented through

the interview data. Examining the case study of Joseph, a student who used the emoji stickers to express his reactions to unexpected critical feedback while still arriving at a positive word bank emotion, provides more insight into the relationship between figures two and three.

Case Study: Joseph's Strategic Forgetfulness

Joseph, a second-year student who intended to enter the medical field, was selected as a high-motivation student. I noticed early on in our interactions that Joseph relied heavily on his peers for affirmation of his writing. At his friends' recommendation, for instance, he took Honors writing in high school. As a first-year college student, Joseph enrolled in his particular section of FYC because his high school friend was also in the course. He and his friend sat near each other, discussed the class over lunch, and wrote papers at side-by-side computer stations in the library. He also sent every paper he wrote to his girlfriend, as his quote below elaborates:

I wrote the paper and then I sent it to her. Well, first I sent it to [my friend] to check and he corrected the grammar and stuff, like if a word was wrong or it needed a comma or something like that. He fixed that stuff and sent it back and told me what I needed to work on. Then I sent it to her to see what she said. We were on a GoogleDoc and she made comments. We spent like five hours on it. I trust her in English.

Joseph's reliance on his peers for assistance is an important component of what Bazerman calls "the history and personality" of the student and sets the stage for the negative surprise he would shortly receive. After Joseph resolved each of his girlfriend's concerns, he anticipated getting an A on the paper, or maybe a B at worst. But his paper got a C. He said:

I was honestly very shocked. It was bad. I was on BlackBoard. I saw my grade, it went from an A to a B, and it was a low B. Yeah, I saw my overall grade and I was like, "Oh no, what went in?" Then I scrolled down and I see the research essay and it's a C. Then my heart dropped. I got angry at myself. Not at [the professor], but more at myself because I thought I did a lot better. I was shocked because I didn't think that was going to be the outcome. I was expecting at least a B or an A. I just thought I put enough work in to be a B or an A.

As Joseph read through the comments, he began applying emoji stickers to make a trail of his reactions. Figure four offers an overview of the images that Joseph stickered to his draft. The images can be read from right to left, like a row of text.



Figure 3: Joseph’s Emoji Responses to Marginal Comments on his Paper

While applying words to emojis is an interpretive act, I see here a range of negative feelings, including shock and dismay, disgusted sighing, woundedness, speechlessness, and hysterical laughter. As I reviewed these stickers during the interview, Joseph and I had the following exchange:

Kelly: Gosh, a lot of tears.

Joseph: Yeah.

Kelly: You get hysterical right at the end.

Joseph: It honestly was hysterical. By the time I checked through all the comments, I was like, “Oh my god, there’s so much to do.” It just got funny, I guess.

Joseph’s emotions, as articulated during the prewriting activity, however, were not hysterical, tearful, or negative. Instead, Joseph’s dominant word was accepting. Joseph’s freewrite immediately following these selections was as follows:

Accepting is the dominant emotional response. I say this because I know the feedback [the professor] gave is solely to make my essay better. She stated, “Joseph, good focus in this draft. In revision, work on the writing itself.” The reason this captured my attention is because it let me know the focus or ideas of the essay were good. . . . Moving forward, I plan to start to revise the essay this weekend. I believe that since I see the revisions/comments she made as constructive, I am able to forget the “negative” emotions I feel and focus on making the essay better.

Joseph’s narrative illustrates Hochschild’s point that “[t]his emotion system works privately, often free of observation . . . It is a way of describing how we intervene in feelings in order to shape them” (57).

To accept his professor Elise’s evaluation of his writing, Joseph must also accept that his self-assessment was incorrect—and that the assessments of his girlfriend and friend were also incorrect. The double-edged—almost self-cutting—element of this reversal was articulated by another student, Kaari, a low-motivation student who commented that for each positive emotion she wrote on her prewriting activity, she also felt the

opposite emotion toward herself. Thus even as she wrote that she was “informed” by her teachers comments, she also acknowledged that she had previously been—and would, without her teacher’s intervention, continue to be—“ignorant.” Moving from the swirl of receiving critical feedback to accepting it is not automatic, even for a highly-motivated student such as Joseph. Kaari’s discussion of the emotions that faced the teacher and the emotions that faced herself as a student are mirrored in Joseph’s interview transcript, where he makes the point of saying that the emoji faces are not looking towards his teacher but instead towards himself. He was experiencing what Anson and his colleagues call face threat, “those communications which challenge a person’s desired self-image” and are “typically met with defensiveness” (384). In these instances where the ego is threatened, write Bruce Ballenger and Kelly Myers about revision and emotion, the student may “seek to reduce or eliminate [the cognitive dissonance], particularly if it threatens their self-concept” (592).

