

## Foreword

*“We return to our special problem, which is how the rigid character of past custom has unfavorably influenced beliefs, emotions and purposes having to do with morals” (Dewey, 1922).*

*“How do you un-think something you considered fact? Or, a question could be, ‘What does it mean to know something?’” (Adler & Iorio).*

This collection offers an invaluable contribution to the field of pedagogical studies and the exploration of social and cultural transformation. Each chapter offers careful analyses of particular educational settings, dilemmas, and challenges, while each is also rooted in a thoughtful and rigorous theoretical framework. The result is a one-of-a-kind collection that maps different understandings of “disruptive pedagogies” for educators and scholars in almost every conceivable type of educational space. The chapters reflect diverse international and cultural contexts, a range of formal and informal educational sites, and educational settings from early childhood to higher education, as well as dilemmas across sites of contestation—from personal identities in negotiation of classroom relations, to questions of educational policies and curricula that shape educational spaces.

During the 1980s when I first began looking for accounts of how emotion shapes and is shaped by educational dynamics and environments, the few scholars and theorists who recognized emotions in their social context were those writing about “feminist pedagogies.” Since 1999, when I first articulated “pedagogy of discomfort,” studies of affect and emotion have become increasingly popular within scholarly circles outside of education. Not surprisingly—as I will show here - neither education nor emotion has traditionally been considered a “sexy” area of study. In this brief foreword, I offer a broader context of how Western dualistic thought has structured our modes of thought and our lived experience of affect, emotion, and the habituated “common sense” beliefs that can be understood as the reproduction of hegemony or dominant cultural values. Two key and related “sites” where shared cultural values are produced are (1) education/schools, and (2) individual and collective consciousness/habituated ways of being and doing. While critical analysis of the sites of hegemonic reproduction is assisted by philosophies of feminist thought, Marxism, or post-structuralism, one need not identify with these theories to recognize that education and schools, and the terrain of habituated emotions, are “sites” where cultural values are systematically engrained and inscribed.

## DISRUPTING COMMON SENSE

When considering the disruption of habits and emotions as the foundation for social change, a central concern is how social custom shapes and molds cultural and individual beliefs and values, and how critical reflexivity can be introduced to “interrupt” what seems given or natural; “That’s just how things are!” is the status quo response to those questioning the order of the world. How do we disrupt what are called by some “hegemonic” or “dominant” cultural beliefs and values that work against practices of social change, freedom, and justice? Hegemony can be understood as the coercive control of norms and assumptions through inculcation and reinscription of so-called “common sense”—the unquestioned assumptions and myths that drive and uphold particular cultures, values, and hierarchies. To discover “hegemony” one need only examine the givens, the common-sensically accepted, popular, and ingrained truths about what is “normal,” “true,” and accepted simply as “how things are.”

These codifications of “common sense” present dilemmas and challenges to transformative education. To disrupt “common sense” is to challenge that which is taken for granted, that which is unnoticed like the air we breathe. The aim of “disruptive pedagogies,” it can be argued, is for all involved to develop the capacity to uncover the hidden implications of unquestioned codifications of “common sense.” More often than not, throwing into question our common sense views can be a deeply unsettling experience. “Being ‘uncomfortable,’” writes Adams in this volume (in press), “is a crucial part of setting the stage for change.” It is a fundamental inclination of human beings to form potent affective attachments to structures of belief and a corresponding reluctance to disrupt the comfort of that which is taken for granted. So-called teachable moments might well be defined as the moments in which learning and/or education and emotion powerfully intersect and clash.

Crucially, there is no one prescriptive mode of a “disruptive pedagogy,” in part because any given situation/relationship requires distinct and differentiated sensitivity and nuance; because the cultural differences and identities of those engaged complicate the entire enterprise of “transforming”—who gets to determine what counts as “transformative”? Who designs educational aims, values, and goals? As Costello notes in this collection (in press), “Where people’s lives are disrupted by their past, present, and unknown futures, educators need to be wary of inflicting additional risks and pressures by imposing Western concepts and teaching methods. Deeply held culturally prescribed beliefs and assumptions are not easily challenged or changed, for neither the outsider teacher nor the host country learners.”

## THE GENDERED CONSTRUCTION OF SCHOOLING AND EMOTIONS

Both education and emotion have historically been associated with women and with gendered forms of labor. Within Western cultural histories, persistent binaries inscribe misleading dualisms that powerfully define our thinking, values, cultural norms and social hierarchies, and resulting internalized sense of worth. These oft-cited dualisms include male/female, public/private, and rational/emotional. Across history and cultures, women are traditionally assigned as caretakers of the private sphere, which includes the domestic realm of reproduction of daily life and family. While men are expected/permitted to take up authoritative roles within the political and public sphere, women are held responsible for the quality of society’s next generation by ensuring that children—both in the home and in schools—adopt appropriate social values, roles, and norms.

