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Conceptualizing Empathy and Prosocial Action: Teaching Film within the Literature Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The experience of viewing a movie in the global era is multi-faceted. A viewer's response to a cinematic experience as Carl Plantinga explains in Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience is not only admiration for the aesthetics and techniques employed in the movie but also in the emotions aroused by the storyline. Audiences react to the story and characters presented with directed emotions by imagining either their mental lives and feelings or their situations. Empathy occurs within this framework of imagination where the audience engages with the story and character based on these directed emotions. The audience could not only empathize with the story or character by experiencing a similar emotion but also think about a similar situation they have experienced and attribute the emotion they experienced to the story or character. Watching a film such as How to Train Your Dragon (2010) would allow the instructor to help students sustain a coherent identity and find similarities with more and more diverse groups of people, leading to a reduction in prejudice while promoting an empathic identity. This facilitation of the development of complex identity-contents in the students based on universal affective states and life-conditions should result in them taking practical steps to alleviate the Other's suffering and engage in social change through empathic reflection.

Keywords: Film, literature, empathy, Self/Other, pedagogy

In a constantly changing world where popular culture inundates students with myriad images, there are novel forms of socio-cultural identities that are being generated. These identities represent the fluid patterns of immigration and underpin the ongoing global discussions on race, ethnicity, nation and citizenship. The conflicting nature of these narratives in popular culture regarding sameness and difference against the Other ensures that students inhabit a global space that interrogates their sense of Self while generating often contradictory emotions (such as love and fear) against the Other. However, the inherent need of human beings to create and sustain a cohesive and continuous sense of Self also triggers the necessity for them to reflect on what they may just have seen or read. Texts in popular culture like films present students with a space to engage in thinking while creating and sustaining a sense of Self, which also allows them to develop the critical skills that assist them in reflecting on daily activities. As Pablo Blasco and Graziela Moreto point out "Cinema is the audiovisual version of storytelling. Life stories and narratives enhance emotions and therefore set up the foundation for conveying concepts. Movies provide a narrative framed in emotions and images that are also grounded in the everyday universe" (25). Thus, films engage not only the linguistic registers of students but also the imagistic.

Teaching film in the literature classroom, therefore, allows for a critical assessment of the traditional pedagogies in order to aim for a radical, transcultural citizenry. As students view the film within the context of literary analysis, they are afforded the opportunity to experience situations and emotions that are novel to them. Through reflection on the responses that the viewing might evoke, students engage in perceiving, judging, and assessing not only the Other represented in the film but also their own sense of Self. This process of re-imagination based on reflection encompasses, as Keith Gilyard points out "maximizing various epistemologies, searching for transcultural understandings, opening up spaces for imaginative wanderings" (97). Structured around an appraisal of the contextual framework of identities as the Self/Other, the new pedagogy must understand and appreciate the multiple identities and perspectives present in film to result in prosocial action. The process of negating bias and prejudice based on identifying and judging the Other as the Self would stress the importance of empathy in human relations. Generally defined as a vicarious, spontaneous and sometimes unconscious sharing of affect, empathy as Martin Hoffman asserts is "the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible" (3). Including film within the literature classroom would allow for a critical interrogation of the socio-cultural and economic negotiations between various ethno-racial and cultural communities while attempting to alter and subvert the traditional power structure with the marginalized Other. Empathy, therefore, could play a crucial role in creating a student body that better negotiates the Self/Other divide and enhances their moral emotion, motivation and action.

EMPATHY: NEGOTIATION OF SELF/OTHER

Empathy is a multidimensional response to another person that can provide the basis for caring and acting justly in society. It becomes a crucial element in the creation of a transformative film-based pedagogy aimed at re-defining the Self/Other divide through the promotion of prosocial thinking and action. Martha Nussbaum in *Not for Profit* shows how effective educators and nation-builders understand that the arts and literature (which could also extend to film) cultivate what she calls "inner eyes"—the capacity of imagining oneself in the Other's situation. This is a capability, according to Nussbaum, which is critical to a successful democratic society based on the prosocial behavior of its citizens. Co-related to Nussbaum's understanding of "inner eye," Hoffman defines empathy similarly as "an affective response more appropriate to the other's situation than one's own" (4). More other-oriented than towards self-directedness, empathy is more effective in transforming caring into action.[1] Unlike sympathy, empathy can ensure that emotive feelings lead to

1 Suzanne Keen discusses the differences between empathy and sympathy in terms of their focus and asserts that "Empathy that

offering appropriate help rather than personal distress to the Other. Suzanne Keen, in her discussion about moral action, claims that,

