

FEELING RULES AND EMOTION LABOR: TOOLS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

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This article discusses English language teachers' emotions from a critical perspective, meaning that emotions are considered sociopolitically rather than psychologically. Feeling rules and emotion labor are introduced as tools for exploring the relationship between institutional power and emotions. To illustrate these concepts, I discuss data from interviews with English language teachers at a U.S. university about noticing and addressing plagiarism in their students' writing. Findings suggest that teachers may resist the feeling rules of their institution's plagiarism policy while experiencing emotion labor about how to address plagiarism with students, despite the policy's clarity about sanctions. The positive implications of this resistance to feeling rules and experience of emotion labor are discussed. The article ends with recommendations for further research on emotion labor as a tool of teacher engagement and activism.

Keywords: critical, emotion labor, feeling rules, plagiarism, teachers' emotions

What is the role of emotions in English language teaching (ELT)? This question has captured my attention for several years. Mainly I have explored pedagogical situations that may provoke EL teachers' emotions, particularly situations that are unfavorable or inequitable (Benesch, 2012, 2016, 2017). This means that my perspective on emotions is sociopolitical rather than the psychological one most commonly taken in ELT. Instead of focusing on teachers' emotions as intrapsychic phenomena, I've explored the relationship between emotions and power. Furthermore, beyond the reciprocal relationship between emotions and power, I'm interested in how emotions might be called upon to address inequities. To that end, I seek ways to conceptualize and encourage emotions as tools of resistance to injustice in ELT.

To contextualize the critical perspective I take, it's important to point out that emotions have historically been considered impediments to rational thought and therefore in need of reducing or taming (Boler, 1989). This can be seen, for example, in the emotional-literacy literature, where strong emotions are believed to interfere with teaching and learning (Goleman, 2005). Teachers and students alike are therefore trained to manage their emotions privately so that they can behave in ways that are considered appropriate for the classroom. Left out of the emotional-literacy equation are emotions as the expression of legitimate concerns and grievances that if aired and acted upon could change conditions for the better (Gillies, 2011).

To explore the relationship between English language teachers' emotions and power, this article is organized into four parts: (1) how to theorize emotions critically, using the concepts of *feeling rules* and *emotion labor*, explained next; (2) discussion of a university plagiarism policy as an example of implicit feeling rules; (3) presentation of data from interviews with college English language teachers about their responses to student plagiarism; and (4) implications of the findings for future research on English language teachers' emotions.

Studying Emotions Critically: Feeling Rules and Emotion Labor

Because emotions in ELT have mainly been considered as private psychological phenomena, I've turned to other fields for ways to study emotions critically. These are fields, such as gender studies, cultural studies, sociology, geography, and political science, in which the critical turn and affective turn have intersected, producing research that takes up emotions from a sociopolitical perspective (Ahmed, 2004; Harding & Pribram, 2009).

Most pertinent to my research interest in the relationship between institutional power and teachers' emotions is the work of sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983, 2012), who coined the terms *feeling rules* and *emotion labor*. Hochschild studied the training of flight attendants in the late 1970s in the United States. She found that they were trained not only in the physical and mental aspects of the job, but also in the affective ones. Flight attendants were taught which emotions were considered appropriate by management for the workplace, and how to display those emotions overtly through their behavior.

Feeling rules was the label Hochschild gave to this type of affective training. Such rules are formulated by upper management and taught to those who interface with the public, particularly in service-sector jobs. In her research at a major U.S. airline, feeling rules included the mandate to smile and display cheerfulness before, during, and at the end of flights. Hochschild noted the hierarchy of high-level managers who devise the rules at the top, middle managers who enforce them, and low-level employees who are instructed to carry them out, raising concerns about the impact of feeling rules on the latter group.

One of Hochschild's concerns about feeling rules was that they commodify emotions, transmuting personal interactions into commercial ones, with potentially harmful repercussions for the mostly female workers she observed in her research. Another concern was that displaying inauthentic feelings in the workplace, such as fake smiles, could have deleterious effects on flight attendants, particularly when dealing with difficult passengers. The term she coined for tension between workers' genuine feelings and those they were mandated to display was *emotion labor*.

