AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Anna Anderson for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Speech Communication, Adult Education, and Anthropology presented on June 7, 2013.
Title: "I Was That Student": Exploring Instructor Experience of Empathy Amid Identities in the Classroom

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This research is an exploration of empathy in the classroom from the standpoint of how instructors experience it and understand themselves to communicate it to their students, particularly students from different cultural backgrounds. The research method used was ethnographic analysis of a classroom observation and a one-hour semi-structured interview with each of nine university instructors. Major findings are presented through five themes derived from analysis of participants' input: definitions of empathy, overt communication of empathy, empathy as mutual engagement, empathy as identity expression, and constraints and drawbacks to empathy. These instructors communicate empathy in ways that address most of the full spectrum of its meanings: emotional, cognitive, and relational. They give weight to academic identities in their experience and expression of empathy with students, which potentially reduces the negative effects of nondominant social identities, but also introduces the potential for unconsciously selective empathy and inadvertent reinforcement of the inequities that inhibit some students from developing a strong academic identity.

"I Was That Student": Exploring Instructor Experience of Empathy
Amid Identities in the Classroom

by
Anna Anderson

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Anna Anderson, Author

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Introduction

"The student from hell," Parker Palmer (1998) calls him, although it is just as often her, the silent kid who sits in the back with a vacant desk and face, eyes averted, radiating disengagement, apparently. Whether or not it is our duty to win every student, it is common among teachers to want to do just that. In Palmer's story, the student's behavior resulted from cultural conflict; he lived at home with his working-class family who daily and actively disparaged his college aspirations. Other students grow up with social norms that are at odds with expected academic behavior, for example, where it is considered disrespectful for an underling to ask a question or look directly at an overling. In recent decades, communicators and educators have begun to recognize and study the impacts of cultural differences such as these to the learning process, and many teacher training programs now include content on developing respect for diversity and empathy across cultural boundaries. The importance of empathy to engaging students in the classroom is well established, as are, to a lesser extent, practices that teachers can develop to communicate empathy in multicultural classrooms (Xing & Roper, 2007; Rhodes, 2010). But what does the term empathy mean, especially to the teachers who are supposed to be communicating it?

This study is an attempt to answer that question, an exploration of empathy in the classroom from the standpoint of how instructors experience it and understand themselves to communicate it to their students, particularly students from different

cultural backgrounds. Specifically, the research question is, "How do instructors experience and talk about their communication of empathy with respect to different cultural identities in the classroom?" The intention is to describe personal definitions and practices of empathy in the classroom, as reflected upon by particular instructors, to provide other teachers with a springboard for thinking more deeply about their communication of empathy across cultural differences, and ultimately to nurture more effective teaching. Because empathy is a complex and partially emotional concept, and because each person's experience is unique, the research method is qualitative.

The study is also interdisciplinary, so this paper is structured slightly differently than standard papers in each of the contributing disciplines, Intercultural Communication, Adult Education, and Anthropology. The next section of the introduction addresses interdisciplinarity and the necessity of the three disciplines to this study, and the last introductory section defines the background terms of culture and communication. The major concepts of the study, empathy and identity, are more thoroughly explored in the literature review, ending with a discussion of how the disciplinary concepts are synthesized and applied in this study. Following the literature review in more traditional order are the method, research results, discussion, and conclusion sections, followed by the bibliography and appendix.

Interdisciplinarity

Each of the three disciplines has its own approaches and research into issues of empathy and identity which are foundational to this study. According to Repko (2008), research within a given discipline tends to work within that discipline's

theoretical and conceptual boundaries, so that integrating insights and perspectives from more than one relevant discipline provides opportunity for new insights and understandings beyond disciplinary limitations. Brown-Jeffy & Cooper (2011) highlight the three disciplines and their complementary nature when they write, "Understanding the synergistic linkages between culture, communication, and cognition is crucial to successful student-teacher relationships" (p. 78).

Intercultural Communication (ICC) is the major discipline underlying this study. By definition ICC focuses on communication between people with different backgrounds and assumptions. Along with understanding how these communications take place, many ICC scholars hope to improve communication through their findings. Adult Education is relevant to the study through its research on student and teacher interactions and on effective teaching practices. Anthropology contributes to this study by its extensive development of ethnographic methods and research into the many ways self, culture, and communication can be framed.

Culture and Communication Defined

Culture and communication are frequently conceptualized by reference to one another. For example, E. T. Hall, cultural anthropologist and founder of intercultural communication as a discipline (Rogers et al, 2002), famously wrote, "Culture is communication and communication is culture" (Hall, 1962, p. 9). Rogers (1999) proposes that many concepts in current Intercultural Communication research can be traced even further back to Georg Simmel's theoretical explorations of the stranger, an outgroup member who participates in a cultural system. Expanding on Rogers' ideas,

Carbaugh and Berry (2001) draw out two complementary conceptualizations of communication from Simmel's work; one sees communication as dependent on typified individuals and cultures, and one sees cultures, individuals, and related types as formed through communication. Both views can be substantiated; communication is both a "cultural resource" or practice as well as a means through which people become group members and create identities (p. 358). Allen (2011) defines the verb form, communicating, as "the dynamic nature of processes that humans use to produce, interpret, and share meaning. These processes are complex, continuous, and contextual. And, they constitute our social reality" (p. 10).

Culture can be defined apart from communication, as Sapolsky (2010) does, "As defined by both anthropologists and animal behaviorists, 'culture' consists of local behavioral variations, occurring for nongenetic and nonecological reasons, that last beyond the time of their originators" (p. 31). With respect to humans, culture more often includes communication, at least implicitly, as in Yagi & Kleinberg (2011), "Culture is defined as sets of symbols and patterns of meaning and interpretation that are shared or partially shared among a group of people. Produced and reproduced through social interaction, culture nonetheless is historically situated, emergent, and shifting" (p. 632). Anthropologist James Clifford (1988) defines culture as "always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (p. 15, emphasis in original). Kearney (1995) notes anthropology's tendency to see cultures, incorrectly, as mutually exclusive categories, and Abu-Lughod (1991) charges that through this categorization

in traditional anthropology, "culture is the essential tool for making other" (p. 143), a

means to "enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy" (p. 138).

ICC researcher Mary Jane Collier (2005) also makes the connections between culture,

communication, and power explicit:

> My working orientation to culture is now that of a communicative location, a
> shared and contested alignment created by individuals, groups, organizations,
> or institutions; the location includes a history and itinerary and is both
> constrained by social structures and constructed through social interaction. (p.
> 242)

As anthropologists of education, González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) conceptualize

culture in the classroom as, not static or predictive categories, but instead the lived

experiences, processes of everyday life, and historical frames of reference of the

students and their families.

In this research, the term culture encompasses the history, relationships, and

interactions that are passed on to and developed by new members of a community.

Communication is defined as the interactional processes by and through which those

cultural experiences, processes, and knowledge are formed and transmitted.

Literature Review

In the spirit of current ethnography, this section provides a brief digest of the readings and theoretical background of this researcher for this project. What follows is not an attempt at an exhaustive account of these ideas even within the limitations of English-language scholarship. The literature review is organized into two sections, the first for empathy and the second for identity. Research is presented and summarized for each concept within the three disciplines that guide this study, followed by a synthesis of concepts drawn from the disciplines. The disciplines follow the same order of presentation in both sections: ICC as the foundational discipline, with supplementary material from Adult Education and Anthropology. The adjectives empathic and empathetic are used interchangeably; "empathetic" is most often used to contrast with "sympathetic."

Empathy

Like love, the word empathy has been subject to innumerable studies using many interpretations. Grounded in our animal biology, by the time empathy reaches visible action it has touched most of a person's inner life, physical, emotional, cognitive, and moral, and reflects much of his or her past influences. The more one explores the multiple aspects of empathy, the more ambiguous, uncertain, and complexly interwoven in intra- and interpersonal networks it appears. An empathic posture, whether compassionate or abusive, whether it is recognized, rejected, or accepted, becomes foundational to other kinds of interactions in ongoing relationships.

Empathy in Intercultural Communication.

This section first reviews some definitions of empathy within the Intercultural Communication literature, and then explores the question of whether empathy is cultural or universal. Lastly, some issues raised in the literature around empathy and power are summarized and related to the classroom environment**.**

Definitions of empathy in Intercultural Communication literature.

Even before the formal establishment of Intercultural Communication as a discipline, its founder E. T. Hall (Rogers et al, 2002) defined empathy as "the capacity for participating vicariously in another's feelings" (Hall, 1962) and acknowledged the importance and the difficulty of empathy in communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. While theorization of both empathy and culture have since expanded beyond Halls' definitions, the cultivation of an ability to imagine and respond appropriately to cultural perspectives beyond one's own continues to be a primary objective of Intercultural Communication educators (Engen, 2002, p. 53).

The common conception of empathy as the apprehension of another person's inner subjectivity derives from early psychology and counseling literature and has been challenged by scholars from a variety of disciplines (Agosta, 2010; DeTurk, 2001). Whether achieved through analogy with one's own history or by an imaginative leap, this reading of empathy is restricted to an internal experience. However, confirming the accuracy of one's internal perception requires some feedback from the other person. Interpretive communication theory, which views meaning as created in and by interaction between people,

focuses on communicative action rather than internal psychological states, and the collective building of subjective understanding, rather than the transfer of one person's thoughts to another… *Relational* empathy, in this sense, is dynamic and context-dependent, and 'emphasizes a *productive* rather than a *reproductive* approach to understanding.' (DeTurk, p. 240, emphasis in the original)

Inspired in part by physicist David Bohm's work, Dace and McPhail (2002) take relational empathy a step further with the idea of implicature, the "notion that our separateness is an illusion, and that, *in reality*, we are all essentially implicated in each other. From this perspective, empathy is a state of mind that reflects an underlying state of being, an experience of reality" (p. 349, emphasis in original). Implicature gives weight to the material, social, and psychological connections among people that classic Western epistemology tends to ignore, while still honoring the individual physical and cultural experiences that make us different.

This more complex sense of empathy as part of ongoing relationships between people appears in the research from other disciplines as well. For example, in their neuroeconomic research, Andreoni and Rao (2010) found links between areas of the brain associated with communication and social contexts, and areas associated with empathic concern. "[C]ommunication, especially the power of asking, greatly influences feelings of empathy and pro-social behavior" (p. 519).

Is empathy a cultural or universal phenomenon?

Communication research has expanded beyond Western cultures and epistemologies to address questions about how interactional processes such as empathy might be experienced and valued differently across cultures. In their comparative study of emotional support preferences between individualist and

collectivist cultures, Burleson and Mortenson (2003) found that while "there are some important cultural differences in what is viewed as effective and appropriate forms of emotional support, …explained to a substantial extent by cultural differences in value orientations and, especially, interaction goals," skill in providing appropriate emotional comfort is highly valued at both ends of the cultural individualist-collectivist dialectic (p. 139).

In his article promoting the importance of intercultural empathy for language learners, Zhu (2011) affirms the value of empathy beyond its particular forms in Chinese culture. "In China, the notion of empathy is to a large extent influenced by Chinese traditional values; as a consequence, current practice regarding empathy rarely takes into account cross-cultural effects" (p. 116). Another study by Gareis (2000) finds empathy to be an influential personality trait in friendship formation by foreign students in the U.S., helpful to German and U.S. students in working through their different expectations and perceptions of friendship enactment—and the resulting confusion when intercultural friendships are attempted.

Although most personality studies are limited by their basis in Western cultures, psychologists have also developed measurement scales to test for cross-cultural empathy. In 2003, Wang et al. published their Ethnocultural Empathy Scale based on three components of empathy, emotional, cognitive, and communicative. In their findings, empathy was generalizable in the samples across cultures, and differences in levels of empathy were correlated more to gender, age, and race than to national culture. Siu and Shek (2005) translated and evaluated a Chinese version of

the Interpersonal Reactivity Index among students in Hong Kong, PRC. Here also, levels of empathy varied by age and gender. The Western presentation of empathy as four distinct factors (personal distress, empathic concern, perspective taking, and fantasy) did not translate directly from English to Chinese, although the reasons may derive from the difficulties of delineating these different aspects of empathy as well as cultural differences in emotional perception and expression. In the broader picture, some notion of empathy as a means of relating to others appears to exist across the societies that have been studied.

Empathy and power in Intercultural Communication literature.

DeTurk (2001) proposes that "[a]ny conceptualization of empathy across cultures or social groups… must cautiously consider dynamics of power" (p. 379) and points out several problems around power relations and empathy that are not always addressed. One issue is the Western assumption of both self and knowledge as static entities separate from social or environmental networks—an epistemology not universally accepted even in the West—that undergirds the internal, emotive notion of empathy. Another issue relates to which parties determine the criteria of communication competence, an instance of what DeTurk suggests is a dominant group controlling discourse and disempowering others by the imposition of its cultural biases as norms. "Empathy has been seen as a key 'competency' among intercultural scholars and trainers… The assumption that open communication and mutual understanding are universally valued… reflects 'definitions of "competence" that privilege the communicative style of middle class white Americans'" (p. 374 & 377).

Gorski's (2008) critique of intercultural communication education expands on this

issue of unequal power, claiming that "the goals most often identified in definitions of

intercultural education…, the facilitation of intercultural dialogue, an appreciation for

diversity, and cultural exchange" serve to maintain the status quo and thus reinforce

the marginalization of the less powerful (p. 520).

> Far too often [intercultural communication] experiences are facilitated –
> controlled – in ways that assume that all participants sit at an even table (Jones
> 1999), one at which all parties have equitable access to cultural capital.
>   According to Jones, such dialogue experiences tend to focus on the
> goal of mutual empathy – requiring dominated people to empathize with
> people who are, or who represent, their oppressors...
>   Which people and systems do we protect when we request empathy
> from dominated groups without first demanding justice from the powerful? ...
> The powerful – who, as individuals or institutions, usually control (implicitly
> or explicitly) rules of engagement in intercultural education experiences – tend
> to leave unacknowledged the reality that the marginalized voices they invite
> into dialogue do not need organized opportunities to hear the voices of the
> powerful. (pp. 520-521)

Gorski's last line echoes standpoint theory, also mentioned by DeTurk, the concept

that marginalized subordinates cannot avoid exposure to the viewpoints of the

dominant, and in fact may need to closely and correctly read those with power over

them as a matter of survival, while those with power generally have no reason to

consider the views of those with less power (Wood, 2005). This implies that

subordinates need a greater depth of empathy in the sense of understanding the

dominant mind, while for the dominant, empathy for marginalized people is optional

at best. DeTurk suggests that "everyone has experienced some type of oppression or

marginalization over the course of our lives, and thus has the potential for this type of

understanding" (p. 381). In the context of the classroom, more powerful instructors

certainly have some history of being less powerful students, however they may choose to remember or act on that understanding.

In Bartlett's (2009) study of communication patterns between indigenous minority and dominant Western NGO participants in Guyana, "discursive power is a question of shaping a common framework of representation and interpretation" within a wider social setting, within which power relations shift depending on the constraints of situations, relative social capital, and language ability (p. 183). Bartlett outlines three levels of intercultural communication, from that of a dominant group talking *at* a minority group, to shared conceptual comprehension, to mutual engagement in shared meanings that both groups understand and support. Empathy comes into play as "an understanding of the motivations and significance of what is being said" (p. 187) at the third and most effective level of intercultural discussions,

> in which conditions are created whereby the minority group not only comprehend what is going on in terms of the content of the discussion (that is, the field, in Halliday's terms), but also the interactional dynamics between participants (the tenor) and the manner of proceedings (the mode). This level, then, corresponds to understanding as empathy, where minority participants feel 'at home' with the proceedings. (p. 187)

Bartlett's three communication levels can also be recognized as different modes in which teachers communicate with students. Most of us can recall instances of an instructor talking *at* students, or conveying disembodied concepts without any meaningful connection, as well as times when a teacher was able to engage and support students in actively grasping the significance of particular content and the broader learning process.

Summary of empathy in Intercultural Communication.

Summarizing these findings in the Intercultural Communication literature, empathy is defined as an ongoing construction of shared understanding built through communication. The basic concept of empathy is universally found with nuanced perceptions and expressions differing across cultures, including differences by age, gender, race, social status, and so on. Power inequities and social contexts influence each individual's felt need and goals for developing an empathic relationship and sense of how empathy ought to be communicated in a relationship. The less powerful (e.g., students) must often learn to read and understand those who hold power over them (e.g., teachers) while the reverse is less common. The most comprehensive communication takes place within mutually empathetic relationships that transcend power differences.

Empathy in Adult Education.

This section presents conceptualizations of empathy found in education literature, where it is considered as a component as well as an outcome of the learning process, followed by a discussion of some critiques of empathy as seen by educators.

Definitions of empathy in Adult Education literature.

In its Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric for evaluating student learning outcomes, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) sets forth empathy as one of six "key components of intercultural knowledge and competence" (Rhodes, 2010, p. 1). The AACU uses Bennett's 1998 definition of empathy as "the imaginary participation in another person's experience, including

emotional and intellectual dimensions, by imagining his or her perspective (not by assuming the person's position)" (p. 1). The Center for Educational Research and Development (1994, in Hutchison, 2005) includes empathy and respect for individuals as one of five dimensions of teacher quality.

