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**Desire and Passion as Foundations for Teaching and Learning: A Pedagogy of the Erotic**

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**THE ENCOUNTER: #1**

Jared\(^1\) won’t stop IMing\(^2\) me, and honestly, I don’t want him to. I’ve really come to appreciate him for more than just a student. I’m not at all physically attracted to him, but he does peak my intellectual curiosity. He has an attractive personality. By that, I mean that I could see myself having a real friendship with him were I to encounter him outside of the classroom. This institutional space surrounds us in power differentials existing between teachers and students. This doesn’t feel right, though. I don’t want to be accused of “playing favorites.” I’m new at this teaching thing, and I don’t want to get called into the principal’s office. I don’t want him to take advantage of our friendship. But I like being around him. He makes me smile. I like talking with him and hearing his stories, hearing about his 17-year old adven-

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\(^1\) I use pseudonyms throughout this paper.

\(^2\) “IMing” is short for “instant messaging.” Many online programs are set up where persons belonging to them can send one another instant messages, allowing them to talk to one another online via typing messages that are instantly sent and received. Such programs include America On-Line (AOL) Instant Messaging, Microsoft Network (MSN) Messenger Service, and Yahoo Chat.
tures with his punk band and his beat up old car. His love affair with coffee makes me laugh.

Coffee is one of his favorite topics of conversation. His addiction to coffee inspired him to make some for the whole class during his informative speech. He knows that I enjoy a cup of coffee every now and then, too. He even offers to bring coffee to class for me, offers which I sort of gloss over. If someone wants to bring me coffee, then I’m all for it, but I don’t know how that would look for others in the class. I don’t want to send any mixed messages to him or anyone else. I’m not in the business of accepting “gifts” from students.

I make it a policy to provide students with my AOL instant messenger and MSN messenger service screen names. This has been very helpful for students; they contact me quite often to talk about class topics—questions on tests, assignments, due dates, etc. This very morning, Jared’s IM window pops up. He asks me if I’m on campus. I tell him no but, assuming he has a class-related question, I can meet with him later or answer anything right now. He says that he’s just curious. He’s working on campus and thought he’d say “hi.” We chat about a few more things, nothing to do with class. I tell him that I think a good job for him would be working at Jaguar Java because he’d get a discount on coffee. He then asks, “Would it be inappropriate to bring you coffee sometime, my fellow addict?” Another offer. After a significant pause and a few more messages back and forth about other topics, I hesitate. “I don’t think it would be inappropriate, but university policy thinks it

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3 Jaguar Javas are small coffee stands located throughout campus.

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would be.” Did I say too much? Is there something coded—a word we talked about a few short weeks ago in our introductory communication class—that reveals more than it should? Then I add, “I’d love to have some on exam day, though.” He writes, “You know, you’re pretty cool for a grad student. I dated one for a while once and she didn’t have a fun bone in her body.” What does he mean? Is there something coded that I’m supposed to decode? I counter, “Well, SPCM [speech communication] grads aren’t like others.” I’m at once growing in comfort and discomfort. Before I go too far, I should stop. Although, I can’t say what it means to “go too far.” So we say we’ll see each other in class tomorrow, and that’s that.

**The Purpose**

Jared is one of my students. I’m not quite sure what to make of my desire to engage in this electronic, extra-classroom relationship with him. In many ways, I feel like it enhances our intra-classroom relationship. I feel as though I relate to him differently than I do other students. I feel less distance. I feel a mutual investment in what we’re doing in this hybrid communication course. I wasn’t taught about this in my GTA orientation seminars aside from the “don’t-have-romantic-relationships-with-your-students” advice. I haven’t had opportunities to discuss this in my communication pedagogy seminars. Yet I doubt that I’m alone in feeling a personal connection with a student, and believing these are the very things we talk about in our communication classrooms.
In this essay, I use my experiences as a graduate teaching assistant in a stand-alone introductory communication course to theorize the roles of desire and passion within the classroom, developing a pedagogy of the erotic. Using a narrative style throughout, I focus on extra-classroom instant messaging encounters I had with several students (Jared included) in one semester to inspire questions I feel are fundamental to the vocation of an educator in general, and a communication educator specifically. I argue for a shift in pedagogical practice from resisting desire and passion as feelings potentially destructive (as in when they cross ambiguous and constructed institutional boundaries), to embracing such emotions as affirming, creative, and relationship-building pedagogical influences. This entails a shift away from relegating notions of desire and passion to the realm of the sexual, in the conventional sense of the word. I aim to illuminate the tensions and contradictions young and/or beginning communication instructors sometimes face when questions of personal and professional boundaries arise. I offer a pedagogy of the erotic as a pedagogical orientation that is fitting for the introductory hybrid course, as it promotes freedom of exploration and acknowledges desire and passion as integral parts of the human communication process in general, and the teaching and learning process specifically. To that end, I hope that educators of the introductory communication course, and those that direct introductory course programs, might see the potential in acknowledging the sometimes-blurry boundaries that hinder both teachers and students from drawing upon their curiosities in exploring, together, the process of human communication. I put forward implications a pedagogy
of the erotic may have for introductory communication course classrooms, as well as orientation programs that train educators within such classrooms.