> Prosocial behavior, or voluntary actions benefiting another, can be motivated by concern for others, by internalized values, by desire for rewards, or by fear of punishment. Typically only the first two motivations (concern for other and internalized values) contribute to altruistic behavior, and empathy often features as a first step in a process that expresses concern for others in voluntary action taken on their behalf. (16)

The transformation of empathy into prosocial action is closely connected to its relationship with morality, especially in terms of how the Self treats the Other. This relationship of empathy to morality becomes complex within a classroom that focuses on storytelling as students come in with pre-determined moral frameworks. Films as literary texts present multiple and sometimes alien narratives that are disparate from the students' understanding of actions, situations, characters, and thoughts. Exercises within the classroom that require the students to critically think and write about a non-typical situation and characters could engage them in ways that are viewed as hazardous to their sense of well-being. The inherent quality of a narrative text to lend itself to multiple interpretations by engaging imagination is closely linked to the sense of Self and the assessment of the Other. Therefore, any attempts at evaluating and subverting the ego-centric evaluation of the Other within the classroom must involve the cultivation and arousal of empathy in familiar and non-typical situations.

Indeed, instructors can be aware that empathy does not need to be a conscious response. As Elaine Hartfield, John Cacioppo and Richard Rapson observe, that primitive emotional contagion, or "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and consequently, to converge emotionally" (81) points to empathy arousal as originating from the Self's awareness of the Other from birth. Infants mimicking another baby's reactions reflect the unconscious nature of empathy. Hoffman also observes that "mimicry is probably hard-wired neurologically based empathy-arousing mechanism whose two steps, imitation and feedback, are directed by commands from the central nervous system" (44). This becomes especially pertinent while watching a film within the classroom, as viewers tend to react to events on the screen without being conscious of their mimicry. However, beyond this spontaneous affective reaction, the human brain is also layered over by more complex cognitive responses to the state of the Other. Empathic arousal also occurs when the Self mirrors expected responses and reactions in an Other who can sometimes seem remote. This becomes crucial when we analyze a viewer's (Self) reaction to a character (Other) while viewing a film. Viewers imitate the character's fear or triumph by mirroring their actions. A pedagogy focused on more complex cognitive processes could lead to empathic arousal even though the character is not physically present in front of the student viewer. Hard-wired into a human being's disposition to experience emotional contagion, empathy allows for the sharing of emotions and feelings. However, Keen also claims that "our personal histories and cultural contexts affect the way we understand automatically shared feelings" (5).

Situated within specific ideological structures, individual subjects also evaluate and react in culturally predetermined and predicted ways. The moral issue concerning the arousal of empathy concerns the parameters set according to the basis of judgement especially within films where the characters in the texts are distant Others on the screen. While evolutionary biology posits that empathic bias, or even identification, is based on sharing another's genes, psychology argues that individuals' judgements are based on their in/exclusion within their primary group. Hoffman points to the vulnerability of empathy to "familiarity bias" and "here-

leads to sympathy is by definition other-directed, whereas an over-aroused empathic response that causes personal distress (self-oriented and aversive) causes a turning away from the provocative condition of the other" (4). Empathy, thus, leads to more prosocial action whereas sympathy transforming into "personal distress" might inhibit actions that lead to change.

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and-now bias" where "[A]lthough people tend to respond empathically to almost anyone in distress, they are vulnerable to bias in favor of victims who are family members, members of their primary group, close friends, and people who are similar to themselves; and to bias in favor of victims who are present in the immediate situation" (14). Within a dialectic of difference, this becomes even more problematic when, instead of noticing individuals, categories are assigned and organized by race, ethnicity, nationality etc. Within a classroom where the film focuses on the Other and processes of marginalization, this bias is common as students are introduced to characters and contexts that seem non-typical. Such students might struggle to find any in-group similarity that would encourage them to view the Other as similar. Being separate from this Other, students could react with negative, inappropriate responses to the character's situations rather than with compassion. This results in what Diana Meyers claims as the process where "difference- the neutral fact that people look different, act different, and choose different affiliations- degenerates into "difference"- the censorious freighting of the facts of difference" (4). This 'generalized' Other, temporally, spatially and psychologically distant, becomes the basis on which the student reader creates an identity. For as Zygmunt Bauman points out, "the otherness of the Other and the security of the social space (also, therefore, of the security of its own identity) are intimately related and support each other" (237). The teaching of film, therefore, must negotiate a world of varied narratives of the Self and Other to lead to empathy-oriented reflections based on emotions which lead to prosocial action.