Reviewing the literature on the place of empathy in moral education, Verducci (2000) explains the wide discrepancies across scholarly definitions of empathy as a result of theorists' focus on narrow facets of a complex composite. "[C]onceptions of empathy are used by different disciplines, for different ends, and with different objects" (p. 78), thus "theorists have described a constellation of related phenomena, not a singular phenomenon" (p. 66). Verducci sorts this range of phenomena according to their historical derivations, disciplines, and affective or cognitive emphasis, noting that in "those that value both affect and cognition, empathy emerges as a rich, affectively charged, cognitively active complex" (p. 67), and proposes that the choice of which definition to use depends on the purpose and context of the research situation.

Similarly, in their interdisciplinary framework for teaching empathy, Gerdes, Segal, Jackson, and Mullins (2011) analogize the different aspects of empathy as color frequencies in the rainbow, each distinguishable yet inseparably part of a larger single entity. Drawing from cognitive neuroscience research, these authors conceptualize empathy as comprised of three primary processes, affective response, cognitive processing, and conscious decision-making, all of which are physiologically observable processes in the brain's neural networks.

Speaking practically, Palmer (1998) illustrates how teacher empathy operates toward students:

> A good teacher is one who can listen to [students'] voices before they are spoken… What does it mean to listen to a voice before it is spoken? It means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other. It means not rushing to fill our students' silences with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that we want to hear. It means entering empathically into the student's world so that he or she perceives you as someone who has the promise of being able to hear another person's truth. (p. 46)

In the context of education, empathy is composed of the teacher's constructive intention, perspective, and action toward students.

Teacher and student empathy in Adult Education.

Among the three disciplines under consideration in this research, education most emphasizes empathy in its end users as well as its practitioners. The importance of teaching empathy to students is as common in education literature as the effects of teacher empathy on learning.

Teacher empathy. Cozolino and Sprokay (2006) adduce research about the physical and learning effects of relationships on adult learning in their chapter on the importance of the teacher's relational support for students to successful learning. "The notion of the brain as a social organ emerged in neuroscience in the 1970s… [T]he brain is a social organ and learns best in the context of a trusting relationship" (pp. 13 & 15). Learners are influenced by involuntary physical cues as well as through verbal and cognitive interactions. "[T]hrough emotional facial expressions, physical contact, and eye gaze—even through pupil dilation and blushing—people are in constant, if often unconscious, two-way communication with those around them" (p. 13). The

quality of the emotional environment in the learning situation, primarily determined in most classrooms by the instructor, inhibits or facilitates the student brain's ability to learn. "[T]he teacher's interpersonal attunement creates a biological state in the [learner's] brain that makes it better able to incorporate new information… [E]xcellent teachers create emotionally supportive learning experiences that can rebuild the brains of their [adult] students" (pp.13-15).

Support for teacher empathy with students as a positive factor in the educational process, especially where cultural backgrounds differ, comes from teachers as well as researchers (Duncan-Andrade, 2011). McAllister and Irvine's (2002) study "focus[es] on teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the role of empathy in their teaching practice [and] as a component of teachers' success" with heterogeneous student populations (p. 434). As they reflected on and developed their own empathic skills, the teachers in this study saw improvements in their relationships with students and the overall classroom atmosphere. While they "agreed with researchers that empathy is a necessary, but not sufficient, trait for working with culturally diverse students… [the teachers] noted the importance of empathy in helping them to become more effective teachers with all their students" (p. 442).

Student empathy. Much of the education literature on empathy is directed to cultivating empathetic feelings and skills in students, particularly in elementary and middle school students and adult students of the helping professions. Reasons given in the research for fostering empathy in students include nurturing positive relationships between students to enhance the learning environment, ameliorating

larger social and ethical problems such as racism and bullying, and expanding

students' communication skills in increasingly multi-cultural work and social

environments. In his course, Teaching Empathy, Levine (2005) articulates the

importance of developing empathic skills among younger students, words which may

apply just as much to adult students:

> Empathy education is one of the most critical educational issues of our time
> because it is only when students feel emotionally safe and secure in all areas of
> the school environment–in the classroom, hallway, or cafeteria; at recess; and
> on the bus–that they will begin to focus and tap into the unlimited potential
> that lies within each one of them. (p. 8)

The benefits of empathic skills, or the damage from their lack, extend beyond

educational settings. Because "pronounced egocentric bias or self-centered

orientation" is the basis of antisocial behavior patterns, DiBiase (2010) believes that

"learning to take the viewpoint of others should then be a prominent theme in

prevention programs" for children who are at risk for social and behavioral problems

(p. 22). Adult self-interest and apathy toward others also helps drive destructive

patterns in the larger society. Schneider (2005) noticed that students in her

undergraduate literature classes reify racial divisions in the classroom by ignoring

significant experiential connections and distinctions in individual narratives,

identifying with and grouping themselves instead according to superficial racial and

class group markers. Finally, in increasingly globalized employment, political, and

social settings, the development of empathy skills can also contribute to student

success after graduation (Davis-Maye, Zugazaga, & Colvin-Burque, 2007).

Critiques of empathy in Adult Education literature: Ethics, otherness, and bias.

For all the benefits of empathy in the educational environment, educators have also considered its less constructive aspects. In a reflection on her own teaching, Gair (2011) summarizes several of these, including: the use of empathic awareness to manipulate or harm others, too close an identification with others that leads to "transference, burnout or compassion fatigue" (p. 793), and the limitations we absorb from our particular culture and society about who deserves empathy and who does not.

In their 2011 dialog, Claypool and Molnar discuss the uncritical view of empathy as always a good thing and whether empathy is necessary to a responsible relationship. Molnar questions the ethics of "attempting to get someone to feel a certain way" through teaching empathy (p. 179), and the potential for "hubris… in believing [one] could actually feel the same as others" (p. 181). He also wonders if projecting one's experience onto others might not instead create an unfounded sense of commonality and blind one to crucial distinctions, as with the results that Schneider (2005) saw. Critiquing pedagogic methods in teacher training, Taylor (2007) also suggests that promoting empathy in college literature courses may sometimes commodify and reduce the value of difference in others,

> remembering Davis' (2005) argument that empathy is always egocentric and self-serving: 'We may think that when we empathize we see and feel through the eyes of [the textual other], but in fact what we are doing is reducing their Otherness to what can be misrecognized as their sameness to our imagined Selves.' (p. 300)

In regard to the second point from Gair (2011), compassion fatigue, the emotional demands of teaching contribute to the high levels of stress reported by

teachers (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). Teacher burnout is common, and managing empathy for all of the people with whom teachers must deal is often a major challenge.

Gair's (2011) last issue, selective empathy, speaks to the limitations of cultural and social biases on a person's capacity and willingness to find commonality with others of a different class, phenotype, or culture. In the context of education, attending university does not inherently constitute a broadening multicultural experience. For example, although non-white enrollment in U.S. college campuses has increased, all minority students combined are still outnumbered two to one by white students, and within the vast diversity of minority backgrounds, a student of particular racial, ethnic, or cultural origins may feel and be isolated and invisible (Plaza, 2011). "There is not a critical mass of students from marginalized groups to create comfortable spaces, in classes and on campus, to articulate alternative positions" to dominant middle-class white worldviews (Vanderlinden, 2008, p. 28). Yet "while the linguistically and culturally diverse student population is growing, the teaching force remains largely middle-class, Euro-American, and monolingual English speaking, not trained or experienced to respect and affirm diversity" (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). This assessment of many teachers' unfamiliarity with nondominant perspectives is seconded by Xing and Roper (2007) and Messing (2005):

> [W]hen teachers complete their university studies, many assume that they have learned as much about their future students as they need to, despite the fact that their studies likely exposed them to third-hand knowledge of multicultural communities and the differences of class, race, and gender that they would encounter among their students. (Messing, p. 191)

Various pedagogic approaches, including Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005), the Self and Other Awareness Program (Davis-Maye et al., 2007), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011), and OSU's Difference, Power, and Discrimination model (Xing & Roper, 2007), have been developed explicitly to foster greater intercultural knowledge, competence, and empathy with students from nondominant backgrounds. Integral to these approaches is the recognition of historic and systemic barriers to visibility that most minorities continue to face and that educational institutions have played a major part in maintaining (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Ansalone, 2003; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Davis-Maye et al., 2007; Chapman, 2011). For those steeped in the norms of dominant culture, teachers and students alike, this disturbance of the status quo can be unsettling, but "recognition of the role of power in minority-majority experiences is a key component in developing sensitivity and ultimately, cultural competence" (Davis-Maye et al., 2007, p. 225) that includes empathy across cultural differences.

Summary of empathy in Adult Education.

To summarize the conceptions of empathy from these studies, empathy is a constellation of emotional, cognitive, and decision-making processes that impacts others physiologically, emotionally, and cognitively. A teacher's capacity for empathy correlates directly with his or her role in nurturing positive social relations and a supportive, inclusive learning environment. The cultivation of students' empathic skills also enhances the classroom learning environment and ultimately the larger society. Limitations of empathy from an education perspective include the

potentialities of unclear boundaries between self and other, elision of significant

differences, compassion fatigue and burnout, and selective empathy based on cultural

and social biases, including those in the educational system that contribute to its

inertia around issues of social justice.

Empathy in Anthropology.

Anthropology has generally found empathy problematic in theory and in

practice, so that discussions about empathy often include its destructive as well as

constructive aspects. This section briefly summarizes anthropological work on

empathy from four perspectives, evolutionary, cultural, phenomenological, and

ethical.

Empathy in Anthropology literature: Conceptualizations and concerns.

Kirmayer (2008) explores two anthropological approaches to empathy, one of

biologically based commonality and the other of culturally filtered experiential

difference. In support of biological commonality, evidence from evolutionary

psychology shows that the physiological mechanisms of empathy between parents and

offspring and among social groups extend back through mammalian and avian

evolution, and deliberate altruistic behavior has been confirmed in other self-aware

animals (e.g., apes, dolphins, and elephants). Magnetic brain imaging reveals that

humans share the same neurological circuits as our animal cousins; our bodies and

brains mirror the affective states of others with whom we identify. However, these

same mechanisms also suppress our empathic responses to those whom we perceive as

outgroup members, sometimes to the point of reversing into schadenfreude, the

enjoyment of their pain and discomfort at their pleasure (DeWaal, 2008). Another negative physiological response in empathic interactions can be the empathizer's withdrawal rather than engagement, as a means to reduce the unpleasant sensations brought on by resonance with the distress of the other: we cover our eyes during the gory scenes in a movie (de Waal, 2008), become defensive (Kirmayer, 2008) or distracted and absorbed by our own internal states, perhaps even retaliating against the person whose pain we are reflecting (Rousseau & Foxen, 2010; also, Kashdan & Breen, 2007).

Alternatively, Kirmayer (2008) explores empathy through the interpretive theories of cultural anthropology, which are predicated on the uniqueness of meanings within different cultural frameworks. Through this lens, the accuracy of our interpretation of others' experiences—and our corresponding capacity to empathize with them—is proportional to our comprehension of their socially constructed world, which can never be fully realized. This diffidence toward empathy in cultural anthropology descends from the early foundational thought of Franz Boas through Clifford Geertz, who criticized "the failure of anthropologists and others to distinguish clearly between empathy and projection" (Hollan & Throop, 2008, p. 388). Such failures are exacerbated by the significant differences in the many ways empathy is conceptualized and enacted in different cultural settings. For example, in contrast to Western ideals of emotional intelligence, concealment of one's emotions and non-reaction to others' unspoken subjective states are valued in Yap (Throop, 2008) and Tonga (Morton, 1996). There can also be differences in expectations around empathy

within cultural groups, for example, by age and generational perception (e.g., Twenge, 2009a) and by gender; in quantitative studies, Korean men respond almost the same as Korean women, while in Western and Westernized cultures women respond with more empathy, in keeping with cultural expectations within each group (Strauss, 2004; Twenge, 2009b). Hollan and Throop conclude, "What this suggests is that empathy must always be studied within the much broader context of the ways in which people gain knowledge of others and reveal, allow, or conceal knowledge of themselves" (p. 389). According to their review of anthropology literature, however, empathy is often implied without being defined, and there is a "relative lack of explicit interest in or systematic exploration of empathy in anthropology" (p. 388).

> One thing that is clear from the limited anthropological literature currently available is that first-person-like knowledge of others in the context of everyday social practice is rarely, if ever, considered an unambiguously good thing–despite the many positive connotations empathy has in the North American context. Although such knowledge may be used to help others or to interact with them more effectively, it may also be used to hurt or embarrass them. Because of this, people all over the world seem just as concerned with concealing their first-person subjective experience from others as in revealing it. (p. 389)
> The aversion of the potentially shaming gaze or interaction is one of the most common and important forms of empathic communication we find anywhere. (p. 393)

Empathy can manifest negatively in various ways. For example, in the socio-political climate of Indonesia's recent upheavals, Bubandt (2009) makes the case that instigators of violence needed to develop what he terms hostile empathy to create effective political forgeries. "These fake letters achieve dehumanization [of another group] exactly through deliberate acts of empathy that seek to recreate the subjectivity of the enemy… By means of empathic role taking, the enemy is made to reveal his

inhuman evil self" (p. 569). In another vein, during their work on post-war reconciliation, Halpern and Weinstein (2004) found that interviewees "frequently raised a concern that if they became friends with former enemies, their own people would ostracize them… It is apparent and must be remembered that empathy is socially situated" (p. 577).

Hollan and Throop (2008) observe that empathic processes, whether encouraged or prohibited, develop in the context of social hierarchies, so that in the various different ways it is practiced and proscribed across cultures, "[e]mpathy or its lack can be seen, then, as a type of metacommunication among people that can reinforce or undermine other forms of communication and interaction" (p. 393). In the context of this research, a teacher's empathic approach to teaching, or lack of such an approach, is the metacommunication that underlies all other interactions with students. The fact that this bedrock empathy comes to being in the milieu of the educational hierarchy returns us to issues of empathy and power. Research by Van Kleef et al. (2008) confirms the inverse relationship between social power and empathy, which includes all aspects of empathic communication including the suppression by the powerful of their physiological empathic responses to others. When people with power relate to those with less power, especially those seen as culturally "other", a limited empathy is often used to bolster and enforce the existing unequal power relationships, to the detriment of the less powerful (Rousseau & Foxen, 2010).

In his research on apprenticeship learning, Geiser (2011) concurs with Hollan and Throop's (2008) claim about empathy's wallflower standing in anthropology,

characterizing the historical tradition of empathy in anthropological fieldwork as a limited method for cultivating emic understanding of unfamiliar cultures. In developing his own theoretical stance, he starts with a conception of empathy from philosophy and psychology as a complex process encompassing cognition and emotion in personal and social contexts. Drawing from phenomenological anthropologists and Heidigger's idea of "being-in-the-world" (p. 301), he regards the surrounding environment as integral to all physical and psychological experience, so that bodily sensation and emotion are as much a part of one's knowledge as data stored in the mind. In a holistic view reminiscent of Dace and McPhail's (2002) implicature, Geiser locates master and apprentice as "nodes within their respective fields of relationships" (p. 303) and theorizes empathy as a state of expanded awareness in which "the observer perceives the environment not directly but via the demonstrator while experiencing himself and the other as one *phenomenological unity*" (p. 310, emphasis in the original). In the life-long arcs of these apprenticeship relationships, empathy is a physical, emotional, and cognitive participation in another person's experience.

Given the complexity and ambiguity of how empathy is experienced, interpreted, and communicated in and by different cultures, situations, and individuals, "to maintain empathic openness and cordiality in the face of all the obstacles to understanding requires an ethical stance as well as an emotional and intellectual one" (Hollan & Throop, 2008, p. 395). This observation is interesting not only because both empathy and morality are deeply entwined with each other and embedded in

cultural and social domains, but also because past anthropological research has tended to avoid ethics and morality in ways similar to its avoidance of empathy (Fassin, 2011; Stoczkowski, 2008), although as these writers demonstrate, that aversion has recently begun to soften.

Summary of empathy in Anthropology.

To sum up the anthropology research in this section, our empathic responses, both positive and negative, are grounded in mammalian evolution and formed by social conditioning and cultural milieu. Self-expression and awareness of others' internal states are not universal positives and vary greatly in social and individual contexts. Embedded as it is in social hierarchies, empathy can be seen as a structure within which other forms of communication operate, although more social power commonly equates to less empathy. In some relationships over time, empathy may also become a shared experience of the world. The complexities of understanding others and of empathy itself suggest that, along with its physiological, emotional, and cognitive aspects, ethical considerations also play a part in how empathy is communicated and experienced.

Synthesizing disciplinary conceptions of empathy for this research.

Pulling together the ideas from all three disciplines, empathy is composed of many facets:

- physiological, psychological, and emotional mirroring of another's internal state;
- the capacity to hear what another person means and to see from another's perspective;
- an awareness of the world expanded through the experience of another;
- a cognitive decision based on contemplation and evaluation of personal,

social, and moral costs and rewards;
- a shared understanding achieved through ongoing communication;
- a relational process that makes other kinds of communication possible.