My studies of graduate education have largely been situated within the field of critical and engaged pedagogies. These pedagogical orientations inform my development of a pedagogy of the erotic. While I do not have space to detail critical and engaged pedagogies, I would like to take time to highlight those parts of them that I find particularly relevant to my work here. In the age of globalization, more and more educators are beginning to take seriously, or at least acknowledge, the importance of critical approaches to education. MacGillivray (1997) summarized Giroux’s four elements of critical pedagogy:

(1) voices can be heard, (2) ways to interrogate discourses can be created and used to create new understanding of lives within and outside the classroom, (3) emancipation is central to creating new ways to imagine community, and (4) work addresses and attempts to change the reality of students’ lives. (p. 473)

A critical pedagogy situates education in its historical, geographical, and cultural context. Its practitioners interrogate the process of learning as value-laden, rather than value-neutral. It asks participants to examine the ways ideologies and power dynamics based on and wrapped up in categories such as race, ability, sexual orientation, gender, class, and age, inform the processes of education and educational policy. Critical pedagogues “are dedicated to the emancipatory imperatives of self-empowerment and social transformation” (McLaren, 1998, p. 167). They understand the dynamic of power and ideology to be constitutive of what happens in schools, and are committed to classrooms as being a site
Critical pedagogy relies on self-reflexivity, and asks educational participants to critically interrogate their part in creating and maintaining educational systems. Finally, a critical pedagogy embraces authentic relationships among educators, students, community members, administrators, parents, and so forth. Fassett and Warren (2007) explicate a critical communication pedagogy as one which explores mundane communicative practices as constructing educational subjects, and note that “it is in those moments [of mundaneity] that the social structure emerges” (p. 45).

Engaged pedagogy, likewise, sees education as a site of subjectivity construction. Such a pedagogy is very much invested in personhood—recognizing educational participants as more than their specific roles within the classroom (e.g., teachers and students). Hooks (1994) contests that engaged pedagogy “emphasizes [the] well-being” of teachers and students alike (p. 15). A goal is to empower teachers and students, and embrace vulnerability and self-actualization. This pedagogy stands in stark contrast to pedagogical models that are content-based, teacher-centered, and rationally-oriented. Hooks (1994) further argues that

[the unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class [the unwillingness to be an engaged, critical educator] is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained. (p. 39)]

Because both engaged and critical pedagogies are intertwined with affirming participants’ humanity, hooks

With this orientation in mind, I am called to be reflexive in these mediated moments like my conversations with Jared, and to ask questions of the current educational system, questions that center on the nature of the teacher-student relationship. Where do I, as a teacher, get to experience emotion and attraction? How about my students? Where might I experience the powerful force of joy and passion and curiosity which can bridge the differences between me and other students? Where is the line between teacher-student and student-teacher (Freire, 2000, p. 80)? Why can I not accept a simple cup of coffee from a student? How am I to work on my vocation of becoming fully human—and work with others to become fully human—if I am forced to deny passions and curiosities and emotions I have as a human being (Freire, 2000)?

**The Setting**

I teach the introductory communication course. It’s my seventh semester as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) teaching this hybrid course known as Oral Communication: Speech, Self, and Society. Students have to complete speeches, reflection papers, tests, in-class activities, and attend to participation. The course content largely includes a mixture of public speaking, interpersonal, intercultural, verbal, and embodied communication. As a GTA, I’m the instructor-on-record; I don’t assist a professor in grading and the like, so no one is there to monitor what happens in the class. The course
is situated within a department that encourages and offers graduate seminars in critical pedagogies and democratic education. A large part of the week-long GTA orientation at the beginning of each school year is devoted to discussing pedagogical philosophies, the construction of the roles of teacher and student, and how GTAs might integrate critical perspectives into their classes. As a graduate teaching assistant, I hold a relatively good deal of autonomy within the class. I have guidelines, core required elements of the syllabus, required chapters, and an overall structure of assignments to follow, but the specifics of the course content are up to me. I appreciate this autonomy; I have enough freedom to develop my own pedagogical philosophies and styles while still feeling supported by the department.