IMAGINED REFLECTION: BRIDGING THE GAP FROM EMOTIONS TO BEHAVIOR

Imagination is a core component involved in watching a film and having an empathic response to it. Milan Kundera in his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* suggests that empathy is above all an imaginative activity; it involves "the maximal capacity of affective imagination" (20). Imagination not only allows the reader to create the world presented in the narrative but also to identify the situations and characters within the plotline. The response to a cinematic experience, as Carl Plantinga explains, is "artifact emotions" where the audience is awed by the aesthetics of the film and the techniques utilized within it along with story-directed emotions. Here the audience reacts to the story and characters presented in the film by imagining either their mental lives (including imagining feelings that characters feel) or their situations and responding with directed emotions. As Berys Gaut points out "story-directed emotions include feelings of suspense and curiosity; character-directed emotions include fearing for them, getting angry at them, admiring them, and so on" (136). Audiences react, therefore, to the aesthetics of the film as well as the "representational emotions" aroused by the narrative. Focusing on the film's narrative allows not only an increased complexity in content but also could trigger further identification with the characters and situations.

Further, the images accompanying the storytelling are a powerful tool in highlighting important situations, characters and their corresponding emotions in accessible ways whereby students can identify them. This process of identification is the core of empathic response. Anne Friedberg discusses identification as

> that which conceals and defers the recognition of dissimilitude…The process of identification is one of denying the difference between self and other. It is a drive that engages the pleasures of sameness. If the subject is constituted in a series of identifications which force similarity, identification is one long structural repetition of this denial of difference, a construction of identity based on sameness (40).

Identification, to either an actual person or a fictional character, based on the negation of difference and a stress on sameness results in empathy towards the Other. This focus on sameness, however, could marginalize the unique identity of every individual that is crucial to identity making.[2] A response to characters or situations

2 Refer to Mark Bracher's *Radical Pedagogy* for further discussion on the typical characteristics of a secure identity.

that challenges a student's sense of Self t might reduce their empathic response to the Other. The pedagogy of teaching film must sustain the students' sense of Self as well as increase their identification with the Other to promote reflection resulting in prosocial thinking and behavior.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Choosing a film to include in a literature classroom which engages the students' ability to critically think about daily thinking and action depends on the degree of subtlety in the presentation of the relationship between characters, cause-effect relationships between action-result-reaction and the different emotions being expressed. Depending on the level at which the class is being taught and the students' knowledge, the film can be of varying complexity in how it transmits meaning. Students with a strong grasp of cinematic forms, techniques and ideologies would be able to analyze a frame with more rigor, as they would investigate the relationship between the characters and finally, themselves. Nonetheless, a film that focuses on characters with differing identities, perspectives and emotions would be most effective in highlighting the importance of re-thinking sameness and difference vis-a-vis the Other. A narrative that centers on the shifting relationships of characters would also engage students, especially if they are exposed to non-prototypical characters, actions, and situations. While a film with characters that resemble the students in the class would be effective in gaining their interest and immediate identification, the danger of the familiarity bias must also be considered. The characters, relations and actions within the film should encourage students to think beyond their familiar structures of experience while stressing some elements of sameness. The films included in the class could range from the classic cinematic adaptation of books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Wonder*, *A Little Princess*, and *The BFG* to fairy tales such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *Tangled*. Documentaries such as *Los Tigres del Norte at Folsom Prison*, *The Armor of Light*, *Kindness Is Contagious*, *Bully* and *Imba Means Sing* also present opportunities for the instructor to focus on the socio-cultural and economic negotiations between various communities and attempt to rethink the Self/Other binary based on empathic thinking.

The exercise outlined below is based on the first of the computer-animated action fantasy films *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010) loosely based on the book series of the same name by Cressida Cowell. The plotline follows the adventures of a young Viking named Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, son of Stoick the Vast, leader of the Viking island of Berk as he attempts to fulfill his destiny and become a hero. Deemed as weak and useless in imposing his will over dragons, Hiccup, through non-violent and unconventional tactics, befriends Toothless (formerly Night Fury), a dangerous but injured dragon. Together they form a bond based on empathic understanding as they struggle not only to establish their identity but also prove that dragons can be non-violent. Throughout the narrative, we see Hiccup and Toothless being othered and marginalized as they deal with issues of ethnicity/class and nationality as well as the negotiations that the characters must engage in to survive in their world. This makes the film a thought-provoking point of departure for discussions on empathy within the process of identifying the Self and Other.