Why was Joseph able to see Elise’s comments as useful and persist? Part of the answer is that he knew he had to see them as constructive in order to hold up his end of the social bargain of the classroom. Again, Bazerman gets at the essence of the deal: “the interaction that occurs between student and teacher across the student’s paper is framed and driven by the reason we have come together in such a contrived dyad: for the students to learn to write better” (143).

By reflecting on the situation of the communication and the role of his teacher, Joseph managed to discipline himself into the position of, as James Gee would put it, saying/doing/believing the right combination to inhabit the student role. As he said in the interview: “I’m going to work hard on this revision, I’m going to get it done early, and I’m going to meet with my teacher to confirm I’m on the right track.” While Driscoll and Powell suggest that students’ ability to handle negative circumstantial emotions has to do with their emotional disposition, I see a nuance here: it has to do with his perception of the teacher’s ability to fulfill her end of the classroom bargain. The fact that all eight of the focal students overwhelmingly managed to arrive at a similar small subset of dominant emotions in the word bank suggests Joseph’s process of transmutation is not unique. We might extrapolate that his management of his emotions is as mundane as the self-regulation of the airline stewardesses studied by Hochschild in the early eighties—and that his emotional management is just as key to his successful completion of his work as their “managed heart” was to theirs.

Discussion

To the research questions I posed at the beginning of this study, I now offer the following answers. Yes, students experience outlaw emotions when reading feedback. And, yes, emojis seem to unlock more ambivalence regarding the feedback cycle than words alone. Timing also seems critical. When students are asked to reflect on emotions after reading the feedback, they report more positive emotions than when asked to reflect on emotions while reading the feedback. When receiving critical feedback, students seem to focus on generic student/teacher roles to mediate their reactions. In all, this study thus suggests that those of us invested in the role of emotion in the writing classroom should pay attention to the modalities we use when researching emotion and to ways

that professors can offer cues that they are fulfilling the expected role of professor. I will elaborate on each of these points briefly below.

Emojis and Non-Alphabetic Modalities

Joseph's use of emojis led to a more nuanced understanding of his emotional reaction as he read particular teacher comments. In this essay, I've put these emojis together and suggested that they offer a more compelling portrait of the reading than the word bank counterparts. This, in turn, points to something broader: visual tools like emojis more accurately capture the waves and surges of emotion than words alone. They are better equipped to represent the changeableness of emotion states. As Joseph transitions from sad crying to funny crying, we see a shift in his emotional state that a single word would efface. And capturing these shifts, that changeable quality, is central to those of us who are interested in what Newkirk calls the "emotional underlife" of learning (4).

Secondly, emojis are better suited for capturing the intensity of emotional responses. This intensity might seem overblown or hyperbolic, but that's part of the semiotic system of emojis. Although hyperbolic, these images are representing resonances that feel true to the student and unlock new directions to explore through research. Bazerman writes, "How the student perceives the teacher as an audience will influence what the student will write, with what attitude, and with what level of intensity" (142). Emojis offer a way of finding "hot spots" in student reaction to professor feedback that are promising. They need not merely be negative, as was the case in Joseph's emoji reaction. Consider Cailey, the student who initiated using the emojis because she felt that they "flew with the times." Cailey's use of the emoji below prompted an interesting discussion of her reaction to her professor's reaction to her paper.