Even though the university has a wonderful mix of traditional (coming directly from high school) and non-traditional (not coming directly from high school) students, I find that most of my sections of this required course are made up of persons around 18 years of age. Such students fascinate me. They’re in a sort of liminal space, having only three months to shift from an institution that relies largely on surveillance (a high school) to a place where they must self-monitor their behavior, and generally have more freedom. Many of them aren’t prepared to make this shift, but do the best they can. As a person relatively close in age to them (I’m only 26), I find that we still have quite a few things in common, and therefore, have some common reference points for class concepts and discussion. This is some of the beauty of the introductory course. Some of our most poignant moments of connection are when we find that common
ground and recognize the ways we experience communication similarly. I don't always want to connect with students, but even in those times of disconnect, there is something to learn.

Talking to Jared online gives me a different point of entry into my relationship with him than I have with other students. It's a different context from the classroom, and while a bit more constrained for the lack of face-to-face interaction, it provides a bit more freedom due to the lack of face-to-face interaction and lack of company in the form of other students. It's just him and me here. And this sparks a whole slew of tensions that I'm not prepared to make sense of in the moment. Yet, these tensions make sense in the context of what I am called to do as a communication pedagogue situated within a framework of traditional higher education that largely encourages rationality at the expense of emotion and desire. My online encounters with students evoke from me feelings that feel wrong in my body but elicit (and come from) a desire for more human (more humane?) relationships with students. I'm simultaneously engaging in personal conversations with Jared, and being introduced to critical communication and engaged pedagogies through my graduate coursework. I simultaneously feel a passion for my relationship with Jared, and a passion for these pedagogical orientations that call for educational participants to embrace the parts of the self that desire and feel—we are subjects within, rather than objects of, education. What I realize, then, is that my relationship with Jared is an experience in recognizing a common subjectivity, in affirming one another as persons and partners in the space of education,
and welcoming one another into our lives. How did I come to this conclusion?

**The Encounter: #2**

This is a teaching day for me, so of course I see Jared. “See” might be sort of misleading; I know Jared is in the same room, but I have great difficulty looking at him. I value looking others directly in the eye—I realize this is a culturally coded, and perhaps culturally oppressive, way of being, but I’ve been inculturated to value eye contact. However, I can’t look at Jared. I try—I really try! But with each fleeting attempt my body comes to matter more and more. It comes into my awareness. I can tell that my face is flushed, and I know I can’t look at him without smiling. This is not to say that I don’t smile when I’m teaching. But I can’t see myself. I don’t know if this smile is different than other smiles, and I don’t know what sorts of interpretations are being made of my smile alongside my flushed face. In nearly any other context, I’m happy to act sort of coy, and am charmed if a person notices that he makes me flush and smile, but not here, in this sterile environment where the teacher-student boundaries are clearly delineated. Or are they so clear?

After handing out the tests at the start of class, I go back to the desk at the front of the room—the first time this semester where I think my “teacherly presence” is noted. Upon coming into the room and seeing me sitting behind the desk, another student, Jesse, comments, “Wow. You’re being the teacher today!” I reply, “Yeah, and it’s kinda weird. I don’t think I like it.” Jared fin-
ishes his test and brings it up to the desk, rather quickly compared to students in the previous class who took the same test. “Finished already?” I ask, eyes focused on the papers lying on top of the desk. “Yeah, gonna go home and go to bed.” He raises his arm a bit and shows me the top of his right hand, stamped with something I can’t read. “Booby’s,” he says. “It wore me out last night.” “That did it to ya, huh?” What else should I say? What are his purposes in telling me he went out to the bar? Am I supposed to regale him with my bar experiences? Tell him I go there sometimes, too? Suggest we go there together sometime? Put up a wall and say I don’t want to know because I’m the teacher and you’re the student? Ignore him? So I say, “That did it to ya, huh? Well, have a good weekend.” Ugh, I feel like I’m in 5th grade, not knowing what to say to a boy. But this boy is eight or nine years younger than me, and not only that, we have boundaries to our relationship. He’s the student to my teacher. I’m the teacher to his student. This feels wrong! And besides, I’m really not physically attracted to him. Am I just attracted to the attention he gives me?

What I want to do is ask Jared if he wants to go get a cup of coffee. I’m interested in what he does outside of the classroom. I’m interested in who he is as a person in the world, in who he is as a person bigger than his role as a student. I sense he wants the same from me. I sense a desire on his part to acknowledge the connection between us. I feel compelled to engage in this relationship not despite, but because of, the ways it might affect our student-teacher relationship. I desire a space in the

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4 Booby’s is a local bar and diner.
classroom where I can acknowledge our mutual connection openly, and draw upon it in my teaching and learning. I desire a pedagogy of the erotic.

A CAVEAT

I know. “Erotic.” Sounds... erotic. I don’t use this word for shock value, or to draw you in to that which dare not speak its name, or to entice you and excite you in ways that scholarship and academia aren’t supposed to do. I use this word to encompass what I feel is a pedagogy that makes space for me and students—for educational participants—to experience education in ways that do not necessarily rely upon notions largely thought to dwell in the realm of the cognitive. I use “erotic” to embrace the space of the body, of what performance theorists call “bodily knowing,” of acknowledging that we are feeling, desiring, curious bodies, and this is important to our educational experiences.

