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**The (un)expected consequences of the teacher's
(emotional) labor.
Inspirations from politically and critically oriented
affect theories**

**(Nie)oczekiwane konsekwencje pracy (emocjonalnej) nauczyciela.
Inspiracje politycznie i krytycznie zorientowanymi teoriami afektu**

Abstract: The aim of the article is to describe the teacher's (emotional) labor and its relationships with the formation of the teacher's subjectivity. This relationship is especially visible when the relations between the teacher's emotions and professional work are shown from the perspective of theoretical analyses and research in the field of the affective turn, especially the so-called „affective economies”. Based on selected critical and political theories of emotions (i.a. Brian Massumi, Sarah Ahmed, and Teresa Brennan), the teacher's (emotional) labor is presented here as a tool of auto-(trans) formations and (auto-)reflection and, at the same time, as a place of the affective marginalization of the teacher's subjectivity and impoverishment of his or her agency. The presented way of conceptualizing emotional labor is a new look at the teacher's emotions. It provides educational theorists and pedagogueologists with analytical tools for empirical research and is also a voice in the discussion, an argument for considering affect in teacher education.

Keywords: emotions, affect, politicality of affect, affective economies, teacher's work, teacher's emotional labor.

*„Affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology”
Brian Massumi, 2013, p. 132.*

Introduction

In the philosophical tradition of the West, emotions and affects¹ were long ignored and devalued, shared the fate of the body, and were treated as a threat to the conceptual purity of rationalist systems establishing a dualistic division into and hierarchy of (better) reason and (worse) body. Starting from antiquity, traditional philosophical thought treated emotions as destroying balance, under the influence of which we act irrationally; „affects were considered as contamination of human nature and a factor preventing the development of virtue” (Burzyńska, 2015, p. 115). Once emotions appeared, they had to be controlled, restrained and, according to ancient philosophers, the greatest advantage was to free oneself completely from their control. This disqualification of emotions was related to the desire to maintain the conceptual purity of philosophical systems, and to the dominant concept of a disembodied, senseless, and asexual (implicitly male) subject, in which „there was no room for anything else but reason” (Burzyńska, 2015, p. 129). This model, the establishment of which was largely contributed to by Descartes, effectively removed emotions from the field of view in the humanities and social sciences, including in educational studies. However, starting from the 1990s, an increased interest in the affective side of human functioning can be noticed, which some call „a turn towards emotions”, „the affective turn”, or „affective studies”, and it seems that emotions and affects, which in Western philosophy played the role of a „full-time outcast” (Burzyńska, 2015, p. 115), will not be just a temporary fashion, but they will stay in the humanities for longer (Nycz, 2014, p. 9). However, despite this „appreciation” of emotions and an increasing number of theoretical works in the field of research on affects by neurobiologists, psychologists, philosophers, historians, sociologists, and cultural scientists, the affective turn still seems to have little impact on the contemporary theory of education and reflection on education (Boler and Zembylas 2016; Starego, 2016); there is definitely no interdisciplinary conversation between researchers in the field of education theory and

¹ I am aware that the terms „affect” and „emotion” and „emotional labor” and „affective labor” are fundamentally different. The discussions on „affective labor” in philosophy and „emotional labor” in social sciences are separate disciplinary traditions and research schools. Distinguishing between these conceptual categories is beyond the scope of this text, therefore, the terms „affect” and „emotion” and „emotional labor” and „affective labor” are used interchangeably in this article.

those disciplines that are currently popularizing the latest research on affect, which is the case, for example, in Polish literary studies (cf. Burzyńska, 2015; Dauksza, 2016, 2017; Tabaszewska, 2018).

Research on teachers' emotions undertaken by educators over the last three decades most frequently concerned the following issues: emotional aspects of teacher-student interactions (Hargreaves, 2000); emotional aspects of the teacher-parent relationship (Lasky, 2000); and experiencing various emotions (positive and negative) while teaching. Numerous studies also dealt with the issues of stress, anxiety, and professional burnout of teachers (Pyżalski and Merecz, 2010; Kirenko and Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2011; Kocór, 2019).

Important research on teachers' emotional experiences was carried out by Jennifer Nias (1996), who emphasizes the inextricable relationships between teachers' work and their personal lives. Nias notes that teachers engage and invest in their work (and in the values associated with it) as it is linked to the development of their personal and professional identities. Professional work is therefore an important source of self-evaluation for teachers (Kwiatkowska, 2005).