Figure 4: Heart Eyes

Cailey used this particular emoji to symbolically represent her affective response to a comment. Sarah, Cailey's teacher, made (a checkmark) during a conference. Cailey explained: "She got super excited about [the conclusion] . . . I was going with her. She made me pumped up. Like, 'Yeah.' She kept checking, and I was like, 'You keep checking it. I like that.'" She later referred to this moment as "sparking." For Cailey, "sparking" with Sarah over her paper—as documented by the heart-eye emoji—was a (relatively) intense emotional exchange. Dictionary definitions of "Heart Eyes" on Emojipedia and EmojiDictionary emphasize the erotic undertones of this emoji: "crush, lovestruck, adored, heartthrob." While I don't think that Cailey felt exactly these emotions toward Sarah, there was something charged in her response. Cailey's use of the word "sparking" also implies the kind of relational fire-making that is more often used to describe romantic love or attraction than teacher/student connection. She's hinting at the important role libidinal affect might play in one's experience of composing. Without the emoji, this underlying intensity to the exchange would have been lost. Emojis capture more than words alone.

Finally, emojis are appealing for their playfulness and their relevance to the ways that students communicate today. Emojis are immediately available on most student phones and are closer to the emotional vocabulary of students' everyday lives. Studies of the use of emoticons in personal communication offer similar findings. After analyzing 92 surveys that provided "open-ended accounts of their reasons for using emoticons across virtual platforms," researchers found that the top reasons that these emoticons were used was to "aid personal expression." Sub-themes included "establishing emotional tone" and to "lighten the mood" (Kaye, Wall, and Malone 463). Such topics are also explored in the recent book *Because, Internet* by Gretchen McCulloch, which examines for a lay audience what Geoff Nunberg calls the "ironic, informal, and expressive" uses of language that have developed online. Considering the vocabularies students generally employ is vital for those of us interested in tracking the flows of emotion in the classroom. While Bazerman's Greek myth captured, for him and for some readers, the intensity of the struggle to determine the ideal way to engage a student writer, other semiotic systems, beyond literary allusion or a list of emotional states in a word bank, can accomplish something similar. We open ourselves to our students' perception by switching semiotic systems because, as Hochschild writes, "to name a feeling is to name our way of seeing something" (223). We need to see beyond the vocabularies we've used in the past.

Performing the Teacher Role by Consciously Building Rapport

The study suggests a generic trust between the teacher and the student greased the wheels of the affective exchange and made it possible for students receiving critical feedback to transmute negative emotions to outward displays of acceptance. This finding raises the question about what teachers can do to present themselves in ways that support student emotional labor. A study by Nathan G. Webb and Laura O. Barrett provides an instructive complement to the findings presented here. Analyzing the first-year communications classroom space, Webb and Barrett sought to understand which teacher behaviors were perceived as building rapport.

While rapport building has received attention as a component of productive relationships in scholarship of teaching and learning contexts, it hasn't received as much attention within composition studies. To understand students' perceptions of rapport, Webb and Barrett coded open-form student responses on a survey. They found that student responses were easily coded using a system previously established by scholars who had studied "consumerist settings" (Gremler and Gwinner). Their categories for rapport building behaviors included: attentive behaviors, common grounding behaviors, courteous behaviors, connecting behaviors, and information-sharing behavior. Table 1 offers a brief overview of each of these components.

Table 1: Rapport-building Behaviors

Uncommonly attentive behaviors	Personal interest and recognition to students—calling students by name, demonstrating excitement, prompt responses, getting all students involved in class
Connecting behaviors	References to humor, pleasant conversation, friendly interaction
Information sharing behaviors	Give advice, impart knowledge, communicate clear expectations
Courteous behaviors	Honesty, empathy, respect
Grounding behaviors	Speaks on the students level and finds similarity with the student

Consciously building rapport in the classroom using these kinds of behaviors seems to communicate to students that the professor is inhabiting the expected teacher role. In my analysis of students' comments between receiving feedback and reporting acceptance, I saw many references to the rapport-building behaviors Webb and Barrett described. A few brief examples are below:

- "She goes into great detail when explaining things." (information-sharing)
- "Listening to her read the syllabus, I was watching her as a person." (information-sharing)
- "She always goes over the rubric." (information-sharing)
- "She's young and easy to relate to." (grounding)
- "She radiates calm." (courteous)
- "When she asks questions, everyone is pretty involved." (attentive)
- "She gets excited and incorporates the whole class with it." (attentive)