The singularity of individual histories means that the ability to tune into another person's reality requires extensive efforts over time in building common understandings, and is—if ever—completely accurate only by accident. Empathy is not always constructive, for the empathizer or the empathizee; empathy can lead people to blur personal boundaries and exhaust their emotional resources, and it can be used to misrepresent, manipulate, shame, or shun others. Empathy in all its forms is inextricably located with communication, and with social power. The sensory and verbal communication of supportive empathy is critical to an effective learning environment. The teacher's duty to empathize with students is explicit; the students' need to empathize with the teacher, voicing what the teacher expects to hear, is implicit in the power imbalance of the educational setting.

Applying this composite conception of empathy to this research, every instance of empathetic communication is a unique result of individual backgrounds and a particular moment in personal and social history, so that an appropriate empathic response can be communicated by anything from analytical preparation to soulful conversation to body language to looking away. The degree to which one person can feel that s/he shares another's experience depends of course on their degree of overlap. "Empathy is closely related to identity," Strauss claims (2004, p. 432). How we think of ourselves and the social groups in which we place ourselves, or are placed by others, deeply affects how much and with whom we can empathize.

Identity

This section explores the literature within the three disciplines on group identity, referred to in the literature as both cultural and social identity. Like culture, social identity is inseparable from communication processes, including empathy. Interpretive and critical Intercultural Communication (ICC) theory considers cultural identities from the standpoint of how a person's sense of group memberships affects the ways they communicate with others, especially those perceived as having different memberships. Adult Education considers identity primarily in terms of the backgrounds of teachers and students. Anthropology acknowledges individual reflections of culture as being equally problematic and contested as the many conceptions of culture both within and beyond Western societies.

Identities in Intercultural Communication.

Ting-Toomey (2005) defines cultural identity as simply "the emotional significance we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger culture" (p. 214), with all the contested, contextual, and ever-changing meanings of "culture" that implies. Cultural identity, "the sense of 'who I am' as a cultural being", is a fundamental part of one's larger self-identity, "a person's sense of 'who am I?' and 'how should I act?'" (Yagi and Kleinberg, 2011, pp. 630 & 633). However, as noted in the introduction, determining what exactly constitutes culture (as well as a self) can be slippery. Early Intercultural Communication scholars initially defined culture primarily by national and linguistic markers. As research advanced, definitions of culture have drawn from Simmel's work and broadened toward the concept of

ingroups and outgroups, defined as other people with whom one shares, or does not

share, "some attribute that contributes to one's positive social identity" (Triandis,

Bontempo, & Villareal, 1988, p. 324). From this perspective, every person is a

member of multiple cultures simultaneously, so that every individual holds numerous

corresponding cultural identities. Yep (2004) characterizes cultural identities as

socially constructed, constantly changing, nonsummative, multilayered, overlapping,

and sometimes conflicting with one another. For Collier (2005), "Cultural

identifications are shared locations and orientations evidenced in" virtually all

communication forms and acts (p. 237). Cultural identities are formed in interaction

with others both within and outside a particular group

> when a pattern of conduct across individuals demonstrates membership in a
> group or groups… [F]rom the perspective of these individuals, these diverse
> cultural identifications differ in salience[, scope, and intensity] across
> situational contexts, and also vary over time[, space, relationships,] and
> interactions… [They] are formed through processes of avowal (self views) and
> ascription (views communicated by others)… and have both content and
> relational aspects. (p. 239)

Collier also notes that many of the factors that influence cultural identifications are not

freely chosen, for example, physical features, gender, age, ethnic and class

background. Kraus, Piff, and Keltner (2011) include social class as a cultural identity

in their research.

Social identity theory posits that individuals form their identities through their

sense of belonging to different social categories, which in turn influence their

interactions with members of those and other social categories. Applying social

identity theory to interethnic communication, Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993)

developed a communication theory of identity, concluding that "identity is inherently

a communication process (p. 161)… Identities are enacted in social interaction

through communication… Not all messages are about identity, but identity is part of

all messages" (p. 167). In a later articulation of this theory, Hecht, Warren, Young,

and Krieger (2005) state:

> Identity is formed and reformed by categorization through interaction...
> Specific identities entail specific expectations, and these expectations influence
> a person's communication. Conversely, the ascriptions and categorizations
> that are communicated to a person also shape his or her identity. Hence,
> identity is internalized from, as well as externalized to, social interaction
> through expectations attached to identities and other social categories. (p. 262)

They locate individual identity in four layers, personal, enacted, relational, and

communal, which can be described separately and are "sometimes contradictory, but

always interpenetrated, [and] cannot exist in isolation from each other" (p. 262). As

we communicate who we are, we continually adjust and refine our sense of self in one

or more of these layers through the communication we receive from others, while

others adjust and refine their identities based on our communication to them, always in

the larger contexts of society.

Collier (2005) points out that cultural identities also affect our interactions with

larger social institutions and structures through communication. "Communication is

the means through which individuals and groups define themselves, relate to each

other, and struggle over issues of status and power. Individuals as members of groups

and organizations discursively negotiate their relationships and their identifications"

(p. 253). Yagi and Kleinberg (2011) agree that "identity construction is inextricably

enmeshed with the power dynamics of cross-cultural relations" (p. 633). According to

Gorski (2008), "Culture and identity may affect personal interactions, but more importantly, they affect one's access to power" (p. 522) and Collier (2005) expands on the implications of power differences in saying that

> the negotiation process is characterized by hierarchy… I now question presumptions of equal agency… Negotiating mutually appropriate and effective conduct occurs in a larger context of historical inequality and structural constraints, and the risk of experiencing negative consequences is higher for members of historically marginalized groups. (pp. 241-242)

To summarize the ICC concepts used in this research, first, spoken and behavioral communication are understood as means of identity creation, redefinition, and expression. Every person has multiple cultural relationships as an insider and an outsider of varying degrees and impacts, with corresponding multiple aspects of identity. The importance, the salience and intensity, of these identities vary in different social contexts and interactions. Lastly, our cultural identities both reflect and reproduce the social hierarchies we inhabit.

Identities in Adult Education.

Adult education considers identity primarily in terms of teacher and student, and the ways in which students' responses in an educational setting may be affected by their cultural backgrounds. The identities of teachers and students constitute critical elements of the learning community in the classroom. The capacity of teachers to develop self-awareness and reflectivity is a common theme in literature by teachers and about teacher training (Burge & Haughey, 2001). Urging teachers to value and develop these capacities in his classic, *The Courage to Teach* (1998), Palmer writes about his basic premise in the book:

> Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this "I" who teaches–without which I have no sense of the "Thou" who learns... *good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*. (p. 10, emphasis in the original)

Palmer goes on to define identity as the "evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self… a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am" (p. 13).

Cultural aspects of identity are generally the less ethereal ones, more tangibly rooted in physical characteristics and behaviors as categorized by one's surrounding society. Kirkup (2001) argues that even in online classes, the identity we present is based on our bodies and their characteristics, history, and location. How an instructor chooses to reveal and represent her or his identities and the authenticity of that self-presentation affect the quality of the learning environment and the degree to which students engage in the learning process. "In order for teachers to be culturally attuned to the identities of their students, they should be aware of their own identities, as well as how those identities may be divergent from the identities of their students" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011, p. 73). While the ratios of predominantly white teaching faculty in the U.S. do not match the proportions of nonwhite students in the educational system generally (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Scott & Ford, 2011), instructors who visibly belong to nondominant groups often face different valuations and expectations than do "normal" teachers (Jackson & Crawley, 2003). Those from less-visible nondominant backgrounds also face obstacles. For example, teaching has historically been a path of upward mobility for students from working and lower class backgrounds (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Van de Poel-Knottnerus &

Knottnerus, 2005), and Wilson (2006) describes the identity conflicts and coping

mechanisms of working-class academics who often feel marginalized by their

previous childhood as well as newly acquired academic social networks. Bourdieu

and Passeron (1977) suggest that in some situations the teacher's social position is

marginal, in the sense of the Chicago School's marginal man, someone with an

unsettled identity who does not fit in the mainstream culture around them.

White and Lowenthal (2010) describe an academic identity that derives from

the distinctive language community of academia, often conflicts with other cultural

identities for students from nondominant backgrounds, and which students must

acquire to successfully navigate through the educational system. The degree of

success a student can attain, especially in college, correlates directly with his or her

mastery of that language and the cultural ways of relating within the academy. In this

view instructors, by definition, have developed strong academic identities. In their

review of recently emerging research on teaching as a professional identity, Beijaard,

Meijer, and Verloop (2004) found that, although definitions of teacher identity varied

among the studies, teacher identity is consistently:

- viewed as a process with future as well as current implications
- seen in both the individual and the larger community context
- composed of interrelated sub-identities, not all explicitly relate to teaching
- reliant on the agency and activity of the teacher in communicating their identity

"Professional identity is not something teachers have, but something they use in order

to make sense of themselves as teachers" (Beijaard et al., p. 123). In sum, along with

their cultural identities, instructors carry an academic identity as college graduates and

a professional identity as teachers into all their pedagogic interactions, based on the dominant culture in which they were educated.

Education literature has much to say about the importance of student identity. For example: "Identity is the base from which learners' engagement with content, as well as communication with others, begins" (Tomei, Beaufait, & Lavin, 2011, p. 462). "Learning involves the whole person… a relation to social communities… becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person… To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities" (Lave & Wenger, in White & Lowenthal, 2010, p. 283). As Freire (1970), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Ogbu (1978), Paige (2007), and other critical theorists point out, one of the primary purposes of education is to instill particular types of identity that elevate and perpetuate the dominant culture.

School is a primary location of identity development for younger students, where socioeconomic status strongly influences student tracking and placement in developmental classes. Poorer students, who are disproportionately nonwhite, are more often tracked and placed in lower achievement categories (e.g. Ansalone, 2003; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Simmons, Lewis & Larson, 2008). For those who make it as far as college, negative associations with social identities related to race, class, gender, and so on collide with the academic identity and contribute to the lower retention and graduation rates that are so common among minorities (Lawrenson, 2008) and students from poor and working class backgrounds (Linkon, 1999; Macauley, 2006). Palmer (1998) contends that students, especially as young people,

are all marginalized in our society, not least by the power differences between teachers
and students that discourage interdependence and community.

One last point about identity in education is that the intrinsic nature of
learning can challenge identities for both students and teachers. Our personal and
social self-definitions include our ideas and beliefs about the world, so that any
information that contradicts our worldview is easily felt as a threat to related identities
(Gal & Rucker, 2010). Since education is largely about incorporating new
information into our existing frameworks of knowledge, which may require
modification during the process, learning often disturbs previously held notions about
the world and ourselves. In this respect, teaching is as much about being self-
reflective and helping students increase self-knowledge as it is dispensing information
and skills. For example, Buchanan (2011) describes theory and teaching practices that
work to balance the creation of a safe environment for self-expression while
challenging student racial identities. Addressing our human resistance to change and
fears of difference, Palmer says, "Otherness, taken seriously, always invites
transformation, calling us not only to new facts and values but also to new ways of
living our lives–and that is the most daunting threat of all" (1998, p. 38), for teachers
as well as students.

Summarizing identity in Adult Education, teaching and learning are deeply
human interactions grounded in the identities of the teachers and the students. A
significant element in academic success involves the adoption of an academic identity
that closely resembles middle-class white Euro-American values. For teachers, their

vocation adds more layers to existing personal and cultural identities. For students, school is a primary location of identity development for good or ill in its perpetuation of dominant culture values, ways of knowing, and ways of being. For both teachers and students, the learning process often perturbs our settled sense of self and thus challenges various aspects of our identities.

Identities in Anthropology.

As a discipline that consciously tries to stand apart from any one cultural frame of reference, cultural anthropology currently sees both culture and identity as constructed categories that reflect particular interests and eras, with indistinct and permeable boundaries between individual selves and social structures. The vagaries of how to delineate a "culture," as distinct from other "cultures" as well as inclusive or exclusive of the personal idiosyncrasies of its members, make "cultural identity" a difficult concept to conclusively define.

Articulating the disturbance this fluid approach to boundaried categories presented to foundational anthropological approaches, Abu-Lughod argues in *Writing Against Culture* (1991) that self is always a construction, and that anthropologists tend to use culture to construct an Other against which to define themselves. Such constructions about the anthropologist as (purportedly) objective and the subjective cultures and selves under scrutiny mask the positionality of the researcher, reproduce existing hegemonies, and mute the possibilities for exploring alternative perspectives. As Gledhill (1998) notes, the academy in general and Anthropology in particular have a history of serving those in power. Essentializing a culture as a distinctive group with

clear boundaries may facilitate categorization, but it also reduces people in the group

to something less complex than ourselves, ultimately defeating the goal of

anthropology, which is to understand humans.

Apart from critical theoretical objections, modern technology and marketing

have also forced substantial reconsideration of how culture and identity can be

defined. In his introduction to *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) Clifford writes,

"Twentieth century identities no longer presume continuous culture or traditions" (p.

14). Increasingly cheap and rapid communication and travel after WWII brought

many previously isolated communities into regular international commerce and

challenged earlier traditional anthropological notions of culture, promoting research

about individual expressions within group similarities. In his 1995 review of

anthropological literature on migration and globalization, Kearney says,

> it is now difficult to bound a community as a 'cultural group'… As King notes,
> '[i]t's not just that, increasingly, many people have no roots; it's also that they
> have no soil. Culture is becoming increasingly deterritorialized.'… Awareness
> of growing dispersion, decentering, interpenetration, and general complexity of
> globalized and transnational communities is reflected in anthropology as a
> rising concern with identity. (pp. 556-557)

For example, Smith's (2006) seminal work on migrant communities in New York and

Mexico is based on the concept of social place versus physical space, where locations

are endowed with transplanted socio-cultural meanings and purposes, and personal

identities begin to detach from and then amalgamate originating cultures, national and

ethnic affiliations, and surrounding societies, apart from their geographic locations.

Another source of difficulty with definition is the modern philosophical

tendency to dissolve subjects such as individual selves into surrounding processes and

relationships. For example, "[i]n Latour a person is not a 'wholesale' human but rather is composed of bits and pieces in many successive layers" (Humphrey, 2008, p. 365). Humphrey proposes that, while "anthropologists have shown in different ways that the 'individual' deciding can be seen as not simply her or himself" (p. 364), the people anthropologists study do think, speak, and act in terms of themselves and others as singular agents. However one's sense of self may change in different contexts and over time, recognizing and negotiating boundaries between self and others is necessary to manage everyday life in any cultural milieu.

The haziness and multiplicities of definition about culture and identity open new areas for anthropologists to explore different referent conceptions of self and sociality. A few examples illustrate the range of theory and research. Chen (2009) contrasts an inclusive Taoist view, self as a manifestation of the underlying oneness of all and identities as limitlessly interpenetrable, with Buddhist and Hindu impermanence, Confucian hierarchy, and Western individualist traditions. Humphrey (2008) describes Mongolian Buddhist conceptions of self as "a daunting thicket of overlaid possibilities… Some… are relational and some are essentialist. Several are distributive and recognize personhood outside the physical body… [and] the resolution of these 'ways' into a distinct subject is not a constant preoccupation" (p. 359). Leve (2011) examines the ways in which some Tibetan Buddhists, who believe self and identity to be illusion, still manage to participate in identity politics based on Western neoliberal values of personhood and human rights. Walkerdine (2006) explores the anxiety and pain that result in moving from one identity to another,

whether grounded in class or vocation, and some of the losses that obtain from the neoliberal conception of identity as an autonomous, self-created, transportable, marketable product by and for consumption. Demerath, Lynch, and Davidson (2008) confirm and expand on previous research showing U.S. high school students who are actively acquiring this marketable identity in schools that reproduce class, gender, and racial advantages.

To summarize conceptions of identity in Anthropology, culture, identity, and the distinctions between them are all currently contested areas. Social identities are entwined with power inequities at personal and social levels. Schools reproduce existing social structures through identity formation; school and its related hierarchies constitute the environment of identity negotiation in this study.

Conceptions of identity used in this research.

Boundaries between personal and social identities cannot be clearly drawn. There are different ways to view the self, yet all inherit and often reproduce the social hierarchies in which they develop. Identity formation, maintenance, and negotiation are bound up in communication processes. The learning environment is composed of the identities of teachers and learners, with a distinct academic identity built upon the accepted behaviors and communication styles of the educational community. The primary focus of education, incorporating new knowledge and maintaining the social order, challenges students' identities, and occasionally teachers' identities as well.

Linkages between Empathy and Identity

Social identities affect with whom and how well one can empathize, and

empathy can affect the groups and values with which one identifies. Cornel West

notes (in Schneider, 2005), "empathy… can act as a counter to the logic of identity

because empathy requires [one] to adopt an attitude that is other-centered rather than

self-centered, an attitude that demands an attention to difference without distancing"

(pp. 206-207). Empathy can also lead to introspection, reflecting on one's self in the

world (Gair, 2011). With the emphasis in education on empathy, it may be that

empathic expression is a way for teachers to validate their own positive self-image.

Perhaps, also, the challenges which learning presents to student identities explain in

part why teacher empathy is so crucial in the learning process.

The interaction between empathy and identity can be analogized as a

kaleidoscope, in which the compositional bits—empathic responses and social

identities—are continuously multiplied and reconfigured in an endless variety of

displays. Each person's cultural identities condition the awareness of physiological

and emotional responses, perceptions and interpretations, the cognitive processing and

moral judgments about them, all constantly reflecting back on one another to result in

decisions and actions. Whether and how one responds to another empathetically is the

constantly changing fallout of one's social identities reacting in the vagaries of each

relationship, situation, and interaction.