Regarding the „political dimension” of teachers' emotions, Michalinos Zembylas (2003, 2004, 2011, 2014, 2020, 2021) carried out interesting studies. His analyses show how the emotional experiences of teachers are integrated into the culture of an educational establishment and how they are involved in the **power relations and ideologies** (bolded by R.G.) which are in force on the school premises. Zembylas consistently emphasizes the socio-political and cultural dimension of the teacher's emotional experiences. He proves that emotions are „controlled” at all levels of education, especially on its institutional level and shows how cultural factors, present e.g. in school rules, education programmes, and ministerial regulations, define what the teacher should feel and how he or she should express emotions while performing his or her professional duties. In this sense, it is politicians who determine and indicate what is, and what is not acceptable in the teacher's behaviour, and who „order” teachers how to express emotions in everyday school life, which to suppress, and which to ignore. Emotional rules are, therefore, a kind of „disciplining techniques” for the teacher's emotional expression (Zembylas, 2004, 2020) because they divide the teacher's emotions into right and wrong, normal and deviant. They oblige the teacher to demonstrate specific behaviours and take particular actions, not only in contacts with students, but also with colleagues, the authorities, and school administration. The emotional experiences of teachers are, thus, clearly linked to ideological and institutional regulations and are undoubtedly **political** (bolded by R.G.) in nature.

This article draws on the above research and continues analyses on how socio-political and cultural aspects (power and ideology) define and control teachers' experience of emotions, allowing them (teachers) to feel and express certain emotions and/or, at the same time, inducing them to suppress and/or ignore others. The aim of the article is to describe the teacher's affective labor and its consequences for the development of subjectivity², (self-)awareness, (self-)knowledge, and sense of agency. Based on selected critical and political theories of affect, the teacher's (emotional) labor is presented here as a tool for (self-)reflection and auto(trans)formation, but also as a source of exhaustion, anxiety, inauthenticity, and (self-)alienation.

The politicality of affect and affective economies

Baruch Spinoza (2010) is considered to be one of the important precursors of research into affects and, at the same time, a clear inspirer of the contemporary theory of affects. The reading of his concept by, among others, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari or Brian Massumi constitutes today the basis of a large part of the concepts concerning affects. It is in the concepts

² In this article, I am interested in the socio-cultural dimension of the subject, showing, on the one hand, the factors determining the „conditions of the possibility” of a specific structure of the subject, and, on the other hand, offering (or imposing) a specific reservoir of resources available to individuals and communities in educational creation and self-creation processes (Szkudlarek, 2012a, p. 304). Therefore, I adopt Tomasz Szkudlarek's understanding of subjectivity, who defines the subject in two ways: (1) as an effect (object) of external determinants (e.g. cultural, linguistic, educational, or political) defining the framework of its functioning, which, in turn, may be recognized subjectively as objects of their own *episteme* and take a specific „subjective” position towards them, creating the basis for autonomous action; (2) the subject can also be understood as the „subject of action”, consciousness, agency, as a „locus of control”. This dimension of subjectivity is very often referred to using a separate term, i.e. *agency*. Then, what we act on or towards, including the very person who takes the action, if it is directed „at himself/herself”, becomes the „object”. Recognizing subjectivity in terms of agency is related to examining the conditions of human freedom and responsibility. Between the subject in the second sense (subject as an efficient „agent”) and the subject in the first sense („constructed” in relations with external structures: social groups, ideologies, myths, roles, etc.), there is often tension expressed in the form of the *structure* vs. *agency* opposition, which is one of the most frequently discussed issues by researchers into subjectivity (Męczkowska, 2006; Szkudlarek: 2012a, 2012b).

In the socio-cultural approach to subjectivity adopted here, important are those dimensions that are susceptible to the work of culture, that place the individual in a relationship with what is social and make it a subject formable to some extent. In other words, in this text I am interested in the subject „constructed in power relations”, which, at the same time, may/must develop a position in these relations that makes efficient action possible.