Many performance studies scholars who are interested in issues of pedagogy, and likewise, many pedagogy scholars who are interested in performance studies, turn their attention to the presence of bodies in the classroom. That is, such scholars are interested in the ways education sanctions particular performances from the very bodies of its participants; the ways bodies are supposed to sit, to stand, to speak, to listen. Common examples include raising one’s hand to speak; staying silent in the halls during break times; and even as recently as June 18, 2007, MSNBC.com reported that a school in Virginia had outlawed hugging, holding hands, and high-fiving in keeping with their strict no-touch
policy ("School penalizes"). Pineau (2002) advocates using "body" both literally and metaphorically. One can use it literally, as in the examples above, to examine the experiencing body. One can use it metaphorically to "[connote] all the social factors that might influence physical modes of experience and expression" (Pineau, 2002, p. 44). Pineau (2002) and Warren (1999) focus on issues of "enfleshment," pointing towards the way the body becomes habitualized to move and act in certain ways. Habits literally become part of our flesh. Ironically, argues Pineau (2002), traditional pedagogy "schools" educational participants to forget that they have bodies in exchange for a heavy focus on the mind, embodying, if you will, the Cartesian split between the mind and the body. A pedagogy of the erotic, I argue, makes the experiencing body matter. A move like this is supported by performative pedagogy scholars, including, Gallop (1995), McLaren (1999), Pineau (2002), and Warren (1999). A pedagogy of the erotic focuses on the ways desire, passion, and curiosity are wrapped up in the body; they are bodily experiences. Important to note is that such a pedagogy does not see a fundamental break between the body and the mind. In this way, educational participants are able to experience desire, passion, and curiosity in whole body. I believe the ways we can make the experiencing body come to matter begin with taking a closer look at issues of sexuality as they intersects with desire, passion, and curiosity. In the next section, I explicate the notion of sexuality, and hope to demonstrate that sexuality is a human component that drives bodily experiences of desire, passion, and curiosity.
SEXUALITY

Smith and Williamson (1985) situate sexuality as a component of all human relationships. They argue that our relationships are “mediated through the body,” and thus, are constituted in part by sexuality (p. 235). They outline three ways sexuality differs from sex: (1) sexuality involves the entire human body, rather than just the genitals; (2) sexuality is an “ever-present condition,” rather than only an isolated act; and (3) sexuality “involves all of the individual’s relationships [because they] are mediated through the body” (p. 235). In short, Smith and Williamson (1985) write, “Sexuality consists of any bodily experience, especially touch, body image, and body rhythm (both individual and interactional), that leads to the development of sexual roles and intimacy” (p. 236, italics in original). Thus, they characterize sexuality as a primary system of communication within all interpersonal relationships.

Britzman (2000) promotes “a thought of sexuality” as a passionate relationship “within and between people . . . .” She challenges readers to examine the connections between sexuality and “freedom, liberty, and the right to craft an interesting, relevant, and vital society” (p. 37). I can experience sexual pleasure with ideas, with relationships that are in no way conventionally sexual, with objects that perhaps simply feel good to the body, such as a warm blanket, a soft sweater, or a firm school desk. Many researchers, beginning, perhaps, with Freud, argue that sexuality is a primary force of the human condition. Sexuality compels human beings with a curious drive, a passionate energy, and a desire for learning. Freud (1989a) theorizes that sexuality marks
a sort of completeness with the life substances of human beings. The sexual instinct is a life-giving energy “which seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance” (1989b, p. 624). Sexuality, in a sense, breathes life into the living, and does so from the very beginning of life.

In keeping with sexuality as a life-giving force, Britzman (2000) suggests we attach the Greek prefix “ur” (“for this term refers to something original, innate, the beginning”) to “sexuality,” to indicate that sexuality is “the first condition for human curiosity and hence the first condition or force of learning” (p. 38). This is what makes recognition of sexuality so important in pedagogical contexts. “Simply put,” writes Britzman (2000), “without sexuality, the human would not desire to learn. The urge of sexuality, then, is made from the desire to touch and to be touched by people, by ideas, and by living” (p. 38). Here, she points to the relational character of sexuality. That is to say, sexuality is not about a knowable, controllable object and a knowing subject; if we wish to keep the language of subject and object, all participants in sexuality are always already both. If we wish to work outside of this dichotomy, then I suggest that sexuality is created as something-in-between participants in a communicative relationship. Sexuality is what happens when desire and curiosity make their way into human relationships. It furnishes human beings with their capacity for feeling.