Emotion labor, as taken up in this article, retains the attention to power while modifying some of Hochschild's assumptions. Mainly, I do not posit, as she does, a difference between authentic and inauthentic feelings because I'm not focused on the psychological effects of suppressing emotions or expressing mandated ones. Nor am I calling for the reduction of emotion labor, as if it were unequivocally harmful, as Hochschild did. Instead, I'm interested in how emotion labor might be a useful signal of unfair conditions and relied upon in the service of institutional change. This is not to say that I discount the discomfort teachers might experience when they find themselves at odds with institutional policies, due to their ethical beliefs, experience, and/or training. Instead, I acknowledge that tension and call upon its use for transformational purposes.

Next, I report on part of a study of feeling rules and emotion labor (Benesch, 2017) that focused on emotionally charged activities in which college English language teachers engage and their responses to those activities: high-stakes literacy testing, responding to student writing, plagiarism, and attendance. In this article, I present some of the findings related to plagiarism, starting with the plagiarism policy of the institution where the research was conducted, the City University of New York (CUNY).

Plagiarism Policy Data

Examining the Policy

Methodologically speaking, I read CUNY's plagiarism policy, officially referred to as CUNY's Policy on Academic Integrity (City University of New York, 2011), numerous times to ascertain: (a) the discourses of plagiarism it promulgates, including how copying from sources is constructed by the institution and how it is sanctioned, according to the policy; and (b) the implicit feeling rules for faculty members, who are tasked with applying the sanctions. Given that CUNY instructors were required to include an excerpt of

the policy on their syllabi every semester, the assumption was that the respondents were aware of the policy and had at least read the portion they were required to reproduce on their syllabi.

CUNY's Policy on Academic Integrity refers to plagiarism alternatively as *academic dishonesty* and a *violation* of academic integrity. Gathered under those terms are various acts: "copying another person's actual words or images without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source"; "presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source"; and "submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, or 'cutting and pasting' from various sources without proper attribution." These acts are presented as equally serious violations that should be punished, with no ranking or indication of a hierarchy of concerns. This means, for example, that copying words from sources without the use of quotation marks is presented as equivalent to downloading an entire paper from the Internet and submitting it as one's own writing.

Following the enumeration of the types of violations that qualify as academic dishonesty, the policy outlines the roles faculty are expected to play when it comes to plagiarism. It therefore implies feeling rules developed by CUNY management that suggest how faculty are to respond. Even though there is no specific training of faculty in these feeling rules, as there was of flight attendants in Hochschild's study, the implicit affective guidelines may have an impact on English language teachers and are therefore worth investigating, including whether the feeling rules are obeyed or resisted.

The portion of the policy directly related to faculty response, titled "Reporting," is reproduced next. To highlight what I am claiming are the implicit feeling rules of the "Reporting" section of the policy, the one that addresses instructors directly, italics have been added. My claim is that these italicized portions imply particular emotional responses from faculty members who discover unattributed copying in student writing:

A faculty member who *suspects* that a student has *committed a violation* of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy shall review with the student the facts and circumstances of the *suspected violation* whenever feasible. Thereafter, a faculty member who concludes that there has been an *incident of academic dishonesty* sufficient to affect the student's final course grade *shall report such incident* on a Faculty Report Form . . . and *shall submit* the Form to the college's Academic Integrity Officer . . . which *shall contain*, at a minimum, *the name of the instructor, the name of the student, the course name and number and section number, the date of the incident, a description of the incident and the instructor's contact information.*

Feeling Rules: Indignation and Retribution

The role of faculty members in punishing the *violation* of plagiarism is circumscribed: they are akin to law enforcement officers who are tasked with detecting, documenting, and reporting criminal incidents. Furthermore, the wording is legalistic (e.g., "shall report," "shall submit," "shall contain"), suggesting a relationship with students grounded in enforcement rather than pedagogical purpose.