of these philosophers that the political dimension of affect is clearly visible. In the works of these philosophers, emotions are not treated as individual, psychological reactions or states, but as **social and cultural practices** (bolded by R.G.). As Brian Massumi says, „the concept of affect is politically oriented from the get go” (2015, p. ix), although noticing the political aspects of affect is neither obvious nor easy. According to Massumi, the political dimension is inscribed in Spinoza’s very definition of affect, who says: „By affect I mean the stimulation of the body, which by the power of this body’s action increases or decreases, is sustained or inhibited, and, at the same time, the ideas of these stimulations” (2010, p. 129). Massumi adds that emotion and affect are two separate categories, „they are governed by different logic and belong to different orders” (2013, p. 117). Affect is „irreducibly corporeal and autonomous”, and Sara Ahmed adds that „we must understand how emotions work rather than treat them” *a priori* as mental states, as „intermediaries” between the mental and social, individual and collective, and states: „emotions play a key role in the surfacing of individual and collective bodies because they circulate between bodies and signs”. Such an argument clearly undermines the assumption that emotions come down to the private sphere of our lives and belong only to individuals, and the claim that they come from within and only then „shift” towards others. This would suggest that emotions are not simply „inside” or „outside”, but act on the surface or on the interface between bodies and worlds (Ahmed, 2013, p. 17).

The key and most important aspect of Ahmed’s theory for our considerations is the answer to the question „What do emotions do?” According to Ahmed, emotions have the power to bind or „separate”, emotions are always involved in our everyday practices (including educational), thus forming social relations. Ahmed proposes the theory of „affective economies”, which speaks about forming individuals, communities, and culture thanks to the circulation between the guided psycho-corporeal systems and signs. In this approach, affects are understood not as psychological states, but as fields of affective tensions created, emitted, transported, and felt by various (family, institutional, political, ideological, etc.) communities. Thus, emotions have the power to form subjects and collectives, and have „the potential to bind and divide subjects entering into various arrangements” (Glosowitz, 2013, p. 27).

For our deliberations, it is also worth recalling the research and analyses of Arlie Hochschild (2009) and Eva Illouz (2010, 2016), which show that nowadays emotions have transformed into a tool of producing value, they have been commercialized, commodified, they are capitalized in virtually

every branch of the market and move freely from private space to public space. „Emotions are deeply internalized and unreflexive aspects of action, not because they do not contain sufficient culture and society, but because they contain too much of them” (Illouz, 2010, p. 9). „Emotion is not action but the inner energy that propels us toward an act, just as it endows a particular ‘mood’ or ‘coloration’ to that act. Emotion can thus be defined as the ‘energy-laden’ side of action, where that energy is understood to simultaneously implicate cognition, affect, evaluation, motivation, and the body” (Illouz, 2010, p. 8). Illouz also emphasizes that public discourse has now been „therapeutized” and that our emotionality has been commodified, normalized, and mystified, in a word – instrumentalized.

Studies in which emotional (affective) work is one of the types (manifestations) of the so-called immaterial work – a form of work that occupies a dominant position in the current global economy and which is an activity that produces intangible goods, i.e. services, knowledge, and communication, are important for the analyses of affective/emotional work (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Emotional work in this approach is the work of interpersonal contacts and interactions related to the real (or virtual) presence of someone else. It consists in producing emotions and manipulating them, while its products include well-being, commitment, and satisfaction. Affective work constitutes the most important link in immaterial work, because it „produces” agency, builds subjectivity, and contributes to socialization and building community.

We find an interesting position in Teresa Brennan’s theory of affect (2004). For Brennan, affect is transindividual and energetic, it circulates between bodies and enables or disables their abilities. She writes: „[in] the encounter between domestic workers and their employers there is more than an exchange of reproductive tasks or emotional work. In fact, what forms these encounters is the transmission of affects” (2004, p. 6). For Brennan, the most important thing about affects is that they can be transferred. Affect is always experienced in a social situation and is expressed in „body language”. Transmission is thus at the heart of the affect theory. For Brennan, affects are not only constituted (or co-constituted) in interpersonal relations, but are produced in affective economies that not only constitute affective meaning but also separate affective power. According to Brennan, affect is primarily a negative force that permeates us and affects our body. While affects can make us stronger when we project them onto others, they most often exhaust us when we become „containers for the projection of unwanted affects”. Affects can also contribute to oppression, exploitation, marginalization, and other devastating forms of affective injustice.