I base my development of a pedagogy of the erotic on the idea that sexuality is a fundamental drive of human beings that must find and create space to act. I use the term “pedagogy of the erotic” rather than “pedagogy of the sexual” purposefully, though with some hesitancy.
My use of “erotic” is meant to be an encompassing term that includes my previous discussion of sexuality, and indicates the forces of connection and love. I draw these conclusions from the mythological story of the Greek god Eros (“Cupid” in Latin), and from Freud’s discussion of Eros (1989b). Wrapped up in the story of Cupid and Psyche is the idea that persons are connected with one another through love. Likewise, Freud (1989a) conceptualizes sexuality as a life-giving energy that falls within the “life instinct” of Eros (indicating that Eros is bigger than sexuality). Therefore, a pedagogy of the erotic acknowledges that persons are driven with passion, curiosity, and desire, all within the realm of a loving connection between one another. A detailed discussion of Eros is beyond the scope of this paper, but I encourage interested readers to turn towards the aforementioned scholars for more on this.

A PEDAGOGY OF THE EROTIC

In an effort to develop a pedagogy that calls for me to experience my body, rather than just think, in the classroom—a pedagogy of the erotic—I offer three implications for what it might mean to embrace the erotic—to embrace the body. Lorde (1993) writes that “we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic”—a heightened capacity for feeling while doing—“as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic” (p. 340). In a similar sense, I argue that sexuality, desire, and passion have often been misnamed, misused, and suppressed within the classroom. In the process, we have turned
away from these human capacities “as [sources] of power and information” within the classroom. But we don’t have to do this. Instead, we can embrace them as a part of the pedagogical process. Three connected implications of doing so are: (1) the affirmation of personhood; (2) the cultivation of creative capacities; and (3) the nurturance of relationships. I draw largely upon hooks (1994) and her explications of engaged, critical pedagogies in outlining these three implications.

**Affirmation of Personhood**

Freud (1989c) offers the concepts of negation and affirmation, which fall under the broader concept of judgment, as exclamations of either an impulse to expel (negation) or an impulse to take in (affirmation). “Affirmation—as a substitute for uniting—belongs to Eros; negation—the successor to expulsion—belongs to the instinct of destruction” (p. 669). Embracing the erotic in the classroom affirms the humanity of both teachers and students. No longer is a teacher just a mind in front of a chalkboard, and no longer are students just beings in desks. These bodies become people when we affirm life-giving energy. This entails welcoming a respect and a care for one another. Hooks (1994) writes that this embrace “is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p. 13). She goes on to say that it is entirely reasonable for students to seek out classrooms where the lessons they learn “will enrich and enhance them,” where the knowledge they generate will be healing and meaningful, and where their classroom experiences will address “the connection between what
they are learning and their overall life experiences” (p. 19). The question remains: As communication educators, do we do work to create such classrooms? In order to do this, educators must not assume students to be passive receptacles of information. Rather, acknowledging and affirming students as persons opens space where students can act on instead of suppress their curiosities and desires.

But students aren’t the only persons in classrooms. Teachers must work to cultivate their own personhoods, as well. Hooks (1994) further indicates that classrooms working with an engaged, critical pedagogical model “will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process” (p. 21). Educators who invite “the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply” (hooks, 1994, p. 22). An affirmation of personhood, with all its desires, passions, emotions, and curiosities, develops as one embraces those erotic instincts with which we are all born.

**The Cultivation of Creative Capacities**

Eros in the classroom ignites the creative capacities within each of us by creating the urge to act upon instincts of curiosity, desire, and passion. Hooks (1994) writes that critical, engaged pedagogy must draw upon Eros if it is to address the aspirations of empowerment and transformation (p. 194). She further explains:

> [u]nderstanding that Eros is a force that enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing, that it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know
what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination. (p. 195)

Hooks (1994) parallels Freud’s belief in the potential of Eros (as an instinct) to conserve and preserve life. She writes that educators “must find again the place of Eros within ourselves” in order to “restore passion to the classroom or to excite it in classrooms where it has never been . . .” (p. 199). Thus we witness the capacity for Eros to create classroom contexts that welcome students’ (and teachers’) engagement with their emotions and passions. This allows educational participants to imagine that the world can be different, and to actualize their role in creating change. As Lorde (1993) describes it, Eros also enriches the capacity to create bridges between people on which they can work to better understand one another, and form meaningful relationships.

**Nurturance of Relationships**

Both of these previous implications speak to the third implication of embracing Eros in the classroom: nurturance of meaningful relationships. Trehewey (2004) acknowledges the teacher-student relationship as “a potentially erotically charged relationship,” and so taking this relationship (and I add those among students) as a point of focus is fitting for my project. When students and teachers come to know one another on a personal level, they create space in which they feel as though they have a personal stake in what happens in the classroom. We begin to care about one another as more than persons thrown together by our roles as stu-
students and teachers. Hooks (1994) maintains that within “a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence” (p. 8). This interest, hearing, and recognizing are facilitated through building relationships. We seldom have interest in persons who we do not know, and who we do not have opportunities to know better. But, as hooks (1994) continues, “[w]hen Eros is present in the classroom setting, then love is bound to flourish” (p. 198). Dismissing the importance of love as a goal of education is to fall into the trap of setting up education as a process with no personal implications, as a context in which emotions are not welcome, and as a system in which we expect teachers to be arbiters of supposedly objective knowledge given unquestioningly to passive recipients.