The first feeling rule that seems to be implied is indignation. This can be seen not only in the detailed instructions of how to report a *suspected violation*, but also in the embedded assumption that students are willfully and knowingly violating a code when they copy from source texts. While this may at times, or even often, be the case, there is no latitude in the policy for immaturity, ignorance, sloppiness, exhaustion, or other possible reasons why students copy—nor is there any consideration of the challenges of citation in the postmodern world, where sampling is endemic (Goldsmith, 2011; Howard, 1995). Instead, students who include unattributed language in their writing are constructed as criminals who once caught must therefore be punished. Thus, according to the policy, those on the front lines of the punishment cycle—college instructors—must represent this position, fueled by the first feeling rule, indignation.

Alongside positioning instructors as detectives and enforcers of the punitive policy, there is language about the paperwork required to document their findings, suggesting the second feeling rule: retribution.

To go as far as reporting a student to an Academic Integrity Officer seems predicated on a desire to make the student pay for an unpardonable act. So the feeling rule cycle is to remain vigilant, confront the perpetrator, and punish.

In sum, analysis of CUNY's plagiarism policy revealed a discourse of plagiarism as crime and faculty as criminal detectives and enforcers of the punitive policy. Given these discourses, the feeling rules of indignation and retribution can be ascertained. How these rules revealed themselves in the interview data, or not, is discussed next.

Interview Data about Plagiarism

Methodology

Data were collected from interviews with 13 CUNY instructors and questionnaires filled out by two CUNY instructors using the same questions. Respondents were nine full-timers and four part-timers teaching in academic ESL programs and two teaching full-time in intensive programs housed in continuing education. All of the full-time faculty were veteran teachers with over 10 years' teaching experience, as were two of the part-timers. Six of the full-timers had been, or were at the time of the interview, ESL coordinators at their colleges. These aspects of their identities are included to show that a range of responses was sought in order to capture prevailing discourses and emotion labor around plagiarism.

Interviews

The 90-minute semi-structured interviews included questions about noticing plagiarism in student texts and any follow-up respondents carried out with students who plagiarized. I read the data repeatedly, looking for instances of emotion labor and connections to the plagiarism policy's feeling rules, coding it accordingly. The interview questions about plagiarism focused on four topics: (1) noticing plagiarism in student writing and attempting to track down the source; (2) teacher/student interactions around plagiarism; (3) preventing plagiarism; and (4) causes of plagiarism. For the purposes of this article, I will only be discussing data collected from the questions related to the second and third topics (for findings about noticing plagiarism and causes respondents attributed to plagiarism, see Benesch, 2017).

The questions related to an experience the interviewee may have had with a student who seemed to have plagiarized (teacher/student interaction around plagiarism) were: (1) Did you discuss your suspicions with the student? (2) If so, what did the student say? (3) What did you say? (4) What was the outcome? and (5) How did the whole incident make you feel? Question (6), which was about preventing plagiarism was: What do you do, if anything, to prevent plagiarism?

There were four findings about following up with students after discovering plagiarism in their writing: (1) emotion labor due to conflict between feeling obliged to do something and uncertainty about what to do; (2) emotion labor due to conflict between professional expertise and empathy; (3) resistance to the plagiarism policy's legalistic discourse and feeling rules; and (4) pedagogical solutions to plagiarism instead of punishment. These are presented next, with representative quotes from the data.

Findings

Whereas no emotion labor was apparent in the responses to interview questions about noticing plagiarism (Benesch, 2017), due to the obviousness of copied portions in student writing, this is not the case with the first two findings, discussed next, about following up with students who plagiarized. Though respondents reported that plagiarism was unambiguous and detection itself therefore not a cause for confusion or conflict, they expressed ambivalence about how to address plagiarism once it was noticed. This is particularly interesting given the clarity of the existing plagiarism policy about punishing violators of the policy, discussed above.