The teacher's (emotional) work as a tool of auto-(trans)formation

As Zembylas rightly argues, emotions are political and they are a place of socio-political control. The teacher's (emotional) work is also significant for his or her disposition and resources, for his or her subjectivity and identity. It is finally an important element of the teacher's self-assessment and (self-) understanding (Kelchtermans, 2005). Emotions always „speak” about what is important for our well-being and/or for our personal development, they are an important manifestation of self-awareness and play a significant role in self-understanding and (self-)reflection. Megan Boler (1999) was one of the first not only to reveal these mechanisms in the context of working in educational establishments, but also proposed that emotional work should become an educational tool that makes it possible for teachers to use their discomfort to change their personal beliefs and to undergo (auto-)transformation. Emotional teacher experiences are seen as an element of the teacher's (auto-)reflection and a tool for personal auto-(trans)formation. Boler claims that by doing emotional work one can re-evaluate one's own assumptions, beliefs, and even habits (Boler, 1999). The teacher may become involved in the critical thinking process and work on his or her own emotions to change them. In other words, emotional work makes it possible to redefine the adopted (often not realized before) values and beliefs. This is because emotional work is an immanent component of reflective and critical thinking (Góral ska and Kosiorek, 2021). The relationships between emotional work and critical thinking were investigated by the American sociologist Morris Rosenberg in the so-called reflexive theory of emotions (Rosenberg, 1990). Rosenberg's main thesis is that reflexivity often results from emotional reactions and, at the same time, interestingly, reflexivity may change the nature of human emotions (Rosenberg 1990, p. 3).

Megan Boler claims that the teacher may also question the emotional rules that form individual and group privileges, especially those that are imposed, oppressive, and inconsistent with their system of values. The teacher's (emotional) work may, therefore, on the one hand, be a tool of transformation, but it may also be an expression of (political) resistance to the rules that are imposed on the teacher (e.g. by the education authorities), and with which he or she does not agree (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2003, 2004).

Emotional exhaustion: the toxic consequences of an affective economy

However, if the emotional rules in force in educational establishments differ from what the teacher really feels, the teacher's daily work involves huge costs, e.g. emotional self-alienation, shame, embarrassment, a sense

of compulsion, inauthenticity, a sense of being manipulated and exploited (Szanto, 2017). In this way, they marginalize his or her subjectivity and impoverish his or her agency. The emotions with which the teacher works do not leave him or her even after the end of work, because they constitute its (i.e. emotional work's) permanent „by-productive labour” (Whitney, 2018a, 2018b, 2021). According to Shiloh Whitney, the conceptualization of affective work as *by-production*, uncovers the forms of exploitation characteristic of it and reveals that the teacher must take on all the negative affective burden rooted in the work, absorbing negative and exhausting feelings related to stress, fatigue, sometimes to humiliation and contempt, and sometimes to the devalued status. The teacher is forced in his or her work to metabolize these „excesses” and „waste”, and to „absorb them”. This causes anxiety, fear, stress, fatigue, humiliation, contempt, guilt, disengagement, and exhaustion. If such emotions last for a long time and are strongly formed and modulated from the outside, often without the teacher's consent and against his or her system of values, the emotional patterns and rules in force at a place may even lead to the so-called „hack” of the teacher's subjectivity (Slaby, 2016).

Conclusion

In this article the concept of the teacher's (emotional) work is presented from the perspective of the (political) economies of affect and it was pointed out that the teacher's work entails numerous consequences for the development of his or her subjectivity, both positive – edifying, and negative – hurting, alienating, degrading, in a word – toxic. It has also been shown that teachers' emotions may be/become places of auto-(trans)formation, but they may also contribute to the marginalization of their subjectivity and impoverish their agency.

I see great potential in the theorizing of teachers' work from the perspective of the political theories of affect. I agree with Shiloh Whitney (2018a), who says that this way of conceptualizing it reflects its „uniqueness”, i.e. it demonstrates and explains how affective work is closely related to power and status, and shows how hard this work is, what emotional costs the teacher bears when he or she has to „absorb” and metabolize its effects. It is only when we understand the teacher's affective work as a by-product that we discover its true burden and how much effort the teacher must make „absorbing negative feelings” related to stress, devalued status, domination and oppression, or other forms of affective injustice.

Such an „expanded” view of the teacher's work may inspire a study of the emotional dimension of the teacher's activity in order to, as Sarah

Amsler (2011) says, create conditions for the development of „affective sensitivity”; or, what Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2020) calls for, to build an educational culture of recognition; or, as proposed by Brian Massumi (2017), to promote and practise the „politics of care”. Martha Nussbaum (2013, 2016) speaks similarly, calling for positive „relational” emotions by strengthening cooperation, self-control, generosity, care, and social justice.

Questions about the affective consequences of the teacher's work are certainly worth asking, especially today, in times of a huge „deficit of sensitivity in interpersonal relations and in the public sphere” (Szpunar, 2018, p. 21); in the world of domination of the „atmosphere and culture of hatred” (Krajewski, 2020), in which „hurting others, humiliation, and cruelty are becoming a normal practice, and aversion felt and expressed towards each other the basic form of interpersonal relations” (Krajewski, 2020, p. 29).

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