Despite being expected to fulfill these crucial social duties of “raising society’s children,” to this day women are not rewarded for educational and emotional labor they perform: to point, every society across history and culture values and rewards men’s labor more than women’s. In the rare instances where men are responsible for schooling, in an “about face,” schooling is automatically more highly valued and better paid.

If the domestic sphere were masculine and not as thoroughly feminized as it is in most cultures, wages for housework and parenting might well be a *fait accompli*. Similarly, were it the case that men performed the *emotional* labor within sites of families or education, emotion would not have had the “bad rap” it has received over these many centuries under the gaze of Western Enlightenment traditions, values, science, and philosophies, as polluting truth with subjective and skewing bias.

It is noteworthy that the pioneering scholars and theorists of emotion have, by and large, been women. While progressive, radical, and critical pedagogies have long valued variations of what in this collection are called “disruptive pedagogies,” such pedagogies—whether rooted in the American traditions founded by John Dewey or the critical and/or Marxist pedagogical traditions inspired by Paolo Freire—have not dwelled on the centrality of emotion and affect as an integral and inseparable aspect of the subject and her processes of learning and inquiry. It has been largely feminist theories—and as mentioned above, feminist pedagogies—that have recognized and brought to the foreground the necessity of understanding emotion’s value in knowledge and learning. Much of the work on emotion and affect can be traced, in this sense, to social movements.

Feminist scholars also insisted that we understand affect not solely as an individual, private, or internal experience. The most radical development has been to show that emotion and affect are not merely private and internally experienced, but rather circulate much the way that Foucault shows us power circulates. Thus, emotions can be understood in part as socially-constructed rules and learned modes of expression that maintain existing gender roles and social order. These cultural myths about emotion rules include, “Boys shouldn’t cry; angry black women are dangerous; women are hysterical; men are naturally rational, et cetera.” In this sense, emotions and emotional expression and rules are intertwined with hierarchies of power. As well, in feminist accounts, affect and emotion are not defined as obstacles to thought, as our inherited Cartesian binaries would have it, but rather as valued sources of knowledge, aspects of perception and epistemology that need not be denied or siphoned off in fear of it polluting “Truth.” Emotions are understood as having a collective presence and circulation, rather than simply residing in a person.

Thus, to foreground the implications of emotion as part of the disruption of habits and dominant cultural norms reflects certain courage: the courage to associate oneself or one’s practices with a “contagious pollutant”—namely, emotion-- that dirties the “pure” waters of knowledge, truth, and scholarship. This bifurcation of emotion and reason that has long defined projects of knowledge and schooling perpetuates myths such as the idea of a neutral curriculum. This powerful myth of neutral curricula ensures hegemony.” Yet *no curriculum is neutral*: any educational project has an agenda, and what is not taught or discussed is as potent as what is. Absence and silence are in no way synonymous with neutrality. For example, a homophobic remark by a student in a classroom left unaddressed by the teacher is tantamount to approving homophobia. As Brunskell-Evans writes in this collection (in press), “I understand my ethical task as examining those aspects of teaching and learning that appear to be both neutral and independent so that the powers that are exercised obscurely are unmasked.”

What are we taught to care about, what are we schooled to value? When and how are we invited to reflect on the source of one's aims and aspirations, to question what counts as socially-condoned, valued, and accepted? What "matters" to us, and how do we recognize the source and implication of our investments in what matters? Dissidence requires dissonance, not just letting everything sail smoothly by; it's disquieting. Dissidents sit not in objective relationship to the regimes they oppose; on the contrary, they are subjectively engaged; they resist because what occurs disturbs - it matters to them.... Within the privacy of thought, democratic citizens will self-regulate, censor, and conform.

For these reasons, this collection offers a bold invitation to educators and scholars across the disciplines. The range of approaches to the question of "disruptive pedagogies"—pedagogies that seek to question cherished values and beliefs—creating space and opening for seeing how diverse educational settings provide opportunities to invite teachers and students to see the world differently. These are opportunities to disrupt habit, as Dewey would have it; to replace outmoded and even harmful tradition and custom with fresh insight and curiosity reflective of willingness to transform oneself and the worlds one inhabits in the cause of a more just and equitable world.

The taken-for-granted cultural conception that education and curricula are neutral is slowly being replaced with recognition of the ideological nature of any given schooling particularly formal schooling. How does one know one is not indoctrinating? Dewey responded that it is not possible to indoctrinate people about actual democracy, because the process of democracy would necessitate questioning all habits and directives.