In the classroom, where the social identities and empathic reactions of both

teachers and students constitute the foundation of the learning environment, identity is

inseparable from the communication of empathy. This study explores how instructors

experience and communicate empathy in the context of differing social identities.

Method

The research question is, "How do instructors experience and talk about their communication of empathy in the context of different cultural identities in the classroom?" The objective of this qualitative research is to explore and describe through ethnographic methods instructors' experiences and communication of empathy in their classroom teaching with students of various social identities (e.g. class, ethnicity, gender, race). By providing these examples, the study may promote thoughtful awareness of how empathic interactions play out across cultural differences in instructional environments and to contribute new qualitative knowledge to educational research and practice. This section explains the following topics: the research design, participants and interviews, data analysis, researcher positionality and other potential limitations.

Research Design Overview

The theoretical bases for this study are interpretive, that is, people construct different social realities, as in Collier (2005), Kirmayer (2008), and Yagi and Kleinberg (2011); phenomenological, in that the meanings people create are derived from their entire experience, as in González et al. (2005), and Geiser (2011); and critical, holding that current injustices have historic roots and should be rectified, as in Dace and McPhail (2002), Xing, Li, Roper, and Shaw (2007), and Abu-Lughod (1991). As a method, ethnography has several advantages for addressing questions of how something can be described. In this study, the cultural identities of the participants matter, their environment and its complexity matters, and the purpose here

is to describe a variety of meanings and interpretations, rather than to prove a hypothesis. All of these considerations make ethnography the most appropriate method of investigation (Keyton, 2010). Ethnography in particular deliberately reflects on identity and culture and is itself a form of intercultural communication (Agar, 2008). For example, Clifford (1991) says "ethnography encounters others in relation to itself, while seeing itself as other… It has become clear that every version of an 'other,' wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self'" (p. 23), and according to Alexander (2004), "ethnography is both a process and a product of describing culture" (p. 330).

Ethnography allows for multiple voices and nuanced responses, where a dominant or majority view might otherwise drown them out using other methods. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) use ethnographic description to reveal the "value of lived experience by marginalized groups" (p. 70), as do González et al. (2005). Beijaard et al. (2004) write, "it is important to benefit from teachers' perceptions of aspects of their professional identity, such as the subject they teach, their relationship with students, and interactions with colleagues" (p. 115). Ethnographic analysis allows these thoughts to be drawn out and explored. Lastly, as Abu-Lughod (1991) writes, specific details in context are important in understanding the meanings that people construct. Particularity also counteracts our human tendency to essentialize and homogenize groups of people, in this case, teachers and students.

Researcher Positionality

As Abu-Lughod (1991) points out, the interpretive nature of ethnography

makes the positionality of the researcher as relevant to the results as the participants' input. Stier (2010) argues that the researcher is as deeply embedded in a culture as any participants and so should declare their starting assumptions and goals "more actively and systematically" (p. 24). Kouritzin (2002) observes that as soon as the researcher begins writing, s/he is encoding his or her own interpretation of persons and events, so that "observation reveals as much or more about the observer as it does about the observed." Mayer (2005) examines how whiteness specifically is revealed in ethnography, especially by the absence of reflection on its effects. The researcher in this study is a single, native English-speaking, white female of northern European extraction who was raised in lower- and middle-class white communities with upper-middle class extended family, turned sixty during the study, and has lived most of her life in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. In these respects she carries and represents dominant cultural values, for example, the benefits of a "good" education, "proper" English, and, unwillingly, the normality and invisibility of whiteness (McIntosh, 1988; Amos, 2010). Family and personality issues have also contributed to her lifelong self-image as an outsider who tends to identify with the least powerful actors in any given situation. This background and experience are reflected in the choice of method, research question, and data of this study.

Participants and Interviews

The study was targeted to experienced college instructors from a variety of personal and academic backgrounds who had at least three years of experience teaching secondary- to adult-level students in a classroom setting. The study was

restricted to veteran teachers with the assumption that they have spent enough time in the classroom to have established their management system and developed their teaching persona (Lang, 2008), so that they can focus more on students and their interactions with students. Instructors from as many different disciplines as possible were intentionally recruited to reduce the possibility of a disciplinary bias toward the study topic. The researcher also invited participants from as wide a variety of ethnic, racial, and gender groups as possible, so that most participants represent at least one nondominant social group. There were four female and five male participants, representing an age range from early thirties to late sixties, and working-, lower-middle-, middle-, and upper-middle class backgrounds. For Institutional Review Board (IRB) and practical purposes, the invitees were all OSU instructors known to the researcher or suggested in conversation by other OSU students and staff. The interview questions (shown in the Appendix) were designed to explore the instructors' social identities, their students' social identities, the instructor's definition of empathy, and how s/he sees her/himself communicating empathy to students in the classroom.

IRB approval for the study was received in December, 2011, after which invitations were issued. A total of nine instructors from various OSU departments, teaching a range of classes from undergraduate Baccalaureate core requirements[1] (Bacc core) to Difference, Power, and Discrimination courses[2] to graduate-level disciplinary specialties, consented to participate in the study. Some instructors teach courses that address social identity issues directly, others indirectly, some not at all.

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1. See Burns, 2007, for a discussion of the OSU Bacc core.
2. See Gross & Nishihara, 2007, for more about OSU's DPD model.

Observations and interviews were conducted from January through April, 2012. The researcher observed one class session taught by each participant to establish a common context for discussion. The interview questions were provided to each participant prior to the interview. Interviews were semi-structured, using the questions as starting points for instructors to talk about their thoughts and experiences, and lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were audio-recorded, with some written notes by the researcher, and then transcribed word for word except for deletion of identifying details. Each participant then received a copy of his or her transcript to review for any changes or corrections. To protect participant confidentiality, codes were assigned to the transcripts, and a random number to each of the participants. Because OSU is demographically homogenous to the degree that some participants could be easily recognized even from a brief sketch, individuals are not described or introduced in the results. All references to social identity categories (gender, ethnicity, race, class, etc.) are omitted or generalized wherever it was necessary to mention (for example, nondominant or minority), and the minimum of other identifiers is used. Departments and courses are also not mentioned or generalized to the college level or higher (for example, technical). Finally, all participants had opportunity to review the draft Results chapter and make any changes they felt might compromise their identity.

Data Analysis

The nine interview transcripts, 176 1.5-spaced pages, were analyzed using ethnographic methods of open data coding (Amos, 2010; Yan & Horowitz, 2008), with attention to the four primary concepts behind the research question: instructor

identity, student identity, empathy, and communication. The researcher accepted the

participants' self-identifications of empathic moments and processes, as well as noting

other ways in which they try to communicate some shared comprehension of another's

feelings or experience. Throughout this process, recurrent phrases and themes were

noted, and then used iteratively during the rest of the analysis to classify and sort the

data (Alexander, 2004; Bluedorn, 1998). Transcripts were read through six times

during this part of the analysis, once for points of interest and once for each concept,

when areas related to a concept were highlighted in a specific color, then again while

listening to the recorded interviews to catch any errors or additional vocal emphases.

The highlighted phrases were then copied into an Excel™ spreadsheet and labeled as

data points according to which concept(s) they conveyed. Separate worksheets were

then created for each of the four concepts, and the data phrases copied into their

relevant worksheet(s). Stepping back from the data when this sorting was completed,

the recurrent phrases and ideas were listed in a table with each participant's position or

response recorded, to visually recognize ranges, common responses, and relationships,

and to check that all the data which the researcher found relevant was represented.

These data groups were then analyzed in relation to the purpose of the research and

aggregated by their relevance to that purpose, the previous organization of the paper,

and one another (Orbe & Drummond, 2009). Five themes were developed to

encompass all the phrases and ideas related to the research question. The researcher's

notes on observations were then reviewed to look for material related to the themes,

presented in detail in the next chapter.

Research Results

This chapter presents the themes and selected data to answer the research question, "How do instructors experience and talk about their communication of empathy with respect to different cultural identities in the classroom?" The analysis and data from participant responses are organized by five major themes for presentation here: definitions of empathy, empathy as overt communication, empathy and identity as mutual engagement, empathy as identity expression, and the constraints and drawbacks to empathy.

The participants in this research provided a wealth of thoughtful responses. The interpretive nature of ethnographic analysis becomes most apparent here in the selection and arrangement of the data points, the sentences and phrases distilled from their responses. Descriptions in some themes are enhanced by instances that were noted during the researcher's classroom observations. While quotation marks are used to differentiate the participants' words and ideas from the researcher's, their responses have been edited to fit the flow of the theme, dropping repetitions, audible fillers, and occasionally tangential remarks and ideas. Some quotations comprise a digest of thoughts that took several minutes to talk through during the interview. Participants' ideas frequently echoed and overlapped one another, so that one quotation often represents responses from other participants as well, and similar quotations suggest a range of ideas more than broad difference in their thoughts on a given theme. Numerous data points apply to more than one theme. Decisions about which data to put under a given theme involved developing a flow of ideas within themes, trying not

to repeat a particular piece of data across themes, and ultimately trusting that readers will remember and refer back to those things that they find meaningful to make their own connections and interpretations.

Definitions of Empathy

Participants tendered straightforward definitions of empathy in keeping with common concepts of intention. The first question about empathy in the interviews asked participants to define their concept of empathy in the context of teaching. As could be reasonably predicted, these university instructors initially spoke in terms of cognitive effort and invoked commonly accepted definitions of perspective-taking and respecting students as people in an ongoing relationship. Two people (7 and 8[1]) spoke generally about directing one's own awareness to the feelings and perspectives of others by listening, acting respectfully, and taking their interests into account. Participants 1 and 6 made a similar point through the analogy of walking in another person's shoes, noting that this meant "not necessarily really understanding where the other person is coming from because you have that same experience, but trying to understand where they're coming from. It's a process that you build on" (6). The approach to empathy here also begins as a matter of perspective-taking in an ongoing association. One person focused on intentions as they are expressed through one's actions and physical being.

> Empathy is the opposite of apathy. And what I do is more important than what I say—is the connection there? Is the emotional honesty there? Is there a kind of ethic of care? You have a kind of charisma about you, a kind of energy about you. (3)

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1. Participants were assigned random numbers to help maintain confidentiality.

In this case, empathy extends beyond internal feelings and intentions to how a person carries her- or himself and comes across to others.

The remaining participants focused their definitions of empathy on its occurrence in the classroom, where empathy begins in the instructor's connection with the students, "how I identify with my students and how I, as a teacher, take into account their situations and their feelings and where they are with their careers and their lives and so on. Not so much being completely detached" (5). This predisposition of the instructor to assume a personal connection with students wove through conceptions of empathy in all the interviews. Instructors can also identify with students by taking the students' perspective on the course itself. "Empathy for me means truly trying to think about the assignments and the readings for the course from the perspective of my students, and to structure assignments in [that same] way" (4). Both the general and the course-specific approaches involve a mindset on the instructor's part that places students at the center of the educational purpose. Another facet of student-centered empathy relates to why and where an instructor locates power in relationship to students. One participant defined empathy as

> engaging in the humanity of the people who are in front of you, and not being dismissive of their experiences and their thoughts. Acknowledging that they are humans and they are as powerful, and in my view more powerful than me, because I work for them. Part of empathy has to be, what do the students want from the class? (2)

In this definition, the academic roles of instructor and student are subordinate to the relationships between people of equal value, and the purpose of an instructor's higher level of knowledge is to serve the needs of the students. As participants spoke

more about what empathy means and how it can be expressed or inhibited, their ideas and examples quickly broadened to encompass emotional, social, and physical layers of being and doing, which comprise the four remaining themes of the analysis.

Empathy as Overt Communication

A significant portion of the research data revolved around specific actions that instructors use to communicate empathy and nurture an environment that promotes empathic relationships of all kinds. This section explores the theme of participants' external expressions and enactments of empathy in seven subsections: empathy by design, empathy in content and delivery, empathy as a teaching strategy, empathy in grading issues, empathy in deliberate nonverbal communication, empathy in stories, humor, and language, and empathy and emotion in the classroom.

Empathy by design.

Several participants described ways in which they see themselves incorporating empathy into their course design, long before classes begin. "The deliberate part would be in the way that courses are structured, in the way that students are given as much agency as possible in an institutional setting" (8). In one of the advanced courses that were observed, the high degree of student agency extended to students creating and executing the lesson plan for that day, delivering most of the lecture portion, and directing the discussions. In other courses, students had great latitude in selecting topics or choosing the form of their projects. Instructors of Baccalaureate Core (Bacc core) classes may have less room to promote student agency, but they also try to take the students' point of view when planning their

courses.

> I always think of empathy at the level of curriculum; you see the curriculum as a negotiation with your students. One of the issues of empathy for me is truly taking workload seriously. I also think of empathy as being something that gets enacted at the level of the structure of the assignments. And I'm not just going to teach the research that I think is the coolest research or the most sophisticated research. I'm going to have all of my decision-making focused around what the students in the class will experience as most helpful. (4)

As well as calculating what is reasonable given their own course load, an instructor can take the students' course loads into account and consider the practical implications of the assignments for students: how many, when due, how graded, how much and what kind of work is required for each.

Another approach to incorporating empathy with students into course design is to involve them in the decision-making processes and to structure the class around student participation.

> I try to set up an atmosphere where the students feel like they have the power to challenge, the power to engage, to go where they think they need to go. I want them to be powerful. I want them to have a voice in the rules, I want them to have a voice in the procedures, I want them to have a voice in what we will learn and how we will learn it. It's not necessarily that I'm trying to empower anybody, because that suggests that I have power to give out, but perhaps just setting up a space for them to be able to use the power that they already have. (2)

While the instructor begins with particular content and a lesson plan in mind, the class may divert along the way as students ask questions, discuss, and pursue tangents that come up. Rather than interpret these moments as interruptions, some participants plan for them as part of student-directed learning, and may even prompt students with questions or use presentation styles that make those diversions more likely to happen. For example, in one of the classes observed, the instructor passed a student question

back to the class for discussion with the comment that they were as capable of coming up with a good answer as the instructor.

As they prepare for student interactions in the classroom, participants recognize that students have widely varying degrees of comfort with verbal involvement in a group setting. "During the first week of class I let the students know that if you aren't speaking, I'm not making any assumptions about your commitment" (4). For many reasons, students engage to different degrees and in different ways that are not necessarily perceptible to the instructor. Another participant plans ahead for empathic interaction during office hours when students are not doing well.

> We have the policy that when someone comes in and they're irate or having a bad time, we make sure we find out something about them before they leave that's interesting. They may be failing the course, but there's something they're good at, there's something they excel at, they're excited about, and then they start to associate that feeling of enjoying something with this course too. (1)

In this case, connecting with students is not left to chance especially when things are not going well for them in the course.

Participants plan the content and the timing of certain kinds of communication to convey care and generate positive responses. This kind of planning may involve adjusting one's own behaviors to be consistent with intent.

> A really wise friend of mine once said, 'Anything important, any activity that you want to be important throughout your class, has to happen on the first day of class.' If you say, 'I really care what you think and I want this to be a classroom where you talk,' and then you spend the whole first day talking, they've already figured it out. (4)

The instructor sets the tone of the class through actions that back up the verbal message—student input matters in this class. Instructors demonstrate empathy on

multiple levels when they plan a course of action to engage students before the first

class begins.

Empathy in content and delivery.

The second aspect of overt communication covered here is the planning of

what takes place during the class. Some participants see themselves communicating

empathy through the course content they choose as well as the methods they use to

deliver content. In some classes, the nature of the material alone requires students to

see themselves in different situations, to imagine themselves in other people's shoes.

> That empathy that I'm putting out there and the facts that I'm giving the
> students help them to be less judgmental. It's the way in which I teach the
> facts that I think cultivates empathy, to say, this is what life looks like when
> you're poor and this is what life looks like when you're rich, and one would
> hope that if you look at these two things, you would develop empathy. (6)

Several assignments in this course require students to process information about

different social groups and then reflect on how their own lives would be affected if

they belonged to those groups, and similar material was covered during the lecture

observed. However, promoting empathy need not be the purpose of the course for

content to call forth some kind of understanding of others with a different experience.

> It helps to bring home the way in which we're all trapped in culture and in our
> own experience, and how difficult it is for all of us to get outside that and
> realize that there are people living in entirely different ways. We talk about
> tolerance or pluralism–you can't even begin to get there until you imagine that.
> Two things go into empathy, I think, realizing that this person, despite
> the surface, is much like you, and realizing that because of culture or language,
> an apparently similar person actually has quite different things going on inside,
> different assumptions. People have amazingly different views of very
> fundamental things, and you can't tell that by looking at them. (7)

Whether the topic at hand is in the humanities or a technical field, instructors can open

up this kind of discussion if they so choose simply by drawing out the differences in student background and experiences. Instructors in three of the classes that were observed, both Bacc core and advanced, asked students outright to relate stories or aspects of their lives to the content under discussion, asking for ways in which students' experiences might be unique or offer a new perspective for other students to consider.