Finding 1: Obligation and Uncertainty

The first finding about following up was: *Emotion labor due to conflict between feeling obliged to do something and uncertainty about what to do*. The sense of obligation to address the plagiarism may be an effect of plagiarism discourses that construct faculty members as frontline soldiers in the war on plagiarism. Given these discourses, it may be difficult to view copying more benignly as a developmental stage in acquiring academic writing skills (Donahue, 2008).

To elaborate further on this idea, despite calls for *patchwriting* over thirty years of composition scholarship (Howard, 1995, 2000; Hull & Rose, 1989), the data revealed a sense of obligation to grapple with students' insertion of unattributed source material into their writing. Patchwriting in this context means students incorporating copied text in their writing as a way to familiarize themselves with academic phraseology. Despite the efforts of scholars, such as Howard (1995, 2000) and others, to promote copying from sources as a learning tool, this activity continues to be constructed as academic dishonesty, at least at the institutional level, and a punishable offense that teachers must therefore address even if their training and/or beliefs indicate a more nuanced and empathic pedagogical response.

The mandate to view copying as plagiarism and therefore address it can be seen in R1, a representative quote from the data. The conflict between that mandate and uncertainty about how to handle it is noticeable and an indication of emotion labor as well as resistance to the feeling rule of indignation (R = response):

R1: You see it and you know you have to do something about it . . . I mean I hate it. I hate it when that happens because you . . . Unless the student I guess was clearly somehow, you had somehow categorized them and they had been . . . I don't know I think even the bad students, the ones who are doing poorly in the class. You never want to . . . you get frustrated, right? But even with students who are doing poorly, you feel like really upset because it's this . . . it's not even upset. You just don't know what to do. I think you're upset because you don't know what to do.

This response indicates that the discourses of plagiarism, if not the policy itself, can influence English language teachers. These discourses seem to have instilled a sense that plagiarism must be addressed as a separate issue, not simply part of language learning.

Despite the unambiguous wording of the plagiarism policy, however, respondents expressed uncertainty about how to follow up. Reasons given for this uncertainty included empathy for English language learners' struggles with learning the conventions of academic English and lack of conviction about the gravity of the incident, as discussed in the presentation of the third finding, discussed below.

Finding 2: Conflict between Expertise and Empathy

Empathy was also present in the second finding about following up: *Emotion labor due to conflict between professional expertise and empathy*. Professional expertise in this context means the ability of a language/writing teacher to spot plagiarism easily. Here is a representative quote illustrating the second finding about following up:

R2: I'm embarrassed to admit that my first suspicion says to me, "Do you think I don't read these papers? You think I'm stupid, right?" And then I say to myself, "OK, it's not about you. They're just trying to get through your class." And once I get past that then I recognize . . . I understand. I constantly remind myself . . . I could not imagine going to Beijing and taking college classes in Mandarin learning a whole new orthography. Are you kidding me? No! So I have to keep putting myself in their shoes and that's what I do.

This quote exemplifies emotion labor as a clash between, on the one hand, respondents' pride in their ability to distinguish student writing from plagiarized writing, and on the other hand, awareness of the

challenges of writing in additional languages. The clash some of my respondents described indicated emotion labor and, as in the first finding about following up, uncertainty about how to proceed.

Finding 3: Resistance to Feeling Rules

The third finding about following up is: *Resistance to plagiarism policy's legalistic discourse and feeling rules*. Here are three representative responses:

R3: You know plagiarism is not such a big deal for me . . . I'm more focused on are they developing their language . . . it's not a trigger for me the way it is for a lot of people.

R4: Our program, our department, is incredibly strict about it. People, most people, are very very angry and upset when that happens. I am probably viewed as an outlier.

R5: Whereas I've met other colleagues who . . . it's like they're on the hunt for plagiarism and won't rest till they sniff it out. Like a trained bomb dog. And I get frustrated with that because like, you know, it's not the purpose of teaching. And that's why I think when I find it, it's like, that's not why we're here, especially with second language students.