Cultivating meaningful relationships is so important within classroom contexts. Recently, I’ve become keenly aware that the longer I teach, the easier I find it to build such relationships with students. The same is true of teachers I’ve had. Given the personal and intimate nature of the focus of critical pedagogies—people’s lived experiences of oppression and otherness—it is necessary for there to be trust between teachers and students. Trust is built in interpersonal relationships. If there is trust between a student and a teacher, the investigation of feelings and the recognition of bodily and affective learning have a more fertile space in which to grow. Most of us don’t allow just anyone to know our feelings, unless those feelings are positive (and even then, we sometimes only share them with people we trust will respond positively).
As an educational goal, building toward trusting, personal relationships is a touchy issue, literally and metaphorically. It’s easy for me—a middle-class, White, Christian, higher-educated, heterosexual female—to say, “Let’s build trust.” There’s not much risk for me in trusting others (particularly students). In addition, as a teacher, it’s also easy for me to seek trust—students would do well to trust me. However, trust is not something one person can ask another to help build. As with anything in a relationship, trust must be mutually sought after, negotiated, and built. I don’t claim to have trusting relationships with my students. To do so would be to speak for them. But I do posit that being available for relationship cultivation is a way for me to let my students know that I hope we can trust one another.

I clearly find these three implications in my aforementioned IM sessions with students. In learning about one another’s lives outside of our classroom time together, we affirmed one another as whole persons rather than as merely roles. Though I can’t speak for students like Jared, I know that our conversations prompted me to inquire about the confines of the educational system, and imagine how teacher-student relationships might be otherwise. Those conversations also motivated me to interrogate how my extra-classroom relationships with these students differed from students who I only knew within the classrooms. In this way, I drew upon my curiosity for classroom relations and my desire to develop relationships with students. Finally, I found our conversations to be part of the process of building relationships that contributed to understanding one another better. These relationships even challenged me to rethink the assignments in the class, interrogating the efficacy of...
these particular assignments for these particular classes of students. I can only imagine what might happen, how the classroom and process of learning might be transformed, if I were to work towards these types of relationships with each student.

**The Encounter: #3**

What is it about this semester? I feel like I’m doing as much idle chatting as I am answering questions about class via IM. I’ve already had this experience with Jared, but now, I have Phil doing the same thing. And I can’t deny it—I enjoy talking with Phil. I’ve come to know that he doesn’t drink or do drugs, but can’t seem to find any activities that he and his drinking/drugging friends can all do together and stay clean. Even so, he goes with them, but “behaves.” I know he’s homesick and really looking forward to the break. I know that he teases his little 6th grade sister about boys. I know that he has a good relationship with his mom. I know that he enjoys talking to me. I know that when I see the window pop up that asks me if I want to accept a message from him if a person is on my list, her or his message automatically comes through without me accepting it each time.
family conflicts, rent payments, class readings, things that I have to think about. I can just relax. I can just talk. I can just rest my mind for a while. I can learn about someone else, almost like I’m in the beginning stages of a relationship where it’s fun getting to know the interesting, minute, mundane occurrences. And I feel safe—that I have no pressure to refer to our chats during class; that I don’t have to end the conversation as I would end a face-to-face, body-to-body “date”; that this isn’t anything like a “date”; that no one will know I enjoy on-line chatting with a student; that I can joke with him about the fact that he’s the student to my teacher, and vice versa; that we can learn from one another with no strings attached. . .

USES OF A PEDAGOGY OF THE EROTIC FOR THE INTRODUCTORY COMMUNICATION COURSE

When considering the implications of a pedagogy of the erotic for the introductory communication course, I am motivated by Sprague (1992; 1998) and her quest to examine instructional communication and communication education. At a fundamental level, a pedagogy of the erotic is necessarily a pedagogy of communication. I see communication as the mundane activities of life that are world-building; it is through communication that we have relationships with people, that we build structures and practices, that we experience our lives, and that we come to make sense of ourselves in profound ways. More specifically, I see communication as that which allows us to experience and make sense of our curiosities, desires, and passions. In a general sense, then, our com-
municative practices make space for a pedagogy of the erotic to take shape.