Some lecturers play to students' emotional responses as a device to involve them empathically in the content. "We plot [appeals to emotion] ahead of time. There are notes in this lecture that at this point I have to have a caring tone, at this point, a tough tone" (1). This instructor rehearses the lectures with another instructor, adjusting the tone as well as the content to maximize the emotional impact on students. Observing this class was engaging and enjoyable for the researcher, and many of the students appeared to be following the lecture as well, laughing, nodding, or frowning in tune with the delivery. These participants use their course content to show students how other people experience the world, and they manage their lecture and discussion times to encourage different students to express their own experiences.

Empathy as a teaching strategy.

For the third aspect of overt communication, in a slightly different twist from using content to convey empathy generally, the analysis in this section focuses on the results that describe participants' employment of empathy as a tool for teaching certain material, and as a means to reduce power distance between students and themselves.

Empathy as a pedagogic tool.

Several participants talked about using empathy to relate a specific skill or concept. In some disciplines, empathy is a formally stated outcome and one of the primary standpoints and skill sets that the course/ program/ discipline is designed to instill. Since students have chosen that kind of career path, participants who teach these kinds of courses often assume that students come in with some level of emotional empathy and seek to develop its expression.

> I think we can facilitate greater empathy, not to suggest that empathy isn't there to begin with—it might be—but how do we facilitate being able to express that empathy? What are we doing in the classroom to model and facilitate the construction of empathy? (2)

Part of the instructor's job in these courses is to help students develop an existing trait as part of their training. However, empathy need not be an explicit outcome for an instructor to approach the course and their teaching as an exercise in empathy. "Basically I'm interested in engaging them and drawing them out, and so the whole class in a way is empathy. A lot of my teaching is more about the process, about bringing people to consciousness or getting them to participate" (7). The instructor's expression of empathy is a strategy to draw students into connection with the instructor, their peers, and/or the content.

In some cases, participants want to invoke empathy obliquely to communicate more subtle aspects of the course material or the subject. For example, in order to engage a wider range of students in the subject, one participant tells stories to humanize historic figures with different backgrounds, personalities, and problems:

In other disciplines, empathy is a pedagogic tool used to advance other aims. We want to get students to identify with our foundational white guys from Europe, because if that's the only identity students have for them, it's very exclusionary—and they were so much more. We play up their more human aspects so students can see that there are different paths you can take to succeed. And we want students to be able to take someone else's side so they can see their standpoint. (1)

Rather than showcase one path to success in a monolithic community, the instructor provides students with diverse role models they can imagine themselves following, along with opportunities to develop the intellectual skills that come through analyzing different positions. In both the above cases, empathic skills as a student outcome and empathy as a means to deliver specific concepts, participants see their communication of empathy as essential to their objectives for the course.

Empathy as an equalizer.

Several participants expressed the view that structural power inequalities between themselves and students pose a hindrance to building connections with them as people. These instructors talked about building empathy with students as a strategy to reduce that power distance. "What I try to portray to a class or a group of people or a lecture is that I'm one of them. I don't see myself as being separate from them in this whole exercise" (9). The differing roles of student and teacher exist in dialectic interdependency, not oppositional isolation, and the common humanity of student and teacher supersedes their unequal positions. Even when exercising the power of their role, instructors can be respectful of their students as people. "I want the students to feel safe. Occasionally you have to be in conflict and you have to tell somebody they're misbehaving or they're wrong, but you don't have to put them down" (7).

Some participants spoke about specific results they wanted to accomplish by connecting as equals at the human level, such as nurturing empathy in students, promoting a positive emotional atmosphere, and provoking a response from students.

> I want to better relate to the students. I don't so much want to be the Professor, I want to be a fellow human being, and then maybe use my teacher skills to help them better understand what it's like to be the underdog. (6)

Building the human connection smoothes the way for students to accept new information.

> Another intention participants expressed about being more approachable was that of encouraging students to make contact and especially to ask the instruction team for help.

> We want everyone to come and talk to us. The content we know. The "how to get them to learn the content"? That part's the hard part. How do we get them in a place mentally that they are ready to learn? Most of what we do is counseling. (1)

Participants try to bridge the power gap by making themselves available as people who listen to what students care about most, especially in their moments of stress.

> Where student empathy is a desired outcome of the course or program, participants also hope to influence how their students view and manage power. "We don't want them to become authoritarian any more than we want to be authoritarian ourselves" (8). In these situations, instructors model the attitudes and behaviors they want students to adopt. Other participants talked about trust as foundational to their attitude toward students.

> What is important for me, the starting point is going to be, that I'm going to trust the students. I trust them that they want to engage in this project. I want students to engage in the class, but if they're not engaging, I don't want to

assume that it's because they're not paying attention—there could be a lot of things that mediate that kind of behavior. (2)

By accepting students as people beyond their role as classroom learners, and by presenting themselves as people beyond their teaching role, participants hope to draw students into the kinds of human relationships that make their teaching more effective.

Empathy in grading issues.

The fourth subsection of analysis for overt communication is about grading. Sitting in judgment on students is one of the least enjoyable tasks for many teachers, and not all participants brought up issues around grading in their interviews. Those who did mention it talked about their attempt to communicate empathy with students during the process, beginning with their acknowledgement that their students differ widely in background and ability.

Participants accepted the fact that students arrive with a wide variety of different capabilities, needs, and desires as part of and outside their role as content learners. Most traditionally-aged college students are at a critical phase of social development during this period of their lives, and participants noted that course work is only one of several priorities that students must juggle (1). Participants also acknowledged the wide range of academic aptitude and preparedness among their students, and the increased financial pressures faced by many students. "There are some assumptions that I made in the past about what represents student commitment and seriousness as a student that, fifteen years ago I would have been judgmental about, and now I'm just not. Their lives are too hard" (4). Participants manage their own expectations of student performance based on the understanding that students

have lives outside their classes, just as they do, and their flexible approaches to grading reflects this understanding. In some cases, instructors have the students grade their own work, or sit down with them and talk about what grade the student should receive, so that the student's perspective is included in their final assessment.

As an example of how they try to take into account where students are coming from, participants took two different approaches to communicating empathy with respect to flexibility on assignment due dates. Two participants in smaller, more advanced classes are willing to negotiate assignments with students. "I see my job as being willing to empathize, and allowing them to be powerful enough to say, 'I couldn't get this done and here's why'" (2). For these instructors, the chief benefit for the student comes through the doing of the assignment, and if the student is not finished, completion takes precedence over a due date. Alternatively, an instructor of a large Bacc core class empathizes with the student's situation from the standpoint that many students need help learning how to be more responsible. Assignments are due at regular intervals throughout the term, and on the first day of class all the assignments are made available to students with their deadlines emphasized.

> Students get mad at me when I don't accept late work, and I don't care. They email me the day after something is due about some emergency that happened the day it was due. 'I thought I'd have time to do it,' that's what they always say, and I say, 'I understand that, but you didn't, did you? And now you know why you shouldn't assume that those things are going to work out for you. I understand what you're saying, and I'm sorry that happened to you, but consider this a life lesson that you really should do your assignments earlier than the day that they're due.' (6)

Here the instructor identifies the latent cause of the students' failure and stresses the consequences of preparation versus procrastination. Although their policies on late

assignments are opposite, both strategies emanate from the instructor's empathetic view of the situation from the student's point of view.

Empathy in deliberate nonverbal communication.

The fifth area of analysis of overt communication described participants' use of nonverbal forms of communication. Some of the data point to thoughtful decisions on the part of participants in their use of nonverbal communication channels to create a more comfortable and inclusive classroom atmosphere. Participants have developed specific nonverbal habits to try to connect with students, position themselves as approachable, and signal their openness to questions and hesitations. Analysis of participants' nonverbal communication of empathy is organized by their choices in regard to personal appearance, movement in the classroom, and nonverbal cues that encourage student participation in the class.

Connecting through appearance.

Some participants mentioned their nonverbal communication via clothing and appearance, from their own preference for a consistently casual style (8, 9) to making various changes throughout the term to catch the attention of a wider variety of students (1). Two participants have chosen not to wear men's ties when teaching. "My clothing choices probably reflect my non-hierarchical approach to teaching. Never ever a tie. That would be sending a different message about what I expected the relationship to be between us" (8). As another participant noted, the tie is emblematic of higher rank in the social order, "one more power thing that seemed unnecessary, so that in the teaching context I just never wear a tie. And that's a power statement, of

not taking power too seriously" (7). For these participants (in the environment of a

West Coast state college), reifying the power differential is less important than

emphasizing common ground and building connections with students.

Conveying accessibility through movement.

In the larger classes that were observed (more than thirty students), most of the

instructors moved around the room while lecturing, leading discussions, and/or during

small group activities. They explained this in the interviews as an attempt to connect

with people. "I try to get out among the students and be less standoffish, and less of a

boundary between them and me" (5). In addition to verbally conveying to students

that they are human and accessible, participants reduce their physical distance from

students to reinforce the message. An instructor's circulation in the room also serves

to retain attention and draw more students into engagement in the class.

> Getting closer to people, to the people in the back row, walking back there,
> talking from the back of the room for a little while, moving around, asking
> questions, getting them into small groups to work on things, that's much more
> effective than this talking-head sort of thing. (9)

The underlying premise is that learning is something beyond the transfer of data from

brain to brain, that teaching and learning are more effective when grounded in positive

relationships between people. "Eye contact, smiling. It's just the way I want to be in

the world, and then it has inadvertent benefits with helping the students get

comfortable and learn something" (7).

Creating safety through nonverbal cues.

Managing student input is another area where participants actively try to

communicate empathy nonverbally. All of the participants use various verbal and

nonverbal methods to encourage students to ask questions, at the same time being

careful not to intimidate or embarrass people by putting them on the spot.

> Looking at people. They know when I look at them, and if answers aren't
> forthcoming, not being afraid to pick on people who, I think, wouldn't be too
> offended if I did. We need to be careful about that, because if you pick on
> people who are introverted, or just aren't comfortable, or don't like to be picked
> out, then that can backfire in a big way. (9)

When this instructor wanted more discussion from students, an unspoken prompt

through body language became verbal and direct in the absence of student response,

ending an extended silence by asking students for elaboration on their comments.

Nonverbal cues can work both ways in these kinds of interactions.

> By things like avoiding eye contact, they are telling me that 'I didn't do the
> reading and I don't want to be called on.' Conversely, when someone does
> look at you, sometimes it means that they do have something to say and they
> might be thinking that they need some sort of permission, and I do try to be
> sensitive to that as well. (8)

Silence can have many meanings, and how an instructor interprets student silence is as

indicative of the instructor's disposition as it is of the student's motivation.

> With students who seem unwilling to engage with the class, participants may

accept their lack of involvement and avoid calling them out directly, yet still try to

draw those students into the process.

> Some people don't want to be taken into account. And so you gradually have
> to acknowledge that in different ways and live with that, but you can keep
> extending this boundary between the people who feel engaged and/or talk, and
> the people who don't. So I'm always trying to nudge that out. (7)

Participants sometimes use nonverbal cues to make space in the class for student

contributions, waiting and then listening attentively when a student speaks, especially

when other students are dismissive. "Maybe that's role-modeling empathy. Even if

the other students are starting to talk, at least I'm not discounting what the student has

to say" (6).

One participant talked specifically about using physical cues to communicate

acceptance and respect.

> What I hope to do is not dismiss. There can be facial gestures and body
> language that are dismissive, especially if a person has said something that is
> kind of amiss. How do I respond to them nonverbally? I don't want to
> dismiss, so how do I then, without dismissing, ask for further reflection or
> prompt further reflection? (2)

In the same vein, participants consciously use movement and position to reinforce the

safety of their classroom as a place for students to ask questions freely.

> Sometimes a student will ask a question that, you can't believe they just asked
> that–you can hear the other students gasp. You always go and stand next to
> them and say, 'That is a really important question.' You physically get next to
> them, because they just put themselves out there on the line, and they're about
> to get ripped apart, and if I'm kind of embracing them, not hugging but
> physically next to them, and letting them know that's a good question and
> safely they can do that, it definitely defuses it in the rest of the class.
> Sometimes we have students who will get upset about something, so yes, the
> proximity. And also distancing myself when someone does something which
> is kind of off the task, or it's a wrong answer. (1)

In most classrooms the instructor, and by extension the instructor's physical presence

in the room, are the focal point of attention, through which he or she conveys

unspoken emotional messages as part of directing the verbal flow of information and

establishing classroom atmosphere.

Empathy in stories, humor, and language.

This sixth subsection about overt communication describes participants'

deliberate use of language. All the participants told stories during the interviews to

illustrate and elaborate their points, and some purposely communicate with narrative,

humor, and language in the classroom as pedagogic tools to build connections and to

engage students with content.

> There are some stories we do where you can hear people gasping together; it's
> a group emotion. That's what storytellers do, right? Link emotion to content,
> so that you can show a single picture, for example, and they could see that
> picture years later and that emotion returns, and the memory of what that was
> associated with. That's the ultimate lecture. (1)

This instructor intentionally uses stories to invoke affect in order to enhance the

learning process and to nurture a sense of group cohesion. Participants also use

narrative to connect with students. "I look back at my successes, a lot of it has to do

with stories. And humor. Humor breaks down barriers like nothing else" (3). For a

couple of participants of mostly dominant identities, self-deprecating humor is a good

way to minimize the power distance. All the participants who mentioned humor try to

use it as a form of empathic communication.

> Jokes are actually a good way to show empathy. Humor is always a little
> dangerous, you have to be careful, but I think as I've gotten older I've learned
> how to do that better and make sure it's a really inclusive humor, and people
> feel safe. (7)

Using humor to create a positive atmosphere for everyone requires some skill in

empathy and cultural awareness.

> Using inclusive language successfully in the learning environment can also be

subtle and demanding, far beyond simply injecting or avoiding trigger words.

> The more you can make the language of the class your own language but also
> the language of the students—take everyone into account—the more
> everybody gets activated to participate, and people who were quiet before will
> start sitting up and wanting to intervene, because it's now a language that they
> can contribute to. It's very easy for men to talk in a way that excludes women.
> It's very easy for white people to talk in a way that excludes everyone else. So
> to find a discourse where everybody is learning, I think people learn how to

raise their language so that they're taking all these things into account, so that somehow people start to feel like we're all equidistant from some point of discourse that we're all sharing in. (7)

Participants consciously use language, humor, and narrative to model positive communication and to help establish a learning environment in which all students partake and their contributions are valued.

Empathy and emotion in the classroom.

The last subsection for overt communication of empathy relates to participants' awareness of emotion in the classroom. Participants associated the communication of empathy with affect and caring. They endeavor to view and care about their students as people with lives beyond the classroom, and more than one expressed the sentiment that their students know that the instructors care about them (1, 3). Several participants expanded on the importance of a positive emotional atmosphere for students to ask questions and to learn (1, 2, 5, 6). This was apparent during all the classroom observations, where these instructors verbally elicited student questions and comments, framing them as a positive way to engage with class material and show interest in the course. The instructor's attunement to the emotional atmosphere in the classroom counts heavily in this respect not just to students as individuals but also by influencing the group dynamics. "It's really easy to say something incredibly stupid, and you didn't mean it, but, you know, you've hurt somebody's feelings, or made the class work less well" (7). The instructor acts as a catalyst for the emotional tone of class interactions by how he or she responds to students. In some cases, participants directly address the role of emotion in the learning environment as part of class

content and call out traditional inhibitions against emotion in academic settings (4).

More than one participant stressed the importance of recognizing students' emotional

needs beyond their role as learners.

> If you have a class that's so big that you can't even learn people's names, then
> how can you possibly have a chance to get to know what's going on in their
> emotional life? The students, a lot of them, really need some connection that
> they don't get here. (8)

In this analysis, participants do not limit their experience of empathy to their

own internal sensations. They are intentional about acting from a standpoint of what

different students need from their class, starting with course design, including how

they deliver content and the nonverbal messages their appearance and body language

convey. Participants give considerable thought to how they can construct empathic

interactions in their classes, viewing their students as fellow humans in a common

endeavor, a relational learning process that unfolds over time.

This section explored the theme of participants' external expressions and

enactments of empathy, from planning their course curriculum and structure, content

and delivery, through their teaching strategies, approaches to grading issues, to their

uses of nonverbal cues, stories, humor, and language, and the place of emotion in the

classroom.

Empathy and Identity as Mutual Engagement

Trying to separate instructors' actions from the ongoing effects of those

actions, for both instructors and students, is in many ways an artificial distinction. It

was helpful to break out specific instructor behaviors for analysis, but not everything

fit neatly outside the context of ongoing interactions with students and the resulting

chains of reaction as relationships develop. This section addresses these aspects of mutuality in the data, where both empathy and identity are formed in and through the interactions between instructors and students. Participant responses are organized here around four themes: enhancing relationships to improve learning, acknowledging the effects of negative student behaviors, interactions that challenge both student and instructor identities, and participants' thoughts on empathy over time, in and beyond their courses.

Enhancing relationships.