The emotionally fraught instances of teachable moments exemplify the slogan of the women's liberation movement: "the personal is political." As Carpenter writes in this collection (in press), "In my own teaching experience, students and teachers alike find a critical interrogation of romantic love to be even more discomfiting than questions of race and sexuality..." Engaging the private can be uncomfortable enough; critiquing the personal can be downright disturbing, and no wonder.

The tight bond between habit and emotion has long been recognized not only by those seeking a more equitable social structuring, but as well by the most conservative interests of those invested in maintaining political and/or economic power. Shaping "desire"—indeed, manufacturing and creating "desires"—is a key aim of capitalism, advertising, and elite political interests. Such elite interests have indeed successfully shaped and produced the desires of masses of humanity for the past century, profiting on produced desires at the cost of human and environmental well-being and sustainability. Our task of disruption is in some sense more challenging than ever as we face the infinite resources of these dominant interests, who can afford to pay billions of dollars to public relations, advertising, and lobbyists. Such institutions are able to shape public opinion through complex and carefully designed orchestration informed by the best psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists working hand in glove with corporate and partisan political interests.

Yet at the same time, the work of disruption perhaps becomes increasingly viable and feasible, as the common-sense, mystification, and hidden truths and costs of dominant corporate and power interests become increasingly revealed appear as the emperor with no clothes. At the time of this writing, the Occupy Movement has become global—people around the world representing the 99% are protesting corporate greed, the bankruptcy of democracy, and demanding new and sustainable solutions to economic injustice. As Brunskell-Evans again writes, "Human beings cannot escape power, but what they can do is weigh up the costs and benefits of particular forms of subjectivity and decide collectively how to act at 'the limits of the self' or even transgress these limits at local sites of power" (in press). Indeed, the global disruptions and transformations underway in their commitment to a vision of a different

and sustainable economy, environment, and forms of governance are changes far from cosmetic but radical—and the practices of participatory, grassroots, and leaderless movement are indeed a call for a collective reevaluation of power.

Clearly, the publication of this publication is timely and apt. Given the disruption of dominant economic and political narratives currently underway around the globe, we are fortunate to have on hand an unusually thoughtful set of careful studies of the complex, yet inspiring challenges of disruption and transformation within educational spaces.

*Megan Boler*  
University of Toronto

**Megan Boler** is Professor and Associate Chair of the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She is Associate Faculty of the Center for the Study of United States and the Knowledge Media Design Institute also at UT. Her books include *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (NY: Routledge 1999); *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silences* (M. Boler, ed., Peter Lang, 2004); and *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008). She is currently completing a three-year funded research project, “Rethinking Media, Citizenship and Democracy: Digital Dissent after 9/11,” through interviews and surveys examining the motivations of producers of “digital dissent”—practices of digital media to counter mainstream media. Her Web-based productions include a study guide to accompany the documentary *The Corporation* (dirs. Achbar and Abbott 2003) and the multimedia website *Critical Media Literacy in Times of War*. Boler’s essays have been published in such journals as *Educational Theory*, *Cultural Studies*, and *Women’s Studies Quarterly*; recent publications include M. Boler, Guest Editor with Ted Gournelos, “Irony and Politics: User-Producers, Parody, and Digital Publics,” *Electronic Journal of Communication* (September 2008), and M. Boler, “The Politics of Making Truth Claims: The Responsibilities of Qualitative Research,” in *Methodological Dilemmas of Qualitative Research*, ed. Kathleen Gallagher (Routledge 2008). She teaches Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Feminist Theory, Media Studies, and Social Equity courses in the Teacher Education program and Media Studies at the Knowledge Media Design Institute at University of Toronto.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, S. (in press). Critical friendship and sustainable change: Creating liminal spaces to experience discomfort together. In Faulkner, J. (Ed.), *Disrupting pedagogies in the knowledge society: Countering conservative norms with creative approaches*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Brunskell-Evans, H. (in press). The new public management of higher education: Teaching and learning. In Faulkner, J. (Ed.), *Disrupting pedagogies in the knowledge society: Countering conservative norms with creative approaches*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Carpenter, R. (in press). Disruptive relation(ship)s: Romantic love as critical praxis. In Faulkner, J. (Ed.), *Disrupting pedagogies in the knowledge society: Countering conservative norms with creative approaches*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Costello, S. (in press). Coevolving through disrupted discussions on critical thinking, human rights and empathy. In Faulkner, J. (Ed.), *Disrupting pedagogies in the knowledge society: Countering conservative norms with creative approaches*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct* (pp. 63–64). New York, NY: Holt Publishing.