However, this doesn’t directly provide practical applications of a pedagogy of the erotic. As much as I shy away from “handbook scholarship” (cookie cutter applications of theories), I find usefulness in offering suggestions. I believe a pedagogy of the erotic directly addresses, though not necessarily definitively answers (as though one should in the first place), and is inspired by the questions posed by Sprague (1992) to instructional communication:

“Why do schools exist?” (p. 5)
“What do teachers do?” (p. 7)
“What is the nature of development?” (p. 10)
“What is knowledge and how is curriculum established?” (p. 11)
“How does language function in education?” (p. 13)
“How does power function in the classroom?” (p. 14)

Sprague (1992) continues by offering a set of questions to expand the research agenda in communication instruction. I believe a pedagogy of the erotic also addresses this set of questions:

“How can schools be transformed to become public spaces where teachers and students can practice collective communication action toward emancipatory ends?”

“What sorts of communicative skills do [teachers] need to assume the role of transformative intellectuals?”

“If development is not psychologically pre-programmed but culturally and interpersonally shaped, then whose definition of competence and maturity
should prevail? How do various kinds of communication with adults and peers affect development?"

“[W]ho decides what counts as knowledge in the schools? How does communication function as learners come to ‘know’?”

“If language... constitutes meaning, whose language (and thus whose meanings) should be allowed in educational discourse?... What changes in our use of language could bring about different ways of thinking and living?”

“How can we as communication scholars penetrate the complexity of power in classroom life and sensitize teachers and students to the alternatives they have in use?” (p. 17)

While a discussion of a pedagogy of the erotic in light of these sets of questions is beyond the scope of this essay, I do use them as my own framing device when I think of the implications of such a pedagogy. I also encourage readers to keep them in mind when being reflexive about their own teaching, and in evaluating the suggestions I put forth.

First, the process of creating assignments can be one which utilizes a pedagogy of the erotic. Assignments that are based on questions generated by students form one way for students to potentially feel a sense of agency in their introductory class. For instance, at the beginning of the semester, take an inventory of questions the students have about communication. Being curious about something leads to a desire to want to know and experience more. If assignments can be based on questions posed by the students, then students will feel more of a sense of ownership for the assignment.
may result in, for example, a communication reflection paper with 20 different topics. However, variety such as this is healthy. Students are able to research topics that are important to them, and teachers are able to personalize the assignment to each student. This could culminate in the class sharing their reflections with one another, further building relationships among them.

Many introductory communication course programs are concerned with issues of standardization. This does not mean that “standardized” classes cannot practice a pedagogy of the erotic. Topics for public speeches can center on that which students feel passionately about. I encourage my own students to think about the notion of social change, and to develop a working definition of the concept. I then ask them how they feel empowered to create social change in their lives, and if they don't feel that way, how might they work towards feeling empowered to create change. Derivative public speaking assignments could follow suit: introduce the class to how you have been a change agent or why you feel you have not been (self-introductory speech); choose an agency or practice or subject that you feel passionately about, and tell the class about it (informative speech); persuade the class to take up the cause, and provide the class with an immediate action they can take related to that agency, practice, or subject (persuasive speech); pay tribute to someone who you feel has made a profound difference in your own life and/or the lives of others (ceremonial speech). Such assignments directly relate to Sprague’s (1998) fourth goal for communication instruction, “[R]e-shape the values of society” (p. 20). These assignment also touch upon the other three goals Sprague outlines: “Transmit cultural knowledge”; “Develop students’
intellectual skills”; and “Develop students’ career skills” (p. 18-20).

Classroom practices that involve both the teacher and the student working together potentially employ a pedagogy of the erotic, because such practices make space for building relationships. There is no reason why teachers have to have answers. The classroom has long been a place for the depositing of knowledge by the teacher into the student for later withdrawal (the “banking method,” Freire, 2000). However, a resituation of the space into an erotic space encourages teachers and students to explore questions together. This entails creating an environment where it is OK for persons not to “know,” in the conventional sense of the word. It means performing in an environment where “I just feel it” is an OK answer. Such a phrase leaves room for the class to explore what it means to feel, what we do as communicators with feelings, and how much of what we do is based on things we feel rather than things we “know.”

For a final project in my class, students give group presentations on an aspect of identity. In one class, a group chose to discuss race, and set up an activity where all but one member of the class were the same race. The one individual member was another race, and the class was to ignore this person. During the discussion, a facilitator asked, “Do you see this a lot?” Kerry, an African-American student, said, “I feel it more than I see it. I know that, or I feel that, it happens.” In another class, a facilitator named Farash, who is White Arab International (self-identified) was talking about coming to the United States. He was asked by a class member if he found that when he got here, he was stereotyped. He
said, “Yes, you can feel it.” This is not uncommon to hear in classrooms I’m in. Over and over again, I hear people equating feeling with knowing, as Kelly and Farash did. I know I’ve done the same thing, said I felt something and used this as evidence for knowing it. Bodily knowing—knowing through feeling—is embraced in a pedagogy of the erotic. Particularly within introductory communication courses where students (and even teachers) have not yet found the language for what they do, knowing through feeling is a valid way for making sense of experience, and provides an avenue for participants to make connections with one another.