As the interviews progressed, all the participants mentioned reciprocity and relationship as integral to empathy: "The sanctity of the relationship. In teaching, it really doesn't matter what you teach, you could teach, I don't know, automatic transmissions, but if you connect, the students have those epiphanies, and you form relationships" (3). The safer and more trusting an instructor can make the social context, the more effectively any knowledge, lofty or quotidian, can be transferred. Initially, it is up to instructors to instigate positive interactions with their students. "Clearly empathy does flow both ways. I think if you're respectful and caring and a good listener, students respond to that, and are more likely to engage with the faculty member in ways which are professional but also more social" (9). In this sense the teacher's empathic behavior is an exercise of power and leadership in the classroom. Although they saw themselves as responsible for enabling and initiating an empathic atmosphere, the end purpose for most participants is to encourage students to respond in kind. "You don't want empathy to be just one way between the teacher and the

student, you want it to be going both ways, interactive" (4), drawing students into personal engagement in the class. Instructors also use positive exchanges to construct a safe learning environment. "I want the room to be very interactive, I want them to feel comfortable with me, and so you have to have a relationship with them in some ways for that to happen" (5). Effective instruction includes attention to how people relate to one another, and empathy is one means to achieve the kinds of interactions that lead to positive relationships.

Depending on the discipline and course content, in some classes the goal of empathic involvement extends to how students engage with one another as well as with the instructor. "When you get people participating in a task together, communicating with the same aim, they walk away from that experience with a different relationship to each other. And that's what we're after" (8). The day this class was observed, the students planned and presented nearly all the lesson together, so that every student fulfilled a leadership role in some capacity during the class session. The instructors have made this a core requirement because developing the students' empathic and relational skills is one of the desired academic outcomes for the course.

For one participant, teaching itself is primarily grounded in the relations between people. "To be truly effective, it's all about the relationships. We have this whole notion of platonic relationships, and teaching is a big part of that" (3). From this standpoint, each student contributes as much as the instructor to their relationship as the student acts on her or his own individual needs, goals, and relational styles, and instructors tailor their responses to those student choices (7). "Every situation is

different, so what may be called for in terms of empathy in one situation, doesn't fly at all [in another], so there's a real art to it. It's situationally driven" (3). These instructors recognize that relationships in the learning environment are subject to the same variability as most other human communications.

Acknowledging the negative.

The fact that student behavior codetermines the relationship does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes. A student's attitudes and behaviors weighed as much or more than overt social identities in how much responsibility participants assigned themselves for connecting with that student, and some student behaviors impair rather than improve a relationship and an instructor's capacity for empathy. One participant expressed frustration and a lack of sympathy with students who fail to take responsibility for their own actions and yet still expect to be treated as responsible adults, as in, for example, not doing the course work and then complaining about being "given" a poor grade (6). When students are demanding or disrespectful, participants felt less obligation to negotiate with them in matters such as assignments, due dates, and grade changes.

> Probably the main reason is that I can't relate to the way that some of the students interact with faculty—and it's hard to know, are they like that with just me, or are they like that with all their faculty, I don't know—but sometimes they can be really entitled, and really rude, and so I'm not rude back, but I certainly stand my ground, and I don't give in to their requests for those changes. (5)

The motivations for these student behaviors come from something outside the instructor's experience and understanding, so that the student's rudeness evoked the instructor's professional identity without kindling an empathic response. Participants

also expressed less empathy for students who demonstrate a lack of interest or willingness to take responsibility for their participation in the learning process (6). "There are the people who sit in the back row and read *The Barometer* and don't care about anything, and if they don't care then I don't care. That's kind of their problem, not mine" (9). Another way to frame this is to say that the prevalence of a student's academic identity partially determines which relational options seem reasonable to the instructor.

> It is a reality that a student who is willing to identify themselves to me and come forward, I'm probably going to be more flexible and a little more lenient, if only in the sense that I have a face with the name. (4)

As people and as teachers, the more instructors know about a student, the better able they are to respond to the student's individual needs. Participants accepted that, as in all constructive human relationships, the learning process and empathic connection require mutual and positive participation.

Challenging identities.

Participants talked about students' identities as fluid and unsettled rather than fixed and secure, yet some situations present an opportunity for them to re-examine their own identities as well. Nearly all the courses taught by these instructors challenge student identities directly or implicitly, and sometimes both. For example, two class sessions observed by the researcher in unrelated disciplines revolved around social justice issues, while the factual content presented during the observations in two more disciplines is contested by certain political and religious segments of society (1, 2, 4, 6). Most of the students in the two Bacc core classes said little to nothing in full

class discussions; one participant later remarked during the interview that class

participation that day had been more muted than normal and attributed students'

silence to their difficulty with the topic. The more advanced students in one of the

discipline-specific courses asked a lot of questions and voiced some objections about

an assignment related to race, in what the researcher occasionally heard as a skeptical

or combative tone.

Participants noted that some students reject this kind of new information

outright and react defensively. The resulting interactions may challenge the

instructor's as well as the students' identities, and their sense of empathy with the

other.

> Many times I say things that conflict with what they've heard elsewhere, so
> then that's very challenging for them to have that internal conflict of who to
> believe, to sit there and have me be a role model, when what I'm talking about
> flies in the face of what they've heard.
>   Every once in a while I get negative feedback that I'm sexist, because I
> talk about the fact that sexism exists. For personal survival, I have to assume
> that it's not me and that it's them, and that they're coming from a place of
> defensiveness. There's a part of me that thinks, wow, am I coming across as
> bitter? But I think I come across as bitter in terms of racism and bitter in terms
> of classism too—I wish all three of those things didn't exist, so I don't think I'm
> coming across as a bitter and angry feminist. It's students who get defensive,
> because they think they're being accused of being a racist or a sexist when
> we're just stating the facts. (6)

In this situation, both the student and the instructor reevaluate their view of themselves

and one another in light of information from the other. The student reacts to new

material that does not fit his or her worldview by ascribing an identity to the instructor

in order to retain an existing outlook and self-image. The instructor grapples with the

implications of that ascription and assigns an identity to the student as a way to

manage the student's reaction. While their respective identity negotiations do not result in an immediate or positive connection, both are trying to use empathy, to see the situation from what they imagine to be the other person's point of view, in order to understand the other person's motivation as well as justify their own position.

Even when student reactions lack any apparent warmth or respect, instructors negotiate their own responses and communication with students out of convictions based in their own identities.

> There's pushback in some of the things that I talk about, but that doesn't mean that they're bad people. Even if a person was being just crass and mean, I can't go to that same place and then be critical of their doing it. How hypocritical. So, I can't do that. That's not who I am. I have to engage in this pedagogy of love, I guess, I have to, otherwise I might become what some people think that I am, because of those things that I talk about. (2)

Here a negative ascription by a student prompts reflection and deliberate action on the instructor's part to balance challenging course content with personal identity. In the intersections of student and instructor identities, student responses can exert influence on an instructor's sense of self.

Empathy over time.

Participants spoke about how empathy can change over time, in themselves, with and among students in the classroom, and as students go out into the world. As a process designed to prepare students for the future, teaching addresses past foundations and future possibilities as much as it pays attention to the present moment. Participants talked about empathy-related changes in themselves as they accumulated experience and changes in their students throughout and beyond the duration of their classes. Participants' self-images were not static, and there were good and not-so-

good aspects of the changes they saw in themselves. Over the decades, "tolerance for lack of responsibility has decreased with teaching experience" (6), along with the physical energy to develop and maintain connections. Also, as will be noted further in the final section about constraints, some of the institutional changes in education have made connecting with students more difficult. On the positive side, age and experience can contribute to improved teaching skills and techniques, and increasing comfort with the communication of one's authentic identity.

In their classrooms, participants were attuned to students' emotional and social behaviors as courses progress. In the early days of a class,

> there's a way in which they're holding themselves back a little bit, or they're getting the feel of the group. I think that, really early on in a class, some key understandings develop among students that will influence the class dynamics, and that it's hard to unsettle. (4)

Ideally, as students spend more time together, some sort of group cohesion occurs (3). For some participants, the progression includes the students' greater sense of ownership. "I want to try to turn as much power as I can over to the students, so by the end of the class, it's their class" (2). Part of the learning process involves students taking responsibility for their own learning.

Participants also voiced the recognition, even faith, that the learning process continues to maturate long after the course has ended. Instructors of classes in which the development of student empathy is an explicit goal did not expect to always see the results of their work. "While what I'm doing in the classroom might not seem to change them in ten weeks, it changes them over their life course. I'm planting seeds. I might never see them grow" (6). These participants realize that the enduring results of

their efforts are part of a much larger, and longer-term, process. The principles and processes they most want to inculcate, such as empathic awareness, operate at multiple levels of cognition and behavior, with remote more than immediate manifestations.

> My goal is for them to learn and to transform, and that can happen in a lot of ways; it doesn't necessarily mean that it's happening in this instant. I can't assume that in nine weeks they're going to 'get it,' where they didn't get it nine weeks ago, but I want them to start to think about those things and think about how identity mediates their work. That's something you should never really stop thinking about. (2)

Participants view their purpose as initiating or fortifying a lifelong process in students rather than as turning them out as finished works at the end of the course. Some hope to see empathy continue after the class ends in the form of ongoing relationships.

> When things have worked well, students have kept in touch with each other and have kept in touch with us. And they've shown the same sort of commitment to building connections with communities too. What's particularly important in this case is that we're talking about connections that are being built across cultures. (8)

When the instructor succeeds in nurturing human connections, students are much more likely to develop relationships that extend and endure far beyond the class (9).

For the participants in this research, good teaching is grounded in the development of positive relationships. At the same time, they recognized that interactions and relationships change the course of empathy and identity formation. Negative student response affects their own responses and sense of empathy with a student, and may even impel an instructor to reconsider her or his own identities. Even when students seem unmoved, however, participants hope that students develop empathy over time, in and beyond their courses. These intentions around empathy on the part of the participants flow from their own identities as people and as instructors.

Empathy as Identity Expression

Part of the analysis included examining the data about participants' avowed social identities and their goals as teachers, considered as a reflection of how they want to use and communicate empathy. This section articulates the two sub-themes of how participants characterized their own identities, particularly in relation to empathy, and what they remarked about their student identities.

Empathy and social identity.

The analysis made plain that all of the participants in this research value empathy as a goal in and beyond their teaching, and that communicating empathy is important to them as a confirmation of their professional and personal identities, a way to affirm themselves as good teachers and as good people. Participants emphasized their common humanity over their positional power in the way they talked about their own social identities, and in the values and goals to which they aspire in enacting their professional identities as teachers.

When asked about their own social identities, most participants tended to avow aspects of themselves that differed from U.S. norms and averages while making few or no direct references to their more dominant social identities. For example, those of nondominant ethnicity/race or gender often spoke about those characteristics first, while those of dominant ethnicity/race and gender began with areas of nondominance or non-normativity in age, class, body shape, and so on. In both groups, other aspects of their identities that aligned with dominant norms were often omitted or played down when talking about identities, or revealed indirectly during the interview, for

example, when someone who had not mentioned a heterosexual or middle-class identity referred to an opposite-sex spouse or talked about family background. Participants who teach course content that deals with intersections of identity and privilege were more likely to mention a privileged status, but almost always after listing their less dominant identities.

A few participants also expressed their sense of nondominance or difference in other ways, for example, in being from an urban background among OSU's more rural population. Two made the distinction of being intellectuals committed to critical thinking as opposed to academics enforcing bureaucratic, hierarchical rules and procedures. Three participants with nondominant identities explicitly presented themselves as working from a critical framework, although four more expressed some similar personal or pedagogic goals. Three of them specifically referred to themselves as learners, and as learning from their students, again de-emphasizing the power distance and identifying themselves with students. None of the participants spent much time talking about their social identities, but they did have more to say about their role as a teacher and the empathic characteristics of a positive instructor identity.

At ttimes participants talked about their views and expectations of themselves as empathic in terms of their general intentions and goals as teachers. Some linked their own purposes with the students' success in the course. "I'm not there to flunk anybody. My goal is for all of them to pass this class, to learn the material and to move on" (5). In this case the instructor is a facilitator, and the sense of accomplishment comes in part from seeing the students achieve mastery.

Everyone mentioned some aspect of connecting with students as a critical element in being a good instructor. "Someone who wants to connect with the students in the class and not just be a talking head, to me that's very important. If you are effectively teaching, then you should be developing that connection" (9). Teaching and learning are seen within a greater web of human relationships. The desired end is not only an immediate connection with others in the classroom, but also to encourage students to engage with their own assignment and research topics (4), the subject, and even the disciplines and the communities from which they arise.

> We don't want those students who are excited about this stuff to get squelched by their classmates, to not express their excitement. I like to make sure that those people still have a voice—even the majors don't necessarily have that voice. Our students may not be majors, but they're going to be somebody. (1)

The instructor's goal here extends beyond delivering information about a given subject to fostering students' enthusiasm for learning the subject as it relates to their lives, in whatever discipline and community they end up. In this conception the instructor is a sort of intellectual midwife whose ultimate purpose is to pull students out of their safe passivity into the larger world of active exploration.

This drive to activate an appetite for learning may rest on an underlying belief that the learning process can be a powerful means to becoming more human. "What this is about is having education be a really humanizing experience, as opposed to dehumanizing, to create a classroom environment where students are subjects, in the way that [critical] theory talks about subject, as agents" (8). The instructor's vision for teaching encompasses the students' capacity for seeking out answers and making an informed choice. This reflects the Socratic ideal of leading students to question the

world and arrive at a truth for themselves. "I'm trying to create critical awareness, and

I want these students to be able to think outside the proverbial box" (3). While most

of the instructor's action takes place in the classroom, the goal is to change how

students think about and approach life beyond the classroom and after classes end as

well. Some participants, particularly in the Bacc core and less technical disciplines,

talked about their purpose in challenging how students see the world and themselves.

> One of the things that I hope students will do when they leave my class is to think about their identities. A lot of what I do is challenge them to think about the world in a way that they haven't yet. I look for opportunities to be able to do that. (2)

Part of the instructor's task in this process is helping students improve their capacity to

grasp difficult information and then incorporate it into their own conceptual

frameworks—or alter those frameworks when appropriate.

> I think there are two points to the Bacc core: one is for you to be a more well-rounded person, and the other one is to be a better citizen of the world. I think those two things go hand in hand. You can't change what family you're born into, you can't change your color. As you get older, most people don't change their sex, and you can't change your ethnic orientation, and you really can't change your social class like students think that you can. I would like them to recognize that privilege in themselves and in their own experiences. Those are the kinds of things that I try and help them to understand. (6)

From this perspective the instructor enters into a humanitarian work, enabling students

to accept a more realistic awareness of themselves and of other people, in order to

expand their capacity for empathy and connection with more and different people.

> What I see as my basic job in teaching is breaking down all those barriers so that people can understand each other better. I'm like a personal trainer, saying, 'Here, look at this person not like you, and study this man who's not your ethnicity or whatever, and understand him.' It's crossing those boundaries, for understanding. (7)

These pedagogic goals and teaching strategies flow from participants' sense of themselves as humanitarians, for lack of a better word, with corresponding ideals of human behavior and social justice. Participants seemed to view their students in light of their own scholastic experiences, and the commitment to education and learning that presumably played a part in their choice of profession continues to motivate their work. Whatever the course level, content, or structure, one of their common motivations to teach is the desire to send students out into the world as more conscious and compassionate actors who will make the world a better place by being, among other things, more constructively empathic.

Empathy with student identities.

Everyone carries social identities that reflect his or her formative cultures, and the attributes that people remark in others reflect as much or more about their own background and values. Perceptions about others also affect how and how well people relate and empathize with one another. This section describes what participants noticed about their students' identities, starting with OSU's demographics, students' academic identities, visible expressions of identity, students' attachment to their established social networks, and finally how participants talked about seeing themselves in their students.

OSU demographics.

Based on the researcher's observations and participants' confirmation, OSU freshmen are predominantly white, middle- and working-class, of roughly equal male/female ratios, eighteen to twenty years old and away from home for the first

time. Some participants noted that diversity, particularly with respect to color and

class, decreases with academic seniority. Demographics in non-Bacc core courses

may vary somewhat by discipline and course level, perhaps more of one sex than the

other, more or less representation of nondominant identities, or a greater age range.

Students with noticeable impairments are rare, although participants noted that self-

declared learning disabilities have become more common. Heterosexually-oriented

participants tended to agree that student sexual orientation is generally not visibly

communicated, although another participant talked about that notion as an aspect of

heteronormativity, and noted that people of nondominant sexual orientations often do

perceive those kinds of cues about others. Several participants commented on the lack

of ethnic diversity both at OSU and in Oregon generally. Several also remarked on

the less conspicuous diversity among students across socioeconomic classes.

> The demographics, if you bring class into consideration, are hugely mixed.
> There is everything in this course from students of great privilege to homeless
> students sleeping on couches and showering in Dixon. It's really important to
> look beyond what appears to be an apparent homogeneity. (4)

The disparity of socio-economic backgrounds is reflected in significant differences in

students' academic preparedness for and comfort with various disciplines. The

economic downturn of the past few years has also meant more lower- and middle-class

students work much harder and longer to fund their education. Two participants

specifically called out the increased financial distress that many of their current

students face, whether from juggling jobs and school or from burdensome student

loans, and all too often both (3, 4). For these instructors, this knowledge influences

their pedagogy at a practical level, in their approach to assignments and due dates, for

example, as well as amplifying their sensitivity to their students' stress reactions.

   Academic identities.