These responses indicate conscious distancing from a punitive stance toward plagiarism. The respondents refuse the plagiarism policy's feeling rules of indignation and retribution and its construction of copying as criminal activity.

Finding 4: Pedagogical Solutions

The fourth finding about following up is: *Pedagogical solutions to plagiarism instead of punishment*. This means that in place of retribution, respondents reported that they viewed copying from sources as an opportunity to review citation practices and warn students that other teachers might not be as tolerant. Here is a representative quote:

R6: I simply called the student in and I said, "Look I don't want to take action, I've never taken action. Why don't we try to rework this because I know what you did in class. This is not your work. These are not your words. Either you can try and attribute them to others or you can tell me what the source was or honestly tell me what you did or you can restructure it because if I accept it like this I'm probably going to have to at some point do something about it." In all the other cases, we wrote things out and the students had a chance to sit down with me and tell me which pieces and parts were taken from another piece.

This response, like R5, exemplifies resistance to the plagiarism policy's feeling rules of indignation and retribution. Instead of obeying those implicit rules and the explicit mandates of the policy, some respondents reported that they used plagiarism as a teachable moment to interact privately with students, offering ways to avoid copying from source texts.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

In this article, I have presented an alternative to psychological approaches to emotions that construct English language teachers as isolated individuals who experience emotions privately. Instead, I have tried to illustrate ways that teachers' emotions are effects of interactions between them, institutional policies, and students. My focus on feeling rules and emotion labor is a way to study the relationship between emotions and power with an eye toward possible reform of unfair or unreasonable policies, such as the plagiarism policy discussed earlier.

Overall, I found that the teachers I interviewed resisted the university's plagiarism policy and its feeling rules. In contrast to the policy, they do not consider plagiarism unequivocally as academic dishonesty, nor do they seem to abide by the policy's feeling rules. They did, however, report uncertainty (emotion labor) about how to proceed once they notice plagiarism in student texts. In addition, rather than accusing

students of plagiarism or turning them in, some teachers reported interacting with students privately, reviewing citation practices, and exploring what might have led to copying. The approach is pedagogical, not punitive, despite the plagiarism policy's construction of plagiarism as a crime.

My presentation of these findings is intended to show that emotions are produced and performed within specific historical contexts, mediated by power relations. For example, though teachers' emotions surrounding student plagiarism may be experienced privately, they are mediated by the discourses of plagiarism with its construction of text as private property and copying as a violation of property rights (Goldsmith, 2011; Howard, 1995). In addition, according to my research, they are also mediated by English language teachers' training in empathy and the challenges of acquiring academic literacy. The clash between the discourses of plagiarism and teachers' preparation and experience may produce emotion labor, as indicated in the data.

Given these findings, I call for incorporating the study of feeling rules and emotion labor into English language teacher education curricula. Were these topics included in their training, teachers might be encouraged to attend to emotions not as private psychological phenomena, but instead as social ones. Exposure to this perspective would allow new and veteran teachers alike to experience conflicted emotions in their teaching as possible effects of dysfunctional feeling rules or dissonance between their training and workplace regulations. This awareness might encourage reliance on emotion labor not as an indication of personal failure or emotional illiteracy, but rather as a signal that reform is needed, such as more effective guidelines related to students' use of source material (Howard & Robillard, 2006). They might therefore parlay their emotion labor into a tool for organizing with students and other teachers for change.

Along these lines, I propose the following guidelines for future research on teachers' emotions and power:

- Analysis of the feeling rules of institutional policies, such as attendance, dismissal, and literacy testing regulations;
- Analysis of the discourses of English language teaching, such as textbooks, research articles, and teacher education curricula;
- Observations of and interviews with English language teachers about the emotional impact of various aspects of their teaching, such as testing, classroom management, responding to writing, and grading;
- Attention to emotion labor as tension between feeling rules and teachers' training and/or beliefs;
- Embracing emotion labor as a source of engagement and activism.

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