Finally, classroom practices and assignments that encourage students to consider otherwise—to think of and act on ways that are alternatives to their own personal conventions—encourage students to be creative in the ways they perceive the world and one another. They ask students to use their imaginations to “search for openings without which our lives narrow and our pathways become cul-de-sacs” (Greene, 1995, p. 17). When people think creatively, they are more open to listening to others, to creating choices for thought and action, and are better able to create change. A way to do this in the classroom might be to ask students to journal about a recent argument they had with someone close to them. Encourage students to volunteer to “workshop” their experience, wherein other students would offer suggestions (perhaps through role play—through embodying the players) as to how that argument could have taken place differently, what about the people and the situation may have influenced how it did take place, etc. This provides students with self-generated resources for how they might (better?) communicate with those in their
lives who have meaning, and in understanding why persons might communicate differently.

A pedagogy of the erotic can also be explored in educator training programs, such as those introductory course instructors often go through at the beginning of the academic year. A useful session during these trainings would be on relationship development between students and teachers. Such a session could explore creating an environment for cultivating healthy relationships, alerting instructors to the very real institutional boundaries in place (and a questioning of how?, why?, and by whom? of those boundaries), and what to do in instances of discomfort. I know there have been times when I have sensed tension in the classroom when students talk about their experiences or work with other students, but have few (if any) ready strategies for what to do in the moment.

I believe the introductory communication course is an ideal situation in which to explore Eros in the classroom. At their most fundamental level, the three implications of embracing Eros (the affirmation of personhood, the cultivation of creative capacities, and the nurturance of relationships) are best examined within the framework of communication. The introductory course affords us a unique situation: we engage in the practices of Eros through communication, so within the introductory course classroom, we are simultaneously enacting the very thing we are examining. That is to say, we study communication through communication. Many students are studying communication for the first time when they enroll in an introductory course. Since communication educators teaching the introductory course are interacting with students who have little to no expe-
rience explicitly studying communication, such teachers can draw upon the potential curiosity with which students enter the class. We can encourage students to utilize their creative instincts in order to consider the ways communication contributes to constructing the world in particular ways, and how that construction might be otherwise.

A pedagogy of the erotic fundamentally rests upon the teacher-student relationship. Teachers must be willing to take time to know the students as more-than-students, to have a part in creating an environment where students want to be known and want to know others in similar ways, and to be self-reflexive. This is particularly true when we consider Freire’s (2000) call for situated teaching and learning, i.e., libratory education must reflect people’s “situation in the world (p. 96).” Education should be situated in the lives of students, but how, as educators, are we to do this if we aren’t part of students’ lives, if we don’t know what their lives are about? We have to understand that when we see students for 2 1/2 hours a week, that’s 2 1/2 hours out of 168 hours per week, or 2.25% of their week. That means that we are probably not involved in the majority of their lives—the majority of their situations—for the semester or year that we interact with them. So, having relationships with them is fundamental to practicing situated learning, and is an important component of a pedagogy of the erotic.
Embracing the erotic in a classroom is not an easy practice, particularly given the structure of education. Graff (1994) writes, “[T]here is an unavoidable inequality built into the teacher-student relationship, if only because once teachers and students are regarded as intellectual equals there is no longer any reason for the teachers to teach the students” (p. 184). The very notion of “teaching” in some part may depend upon the unbalanced power dynamics of a teacher-student relationship. The situation of power itself isn’t as clear as it may seem, to be sure. Students enact power, as well. Drawing upon de Certeau, Wood and Fassett (2003) demonstrate how power is a distributed resource, rather than a possession that one entity has and another doesn’t. Both teachers and students work under power structures, and the ways power in relationships play out can be situationally dependent. Understanding power in this way illuminates the classroom as a space of power differentials. An inquiry of power can be a potential avenue to build relationships in an erotic classroom. It is a way to communicate about power dynamics in relationships, and interrogating the student-teacher relationship gives both parties a common reference point for such an inquiry. Doing so may build a sort of context where students feel comfortable challenging the ideas of the teacher. Even a few students doing this can set an example that such challenges—posed to the teacher and to other students—can be productive. It also might facilitate space where teachers can reexamine their tendency to afford students protection from ideological challenges. A space such as this is ideal for embracing
the erotic. It is a space in which students and teachers can build relationships based on curiosity, a desire for learning, increased joy and passion, and respect.

THE ENCOUNTER: #3 (CONT.)

. . . But in the back of my mind, and in the pit of my stomach, I feel like I’m doing something wrong.

Still, I look forward to the flashing title that says, “Accept Message?”

REFERENCES


A Pedagogy of the Erotic