   Participants also found other less apparent aspects of student identity relevant to forming human connections with them. Because OSU is a land-grant institution with a mandate for broad acceptance of applicants, many students arrive lacking a full complement of college-level skills (1). Many were average students in high school and consequently seem not to have a strong academic identity, that is, to view themselves as good students—the kind of student who belongs in college and is welcomed by instructors. These students need far more encouragement and support from instructors in terms of their self-image as much as their basic proficiencies. A related concern for some participants was that high-achieving students often hesitate to express their educational accomplishments (1). Even among upperclassmen and graduate students, "there's still a varying sense of how cool or not cool it is to be intellectually engaged with a subject, and with your colleagues" (4). Additionally, some students attend college, not for academic reasons, but because their parents demand it or in order to cultivate a social network, so that for them coursework and education are not priorities (6). These students have little motivation to spend their time interacting with an instructor.

   On the opposite end of the spectrum, "Successful students are often people who at an early age have identified strongly with education and with their teachers, and a very central part of their identity is being successful in college, in the classroom, in communicating with their teacher" (4). Students with a strong academic identity

are more likely to know how to initiate constructive interactions with instructors and to be comfortable doing so. This disparate range of academic identities means that students enter a classroom with wildly unequal inclinations and capacities for relating to the material, their peers, and the instructor. "One primary identity is, I want to be a student who knows you and is known by you. Another identity is, this is just a required class, I'm SU-ing this class, I don't want you to know who I am" (4). From the instructor's point of view, successfully engaging all the students in the class depends in part on each student's willingness and ability to respond to the instructor's efforts in ways he or she can recognize.

Visible expressions of identities.

In their descriptions of how students communicate social identities, participants accepted externalities of dress and hairstyle, tattoos and piercings, as unremarkable, and quickly turned to discussing behaviors. Participants did not notice much expression of group affiliations through clothing choices, for example with teams, clubs, or Greek organizations (1). Most participants talked more about body language, where students sit, their posture, who they talk to or don't talk to, and their levels of participation in the class. Students who are visibly different express aspects of their identities "just by being there" (7), and they expose themselves to more social risks in most classes if they speak up (2, 4, 6). Expressions of entitlement also communicate identity; some participants talked about which students ask for grade changes (usually white males) and which students never do (international females) (1, 5, 6), and wondered aloud about the motivations of students who act disrespectfully

toward them as instructors (2, 5, 6, 9).

> *Primacy of friends.*

Addressed directly by only three participants, one of the interesting threads around student identity that came out in the analysis was that of students' friendships. For most first-year students, college is their first experience of living away from home, and their social enterprise is as important to many of them as any academic component of their college experience (1, 3). On the threshold of their adult lives, in an unfamiliar environment, many students cling to their friends and resist other associations. One participant (8) mentioned a course in which the freshman boys sat together in a silent, cohesive group that resisted interaction with the other students in the class until the last weeks of the term. Another participant made this observation about a Bacc core course consisting of mostly freshmen:

> I thought with social networking people would be more gregarious. It's the opposite. Now students are more likely text messaging with friends of their very limited network rather than the people sitting right next to them. We have a hard time getting people even to talk to each other now. We really have to *make* them work together in groups, and it seems like they're having a difficult time.
>
> At the same time, it has been very hard to get people to work alone. Some people are excluded, so they are by themselves just because they don't know someone in the class, but there are a lot of people who refuse [to work without the involvement of others]. The idea of being by themselves is not something they are comfortable with, and that's difficult, because there are some things you really have to think about yourself. (1)

If one of the main purposes of college is to expand people's horizons, these students retreat from opportunities for new perceptions about themselves and others into the safety of a restricted clump of friends. For instructors who rely on solo as well as group work methodologies, student aversion to interactions outside or in the absence

of their circle of friends inhibits simple content delivery, not to mention the promotion of self-reflection and empathetic relationships. Leading students to think beyond their established and comfortable boundaries may occur only in small steps that take other aspects of the person, such as social needs and peer pressure, into account.

Participants noted that their students' identities are often closely held without much conscious examination. While everyone has a cultural background and identities, students seldom recognize themselves as coming from a particular culture or having particular cultural identities (2). Many students have not given thought to larger life issues in general (1), and they have difficulty seeing or even imagining how divergent the backgrounds and experiences of others are from their own (7). As students do begin to explore their own identities, they rarely stray far beyond the familiar.

> They're pretty much the products of their environment, their parents, the geography. They're kids, there's a lot of identity confusion and experimentation, but what you do run into is a pretty narrow segment of the political spectrum. They'll move around it a little bit, but they're not going to go too far. (3)

The starting point for students, their concepts of themselves, who they are in the world, and how they relate to others, shapes what instructors can do and how far or fast they can push students into accepting new information and differing perspectives.

Seeing themselves in students.

While talking about their students, most participants expressed the sentiment about a certain trait that "I was that student" (1). Those who were shy or less confident as students noticed their shy, less confident students; those who were not

great students and had to work hard to get through school related to students who have to make similar efforts; those with athletic backgrounds connected more easily to student athletes; those with strong nondominant identities (gender, ethnicity/race, body image, etc.) talked more about those students than did other participants. There was a recognition that similar social identities do affect classroom relationships and outcomes.

> Students' identities, that makes a difference too. The class where I felt that there was the strongest connection, where we were really able to live in each other's shared experiences, was mostly because of similar demographics. There was a lot of shared experience, and things happened in that class that could not happen in any other classroom space. (8)

In this instance, the course content brought an instructor and students with similar interests and nondominant identities together, and that greater-than-usual degree of similarity fostered closer relationships through normal classroom processes. On the other hand, where students tend to perceive the instructor's identities as somehow oppositional to their own, an instructor may dampen or curb communication of those aspects of her or his own identity in order to build commonality and connection (3). Thus participants acknowledged the relevance of shared social identity in its constructive and obstructive manifestations.

This section articulated the two themes of how participants characterized their own identities, particularly in relation to empathy, and what they remarked about their student identities. The participants did not dwell overmuch on their own social identities and emphasized their nondominant identities, although the communication of empathy is an important aspect of their self-images as teachers and as people.

While they are aware of noticeable social identities, they talked about their students'
various identities more as behaviors rather than outward appearance. A student's
academic performance and identity is especially relevant to instructor interaction and
the development of relational empathy.

Constraints and Drawbacks to Empathy

For all the potential benefits that the communication of empathy in the
classroom can provide, some of the data pointed to its difficulties and less constructive
aspects. This section organizes those results by describing participants' observations
about impediments to the communication of empathy in the classroom as constraints,
and the drawbacks of their own less-than-positive feelings and experiences as they try
to enact it.

Constraints: Structural issues, settings, and not enough time.

Most participants talked about structural factors that promote or detract from
their ability to relate to students and form empathic bonds. These factors include
obvious things such as class size, duration, and subject, often having to do with the
amount of time available for them to connect with individual students, as well as the
underlying university hierarchy and operations.

Two of the participants articulated points about hierarchy and policy that other
participants touched on less directly. To the extent that instructors have more power
than students, their attitudes and behaviors have more bearing on the learning
environment.

> There clearly is a hierarchy of power in this university, and that power is very
> easily abused. I think when people at a higher power position, instructors, do

> not abuse that, but instead try to connect with people in a respectful way in a lower position of power, that sends a very strong message to those people, to the students. (9)

In these areas, instructors have some control over the ways in which they use their leadership position to establish and communicate empathy, whether to enhance student learning or to exercise their own insecurities. In other areas, instructors are themselves subject to directions and policies that limit their capacity to develop relationships with students, empathic or otherwise.

> I want to say, very strongly, that I believe that the university structure and the structures of higher education do not encourage empathy at all, and that, at very deep levels, they discourage empathy. Increasingly, they say to teachers that teachers are processing students, they are information conveyors, they are functioning to post grades that become part of students' identities, with increases in teaching loads, and with an increasing sense of the university as vocational, and the kind of clientization of the university. (4)

These kinds of social and economic pressures at the university level directly and negatively impact instructor-student relationships.

Institutional pressures were not the only factors that participants saw influencing their opportunities to develop empathic relationships. Sometimes something as simple as the physical logistics of the classroom constrains an instructor's communication style. Participants 1 and 5 noted that they like to move around the room to get closer and include more students, and others (3, 4, 8, 9) mentioned that they prefer to move chairs around for group work or to have students sit in a circle rather than rows. Where the room is too small or chairs are fixed in place, an instructor is less able to use those physical means to connect with students. Other factors operate at a deeper level. Subjects that call forth autobiographical

information from students or that require a lot of interpersonal communication as part

of the learning method provide more of the kinds of interactions that lead to building

empathetic bonds (8). The length of time people spend together, in a program for

example, may also foster friendships between students that spill over into the

classroom. "It's really not so much the age of the students, or the level of the course,

as much as it's what other relationships do they have with you because of the way that

the university is structured" (8). Meeting students more often and in a variety of

contexts, such as multiple courses and project or graduate direction, widens the

platform for establishing connections.

All the participants talked about policies that affect an instructor's time

availability per student and thus their opportunities for connecting with their students.

The time and energy investment required for any course depends on numerous factors

that may limit instructor availability. Teaching and service load, class level, and

course size are particularly important (4). The simplest limitation is the amount of

time in the day an instructor can devote to thinking about and being with students in

addition to the amount of time they spend together during class.

> With eighty students and all this pressure to get things done, you'll see a little
> bit of personal connection. It's getting more difficult to do that here because
> now we have minimum class sizes, and we're squeezing kids into bigger
> groups. It's tough. (3)

Since empathy arises mainly through personal interaction, and most teacher-student

interpersonal communication takes place in the classroom, class size was most often

mentioned as the primary factor in terms of time available for students and thus the

development of empathic relationships. "You don't have much hope of empathizing if

you're not actually listening to the other people. It's a whole lot easier to get to know

individuals and be empathic in a class of twenty or thirty" (7).

Another aspect of relationship affected by time availability is the extent to

which an instructor can be proactive in helping students who are struggling. "If

classes were significantly smaller it would be easier to give more focus to students

who need it. I just haven't had the time to reach out to individual students, but it's

something I'd do if I had the time" (5). Students who need that extra help also miss

the experience of an instructor's practical expression of caring. Two instructors

teaching at the Bacc core level noted that their graduate teaching assistants (TAs)

carry most of the load of individual contact with students (1, 6), while their own

contact with students is limited to lectures and whatever situations the TAs are not

equipped or tasked to handle.

For some participants who teach upper-level courses within their discipline,

individual communication with students comprises an essential element of their

teaching. "I don't know how I could implement my typical pedagogical model in a

large class because I like to have people come and talk to me one by one. How could

that work for a lecture of 150 people?" (8). In this case, class size and course level

combine to increase the amount of time needed for each student. Course level also

determines student demographics, which can make a difference in how an instructor

relates to students. "Large lectures, it's very difficult to make that connection, but I

usually try to with at least a few people. 100-200 level courses are particularly

challenging because of the level of student engagement. Graduate students are much

more engaging" (9). In the undergraduate foundation-course situation especially, the

handful of students who are most comfortable actively participating in a large group

setting are more likely to attract an instructor's attention while the rest remain passive.

One participant talked about connecting with people in a large audience

differently than through the one-to-one relationships that result from smaller class

settings.

> I've been surprised over the years; I think it's easier to work with the energy of
> a big group. You can get people laughing together, crying together. It seems
> like emotions move much more freely in the biggest groups. It's interesting,
> like a rock concert kind of thing. People can be very passionate together. (1)

This instructor is very aware of these student responses and intentionally incorporates

those moments when planning and practicing the lectures to increase the impact of the

lecture material. Although not all courses lend themselves to group engagement, and

not everyone can pull it off successfully, some instructors are able to elicit emotion in

large group settings. The researcher saw this happen during observations of two

different large lecture classes when many students responded simultaneously with

laughter or a sudden buzz of many small conversations among seatmates as they

connected emotionally with something in the lecture content.

Several participants mentioned the impact of their contact with students

beyond scheduled class time (1, 7, 8, 9). "I find that when you put students in a van

and start driving, they're much more likely to treat me like a real person than, you

know, Herr Professor" (9). Interacting with the instructor as a person outside the

classroom weakens the stereotypic images of teachers that many students seem to

hold. This approach to connecting with students may alter what could be termed an

instructor's job description. "Being willing to not constrain our relationship with the students to the educational environment means not being able to leave campus and have work be over. And new technologies are adding different options too" (8). While most instructors take work home with them, the frame of reference here was a set of stories about being available to students and participating in activities outside the classroom with them. The comment about technology was prompted in part by a student's text message received during the interview, followed by a discussion of how this instructor is incorporating text messages into a repertoire of relation-building tools.

Participants also talked about how students communicate independently with one another beyond the class. Sometimes course content "spurs students on to have conversations with other people outside the classroom after lecture. Students will go tell somebody about that information, and so, hopefully it's spreading empathy outside the classroom" (6). The ultimate purpose for empathy, as for all aspects of education, is to change how people understand and experience their world after they leave the classroom.

Drawbacks: Internal conflict, external unpredictability, and burnout.

Participants also discussed some of the less positive aspects of experiencing and communicating empathy as an instructor. Sometimes the high expectations for instructors to be empathetic do not fit with the reality of human limitations and responses.

> As much as I value it and as much as I try to create a structure where empathy
> can be part of the equation, I do often catch myself behaving in ways that are

not empathetic. It's hard to switch that off, especially when there are intersections with parts of my own identity that I've tried to deal with. (8)

Instructors can experience internal conflict when they notice that their own cultures and identities clash with those of students of other cultures and identities, and they consequently do not meet their own standards for empathy.

Balancing the manifold and sometimes disparate requirements of empathy and pedagogy also figured in participants' thinking. They distinguished between empathizing with students' situations and upholding academic goals and requirements. "There is still an ethical sphere too, and I think sometimes that translation is difficult, that we can understand where they are, but it doesn't mean we're going to do what they want us to" (1). Putting themselves in the place of the student emotionally does not displace their instructional aims or responsibilities. Participants do not always have settled solutions to address the conflicts and ambiguities that confront them as they pursue their pedagogic and empathic projects. Sometimes the conflict involves the instructor's obligations.

> There's a tension that exists, because as a teacher, your job, your paid responsibility, is to ensure that students are learning. So if I set up a classroom where I want students to feel powerful, at what point—is there a point—where there is a diminishing return on that, for one whose livelihood relies on that group being able to show that they've learned something? If power is in the students' hands and learning isn't going on, at what point does the teacher have to step in and take some of that power away, and hold onto it, and do something? (2)

An instructor who values empathy must weigh what students want from a class and from their education, along with the purposes of the institution, and the instructor's own goals for students.

Empathy is a good thing. I try to be empathetic, I try to connect, I try to be present, I try to love. But I know that if I don't—and this goes back to power dynamics—if I don't put the pedal to the metal, they're not going to get anywhere. (3)

Instructors walk a fine line to develop empathy and connection with students

and yet still advance their primary intention, helping students advance in knowledge,

understanding, and the academic structure.

In addition to internal discord, extending empathy to students also opens the

learning environment to a broader range of classroom situations and the uncertainties

of teaching.

I'm generally thinking as a teacher in terms of bringing people out, but you never know what you're going to bring out, so you sort of have to be ready for anything, or accepting of anything. I find with teaching you're exposed to just, actually even a lot of danger. You don't know quite what's out there, it's a public position, and so you really agree to let people bring their anger and their personal limitations into this space, and you don't know what you're going to be hit with. So it's a little, there's that unpredictable dimension of it, and that's part of it too. (7)

As with empathy itself, encouraging people to express more of their humanity does

not automatically lead to beneficial or constructive results.

To the extent that instructors try to develop empathy as part of the class

character, it becomes yet another arena of responsibility for them to manage, and one

that demands a lot of personal stamina.

You need sophisticated emotional antennae, and you have to know your students, and there's a constant kind of dialectic going on in your head, and that's why it's such a tiring job, because you're always adjusting on the fly if you're aware of your students' emotional needs. (3)

Practicing and fostering empathy in the classroom is a lot of work, on top of all the

other functions that teaching requires. Some participants with decades of experience

admitted to feeling tired sometimes, and not always as available and empathetic as they would like to be for their students.

Instructors work to create a positive classroom environment in the larger context of university policies and physical facilities, and within their own human limitations of time and energy. The communication of empathy is one among multitudes of their obligations and responsibilities, and rarely at the top of anyone else's priority list. Communicating empathy in the public space of the classroom demands a high level of personal energy and occasionally risk as well, and participants do not always experience empathy as a positive thing. They undertake the efforts and risks to promote a positive emotional atmosphere not as an end in itself, but to better fulfill the purpose of education—student learning.

Summary of Results

The participants in this research experience and think about empathy at many levels, organized here under five themes. The first theme recounted their definitions of empathy, which were concise and cognitively oriented. Although they represent a wide variety of disciplines, backgrounds, and personal identities, the participants often expressed very similar ideas about empathy and its communication in the classroom. These straightforward definitions led quickly into stories, examples, and explanations of more complex enactments analyzed in the remaining four themes. Participants undertake a variety of efforts and actions to overtly communicate empathy, from student-centered course design and content selection, to their own physical appearance and preferred teaching methods, to developing habits of eye contact and body

language. Many of these decisions are unilateral, in that they are made without respect to any individual student or class. The second theme considered empathy and identity as mutual engagement and the ways in which an instructor's actions and self-image are shaped by her or his interactions with a student or class. The third theme explored the communication of empathy as an expression of the instructor's identity, whether as a teacher or simply as a human being, and the ways in which they notice student identities. The final theme gathered participants' thoughts about the constraints and drawbacks to empathy, aspects of the teaching context that hinder the development of an empathic classroom environment, and the less pleasant internal results of empathy that frustrate or exhaust the person trying to communicate it.