Although it might seem that building rapport has little to do with feedback, the data suggests a link between these areas that merits further consideration. And, in light of Hochschild's work, such a link makes sense: as the airline stewardesses in her book displayed the proper face and felt the right feelings, they also paved the way for the customer to inhabit the right frame of mind (and heart). Hochschild writes, "the social bottom usually looks for guidance to the social top. Authority carries with it a certain mandate over feeling rules" (75). The rapport-aiding behaviors uncover similar emotional rules as apply to teaching; students perceive the performance of these rules as cues to perform their own student role, which involves engaging in the expected work of the

class, doing the emotional work required to be open to critical feedback, and responding to critical feedback through revision

Conclusion

Like Charles Bazerman, I find myself a bit unnerved as I conclude this essay. In both instances, a simple answer was discarded for a messier one. Bazerman had to admit that the relationships he develops with students are protean rather than predictable, and that his reading and responding practices are more “ramshackle and ad hoc” than he previously imagined (140). In the case of my study, complications also emerged. While the data demonstrates that students are managing their emotions to accept critical feedback and while I do believe that purposefully establishing rapport may assist students in that process, it is also imperative to consider how a teacher’s identity presentation impacts their ability to establish rapport with students—and, in turn, the delicate emotional ecosystem students inhabit as they receive critical feedback.

The two teachers featured in this study who excelled at establishing rapport were selected due to students’ course evaluations. Yet, of course, such evaluations are subject to bias. Evidence suggests course evaluations are higher for those perceived as men than those perceived as women (MacNell et al.) and for those perceived as white than for teachers perceived as other (Lazos). What this means for my study is that perhaps two white-women focal teachers conform to student bias regarding the appropriate teacher for a composition class. Many of the student comments quoted above regarding rapport-building behavior are overtly gendered and appearance-based, with students commenting on a teacher’s age (“she’s young”) and emotional disposition (“she radiates calm”). When a female-identified student says she was “watching [the professor] as a person,” it’s hard to know if she would comment similarly about a teacher perceived as male.

The idea that women are particularly suited to teaching writing plays into the mother-teacher trope that is prevalent in composition (see Schell), in which nurturing women help students “clean up” their writing and adjust to college life. Students perhaps have internalized these stereotypes of the composition teacher, and therefore are more likely to see feedback more favorably from presumed female, presumed straight, and presumed white teachers. Lisa Martin describes this kind of bias as the base of role congruity theory (Voeten), a point expanded by Sylvia Lazos in “Are Teaching Evaluations Hurting Women and Minority Teachers?” Lazos writes: “Unconscious bias, stereotypes, and assumptions about role appropriateness are the subject parameters that students unconsciously carry in their heads and use to shape the way they perceive their women and minority professors . . . In sum, women and minority professors’ performance in the classroom is fraught with potential land mines” (166). Hochschild’s study, while not using the language of role congruity theory, also emphasized that preconceived notions of identity were in play for the airline stewardesses she studied. “[T]hey are not simply women in the biological sense,” she explained. “They are also a highly visible distillation of middle-class American notions of femininity. They symbolize Woman” (175). We already have substantive evidence that teaching evaluations are biased, but it’s harder to pinpoint how bias impacts invisible classroom procedures, even those as mundane as receiving feedback on an essay.

These concerns offer very real pressure to classroom conditions and interactions, especially in required writing courses where labor is so often contingent and student evaluations are important for teachers who wish to maintain employment. At the same time, this study, and others like it, make me hopeful. So much of the scholarship on response has neglected to probe the dynamics that underlie the process. Approaches that examine this exchange through the lenses of emotional labor and relational perception seem to bring us closer to understanding how classroom dynamics inform the writing process and the feedback cycle. The challenge lies in how to explore this phenomenon without re-inscribing disempowering tropes or falling into transactionalism. We need work that examines explicitly how positionality impacts relational perception and affective exchanges in the classroom, and how this, in turn, impacts the feedback cycle. In all, it is important to understand that transmutation is unfolding in writing classrooms today, and that both teachers and students engage in this process in order to stay with the project—the writing itself—that brings them together.

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