As participants talked about their experience of empathy, they touched on the full range of empathy's many facets. Their intentions, awareness, and enactments of empathy encompassed the multivarious emotional, physical, and social aspects of themselves and their students. One participant summed up the effective communication of empathy this way, "One thing about students' perception of empathy, which has to do with what I believe about students in general: students believe what you do rather than what you say, and that doing comes in the richest, most complicated way" (4).

Discussion

The previous chapter highlighted five themes in the data with respect to the

research purpose, exploring how participating instructors talked about their experience

and communication of empathy in the context of different social identities in the

classroom. This chapter relates the themes from the analysis back to concepts drawn

from the literature review and explores some of the implications for the study. From

the literature review, the constellation of aspects that comprise empathy consist of:

- the physiological, psychological, and emotional mirroring of another's internal state;
- the capacity to hear what another person means and to see from another's perspective;
- an awareness of the world expanded through the experience of another;
- a cognitive decision based on contemplation and evaluation of personal, social, and moral costs and rewards;
- a shared understanding achieved through ongoing communication;
- a relational process that makes other kinds of communication possible.

Additionally, empathy is not always a force for good, and the experience and

expression of empathy are inseparable from communication processes and social

hierarchies. The following discussion connects these concepts with the results of the

data analysis and is organized in order of the five themes from the analysis, with

closing thoughts on the implications of this study for reflection and practice.

Definitions of Empathy

The definitions offered by participants aligned with common understandings of

the term as stated in the second bullet point above, "the capacity to hear what another

person means and to see from another's perspective." In the data, the intention and the

ability to imagine another person's perspective were seen as the starting point for

empathy, a relatively simple concept with complex enactments. Participants did not

directly refer to the biological aspects of empathy in the first bullet point, "the

physiological, psychological, and emotional mirroring of another's internal state", as

part of their definitions. These deeper levels of resonance with students appeared later

in the conversation about topics such as which students they identified with,

sometimes based in part on shared social identities as well as academic behaviors and

goals. While their definitions were relatively straightforward, participants' experience

and enactment of empathy were complex and multilayered and led to the remaining

four themes.

Empathy as Overt Communication

Given that it was the main point of the research question, participants talked a

lot about the second theme, their overt communication of empathy. In relation to the

constituent aspects of empathy, these are actions that result from "cognitive decisions

based on contemplation and evaluation of personal, social, and moral costs and

rewards," the fourth bullet point above. Participants reflected on their actions and

habits around empathy at both cognitive and emotional levels of experience, as verbal

and nonverbal expression, as it plays out in individual and group relationships. They

try to take their students into account in predetermined as well as spontaneous ways,

from planning and structuring courses to delivering content to improvising in

unexpected situations. A few participants related instances where they intentionally

modeled empathy by challenging a boundary posed by different social identities,

whether between themselves and students or within the students' worldviews. While

these efforts begin at the cognitive level, they extend to emotional and nonverbal behaviors as well, to the degree that people are aware of and can control their physical reactions.

Participants' deliberate communicative strategies also draw on the concept of empathy as "an awareness of the world expanded through the experience of another" in that they actively promote empathy with others as a method to expand the students' view of the world. They tell stories and set up assignments and situations that prompt students to imagine themselves in different circumstances, or to see similarities and identify with someone they have not previously considered to be like themselves. Whether in general knowledge or discipline-specific skills, several participants talked about expanding students' awareness of the world as a primary aim of education, and they use empathy in different ways to help students develop that awareness. This is not to say that participants are unaware of the ways in which empathy adds to their own experience. Participants do try to see various situations from a student perspective in order to make the class work better for the students, and they do see themselves as learners, relating their experience of empathy with its ongoing and relational aspects.

Empathy and Identity as Mutual Engagement

The third theme of mutual engagement emerged in data from all the interviews, echoing the relational aspects of empathy from the last two bullet points as "a shared understanding achieved through ongoing communication," and as "a relational process that makes other kinds of communication possible." These two aspects of empathy

were addressed together as participants talked about the importance of relationship and connection in their teaching. Several told stories to illustrate various ways in which empathy is a relational process that develops over time among all the different actors in the classroom. Participants are sensitive to outcomes in the relationships that develop between students, including, for example, the emotional and educational impacts when a dominant majority expresses a lack of empathy with a student's dissimilar experience or viewpoint. Especially in courses that present information they know is disruptive to some students' existing worldviews, participants strive to build a comfortable learning environment as part of balancing difficult content with emotional safety. In cases where students react negatively or do not engage, participants sometimes felt less empathy, and other times saw themselves as communicating empathy through tough love. Knowing when to extend the limits and when to enforce them, or how flexible and in which ways to be so, all depends on knowing and empathizing with that student in that specific situation as part of an ongoing relationship. Lastly, participants all referred to themselves in some way as learners, as learning from students, or as changing over time and with experience as a result of their engagement with students. One way or another, being open to other people affects our view of the world and of our place in it.

Empathy as Identity Expression

The fourth theme considered empathy as an expression of a professional and/or a personal identity, reflecting the relational nature of empathy along with the concept of an academic identity and the interpenetration of multiple social identities discussed

in the literature review. The term "academic identity" comes from White and

Lowenthal (2010), who articulate the ways in which a social identity can be developed

through the cultural and linguistic practices of the educational system.

Some interesting patterns concerning power, empathy, and identity appeared in

the ways participants spoke about themselves and their self-representation to students.

When talking about their own social identities in relation to students and teaching,

participants positioned themselves primarily as members of nondominant social

groups, or as a fellow-member with students of a dominant group in order to convey

lessons about that group's privilege in relations with other groups. This positioning of

themselves alongside the less powerful may reflect the nondominant, sometimes even

marginal, position of teaching in the larger social hierarchy. It may also reflect a

personal identification with and empathy for students, and possibly other marginalized

people, that draws its strength from some aspect of a nondominant social identity that

runs deeper than an instructor's dominant identities.

Several participants had no particular observations to make about students'

social identities and their own communication of empathy. Their instinctive

resonance seems to be with students' academic identities, especially those whom they

see as similar to themselves when they were students, based more on behavior than

appearance. In the interviews, they acknowledged their own initial response to

externally visible characteristics such as ability, gender, and color, but in their classes,

they consciously try to work beyond that response to involve every student who they

think might want to be included, as reflected in the strength of the student's expression

of academic identity. If mentioned at all, social identities other than the academic were more often seen as peripheral to participants' interactions with students, and differences or similarities of gender, ethnicity/race, and so on are easily outweighed by good- or bad-student kinds of behavior. Instructors of courses that directly address social equity were more vocal about how their own social identities might affect their ability to connect with different students, but beyond their initial responses to those identities, even these participants generally did not elaborate about specific ways in which any of their own social identities influenced how or with whom they related empathetically. Where the nature of a course or discipline serves to filter its members to a particular identity set, as with some applied-discipline fields and nondominant-group studies, instructors accept those limitations or incorporate that group uniqueness as part of teaching in that environment. Some participants related issues of identity and equity to larger social systems, and a few spoke out about how the university system constrains equity and empathy in the learning environment. To whatever extent they talked about, or succeed in, the ideal of creating a positive environment for all students, all these participants consciously work toward those kinds of ideals as a necessary element among the conflicting demands of teaching. These goals seem to be rooted in participants' academic, professional, and personal identities, and perhaps some of the other social identities they carry.

Participants build and maintain those identities in part through their decisions and actions to communicate empathy. Sometimes their identity as a teacher led them to certain decisions and actions, and other times participants described their behavior

as an outcome of their aspirations to greater humanity and ethical integrity including but not limited to their instructor persona. Some actions flow from the instructor's professional expertise and extend to all prospective students. For example, their communication of empathy in the classroom begins with curriculum, content, and policies established before classes begin. Their conscious decisions about self-presentation, methods of asking and handling questions, habits of body language and movement, are deliberate efforts to connect with students because they see that characteristic as essential to being a good teacher and a good person, and so to thinking well of themselves. By other behaviors, participants acknowledged the negotiated aspects of identity for their students and themselves: cooperating with students to determine curriculum and class standards, adapting to various kinds of student engagement in the class, letting go of students who choose not to engage. As much as possible, participants enter into interactions with students as fellow humans who can build relationships, and who may also struggle with aspects of their own or others' identities.

Constraints and Drawbacks to Empathy

The last theme addressed the external constraints and internal drawbacks that participants mentioned about empathy. Participants spoke energetically about the hindrances imposed on their ability to form connections with students by the educational hierarchy and by lack of time. They recognize their own power position as a potential barrier to connection, and all take steps to decrease the power distance between themselves and students, as in, for example, their emphasis on their less

dominant identities. They struggle with not having the time they would like to take with all the students who want or need more interaction. They use a variety of strategies to mitigate that lack and try to build human connections with students during class time as well as less formal interaction times. Discussion about time pressure segued occasionally to internal pressures and the drawbacks of empathy, including conflicted expectations and burnout. However, all the participants began with the premise that empathy is a good thing and affirmed in some way that instructor empathy is foundational to a positive learning environment. When asked about negative aspects of feeling or expressing empathy, they generally asked for more explanation of what that might mean, and did not go far beyond the examples provided to them of compassion fatigue or of seeing a negative aspect of oneself in a student. There was very little discussion about potential downsides like elision of significant differences or the manipulative uses of empathy. This may partly be a reflection of the exalted place of empathy in Western and U.S. culture generally, touched on in the literature, as well as the brevity of the interviews.

Implications of Instructor Empathy and Identity

Finally, here are some thoughts about the entanglements of empathy, identity, culture, and communication. If identity reflects culture, and identity is part of every message, what culture are instructors communicating through their empathy? In this analysis, a strong academic identity seemed to be the primary basis of connecting with students and relating to their experience. In higher education, students are expected to conduct themselves in certain ways if they want to succeed, to perform in accordance

with a positive academic identity. Instructors in particular are deeply invested in their

own academic identities as good students and good teachers. In their individual ways,

all the interview discussions about empathy delineated approaches that instructors take

to extend the natural limitations of their other social identities by focusing on the

academic character of their students more than other social and cultural qualities. On

the positive side, this can help level the playing field for students from different

backgrounds, especially when a nondominant student's positive academic identity

eclipses other, less positively regarded, social identities.

However, a focus on academic identity could also have negative consequences;

it may mask and enable communication of selective empathy based on unconscious

reactions, and it may ignore the reality that the opportunity to develop a strong

academic identity is not equally available to all students. First, within our finite

capacity for attention, none of us is objective about who we notice and how we notice

them, and then how we interpret what we notice. No matter what criteria we choose to

emphasize, our unconscious filters persistently narrow our ability to empathize and

communicate. When we are unaware of our sub-cognitive reactions to different

others, whether biological or learned, we perpetuate whatever structures and

assumptions formed those reactions, which are too often not equitable or even

humane. Second, positive academic identity, being a good student, is grounded in

middle-class Euro-American cultural assumptions, etiquette, and values. That

grounding does not translate well across all other cultures, and not all students come

from a background that encourages or even allows the development of such skills and

identities. No matter how hard they work or how much they want to succeed, students who are not acculturated to these social norms may transgress them in ways that, to an instructor, suggest lack of interest, respect, or commitment when that is not at all the student's motive. As in the story from Parker Palmer with which this thesis opens, it is all too easy to misinterpret other people's behaviors based on our own personal and cultural filters, including those based on academic achievement. Nondominant students who come in with material or social disadvantages continue to find college difficult, often without the knowledge base needed to understand specifically why, since they have never experienced the privilege of the background and social knowledge that make up the academic identity.

Part of the solution to these consequences is simple to say and very difficult to live, that is, communicating constructive empathy, connecting with students as people. Our communication of empathy encompasses all the aspects defined earlier, from the physiological to the relational, so progress on any level counts. We may not be able to totally reprogram our autonomic responses to others, but we can become aware of those responses through intentional focus and reflection. Which students do we notice, and what is it about them, precisely, that we notice? Which students do we not notice, and again, why not, exactly? How much of that noticing has to do with our consciousness of an academic identity—how strongly do we weigh our expectation that a student must perform a certain academic role, as compared to her or his other identities such as age, gender, color, class, and friendship network? With reflection, we can distinguish patterns in our reactions. We can cogitate more deeply about why

and how those patterns derive from our particular background, and the ways in which they might be limited by and limiting to our perceptual filters and interpretations.

We can also notice and evaluate the behaviors through which we purposely communicate our feelings and beliefs. Looking back, what decisions did we make in the course of a day, an hour, a moment of interaction, and again, why? How did students respond? These kinds of questions may lead us to consider the nature and quality of the relationships we are fostering and new things we can try. They might also lead us to ideas about how we can nurture greater empathy beyond our individual realm, how we can improve the larger university environment, maybe even the world our students come from and return to.

The communication of empathy is unique to each of us and our relationships. Different questions in the paragraphs above will resonate with different people, in different ways, at different times in our lives. They will lead to different observations and responses, and yet, we often see and hear our own thoughts expressed by others. We can develop our capacity for empathy by listening to others and reflecting on their practices and observations. Empathy and identity both exist in and through communication processes. Instructors communicate empathy when we value students for who they are, at whatever point they are in developing their own identities. That kind of communication is the intent of the participants in this research, through their commitment to self-reflection and learning from students.

Conclusion

While not the sole purpose of education nor the cure for all its ills, constructive empathy is a critical element in developing the relationships that lead to effective teaching and learning. As those with more power in the educational environment than students, instructors are necessarily the leaders and initiators in creating and sustaining empathic interactions in the classroom. Participants in this research think about empathy and find numerous ways to incorporate it in their classroom communication and practice.

This study suggested many areas for future research, such as: How do students experience and talk about instructor empathy? Starting from the research by Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, and Carmi (2009) that shows how those with greater power define and express empathy differently from those with less power, how are students' responses similar to and different from instructors' responses? How many instructors identify with marginalized people, and is there any relationship between that identification and the decision to become a teacher? How well do instructors' self-representations of impartiality match their actual behavior toward students from different social identities? What are the specific impacts of different identities on empathic communication, as well as other factors that instructors mentioned, and how can those effects be leveraged, ameliorated, or moderated to benefit students and instructors?

The strengths of specificity and inclusion in the methodology selected can also be viewed as contributing to the limitations of this study: the small number of

participants, the single location and time of the data collection. The observation of only one class session per participant resulted in very particular data, so that little of it could be used in the final presentation without a risk of compromising the identity of the class and thus the participant. Another limitation to this study stems from the nature of ethnographic interviews. Not all those who were invited to participate accepted, so the respondents are self-selected in that they felt this research topic was worth the expenditure of their very limited time, where others did not. Also, self-reported data reflects only the reporter's perspective, which may be significantly different from the experience and perceptions of others. According to Rousseau and Foxen (2010), whether intentionally or not, interviewees tailor their responses to a specific audience—the interviewer, and the interviewer's eventual audience. In this sense, the data here are specific to nine individuals at OSU speaking for a very short time to a certain interviewer during Winter and Spring terms of 2012. There is only so much a person can say in one hour, especially on such broad topics as empathy and identity.

The primary application of this research is to provide instructors with stories and examples of classroom empathy for further reflection on our own practice, particularly in examining unconscious processes of empathic communication toward our students, and developing our awareness of the social justice implications when we base empathy on academic identity. Participants' reflections and practices can help us to address some of the factors that affect our own communication and ways we can develop empathy with and between our students. There is also support here to

advocate for structural practices and conditions that promote rather than hinder our own and our students' ability to develop and communicate empathy in our educational environments. It is materially impossible to fully and accurately understand every student, to relate to every person we meet with perfect impartiality. However whole-hearted our intentions may be, our awareness of the subtle ways in which we participate in and perpetuate systemic inequalities toward some of our students will always remain incomplete. As these participants have demonstrated, connecting with students as fellow human beings is a never-ending challenge, and an engaged teacher is truly a lifelong learner in the school of empathy.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

I. Instructor identity

What are your avowed social identities in the classroom? [Participant may ask for a definition or examples of social identity, i.e. personas around gender, ethnicity, class, etc.]

How do you communicate these identities, verbally and nonverbally?

Do you feel any limitations or restrictions in the classroom setting, whether self- or externally imposed, on any aspect(s) of your identity? Are there ways in which any aspect(s) of identity are easier for you to express in the classroom?

(How) is social identity addressed in your courses?

II. Student identities

How would you characterize your classes demographically (e.g. age, gender, race, ethnicity)?

What are some of the ways you notice that students try to communicate their identities?

III. How do you define empathy? How do you relate empathy to teaching?

IV. Classroom communication

How do you see yourself expressing empathy in the classroom to your students, as a group and as individuals or subgroups? (Conscious and unconscious, verbal and nonverbal, positive and negative?)

What factors affect your communication of empathy (e.g. class size, course level and type (e.g. lecture vs. seminar), time of day/week/term/year, student behaviors, etc.)?

Thinking of empathy as an interaction, or a relational process, how do your social identities affect your communication of empathy to students?