The exercise outlined below is suitable for a 50-minute class at any undergraduate or graduate studies level. The level at which the class is being taught and the instructor's discretion would dictate the degree of difficulty in the diction of the exercise prompts and the ensuing discussion would vary according to it. These exercises include both a written component and a class discussion. The students are encouraged to express their views on the discussed subject as they engage with the film. The presented exercise is a miniscule example of the vast possibility of empathy-focused assignments that can be created to sustain secure, prosocial identities among the students. Instructors can create assignments and discussions based on mirroring, role-playing and perspective-taking where students are encouraged to engage in situations and actions that are

non-prototypical for them. When based on the close analysis of a film's linguistic (verbal) and imagistic (non-verbal) forms, these critical exercises could take the structure of journaling, class discussions, textual analysis, or narrative responses. The core requirement for an effective discussion and analysis of bias and prejudice must be centered on perceiving and judging the Other and Self within an empathy-based framework.

EXERCISE:

Prompt while watching *How to Train Your Dragon*: Watch Hiccup's face closely as he is trying to help fight the dragons and is constantly rejected by his tribe. Pay attention to his facial expressions (his eyes, brows, mouth). Also, focus on the other expressive cues that are there, for instance, his body posture, tone of voice, activity level (standing, sitting, or running).

Written Exercise- Part 1: How do you feel watching Hiccup's expressive cues? Do you feel distressed at his rejection? What is Hiccup feeling in this scene? Do you feel some of the rejection that Hiccup is feeling?

Class Discussion prompts for the Instructor- Why do you feel a similar distress as Hiccup, or, if you don't, why not? What in the scene aroused the feelings of distress/rejection or created a distance from Hiccup's situation in you? Would you help Hiccup if you could? What steps would you take? Describe the steps in detail. Would the same expressive cues in a situation outside the class also arouse the same emotions in you? Would you take steps to help them? What steps would you take? Explain your answer in detailed steps. How would you feel if you did or didn't help in this situation? Why would you feel that way? Explain in detail.

EXPLANATION:

This exercise is divided into two main parts: a written exercise followed by a class discussion. The questions in the discussion posed by the instructor follow the ones in the written part, which encourage the students to think sequentially in order to maximize their understanding of the distress reaction and cue pairings and analyze their own cognitive processing of placing blame and responsibility within the situation. The exercise has the students paying attention to Hiccup in a scene of the film which centers on his rejection and that most people would find distressing. In this scene, the tribe is in the middle of a dragon attack, and the help he wishes to offer is constantly refused. The film had already shown the impossibility of Hiccup's situation as he is marked as weak and unfit to be a fighting Viking given his stature and inability to perform certain tasks like lift an axe. Given Hiccup's narrative and the storyline, the students are aware that this denial of Hiccup's ability undercuts the potential of his being seen as a full-fledged Viking and hence his corresponding inclusion into the community. As he talks to Gobber, the village blacksmith that he apprentices with, the viewer sees that he has no other option presented to him that would allow him to show his valor. He is clearly the rejected tribe member who has been treated unfairly. Students usually "identify" not only the wrong done to Hiccup but also, to an extent, with his dreams and fears as a young man who is only a little younger than them. These conditions are crucial for arousing empathic distress on the part of the students. If the students perceive similarities, to a certain extent, with the Other and feel that a person is being deprived of something that belongs to them, they will be more open to responding to the distress with actual steps to alleviate it.

Therefore, the first part of the written exercise asks them to focus on the suffering of the Other and especially the emotive cues that express the pain. Paying attention to the face of the victim, his running in a state of panic, the pitching of voice along with the words and images of rejection might make the sadness and threat to Hiccup's sense of self very real to the student. The conditioning that they have had throughout their lives makes them respond to these cues of distress with a similar experience of distress. Therefore, the prompt for the exercise tries to focus the students' attention on their own emotional response to the cues. By matching the victim's expressive cues with their own affects, the students would be more able to process the distress-

relevant material in a similar manner to the Other. The resultant empathic distress aroused from focusing Hiccup's suffering and conditioning from a past distressful cue-affect pairing, therefore, may encourage the students to take steps to alleviate the suffering of the victim.

An important part of feeling empathy toward another is also, however, based on where the blame or responsibility is placed. If, for instance, the students, after watching the above-mentioned scene in the film, decide that Hiccup deserves to be treated the way he is because he is responsible for his own misfortune, then it is highly unlikely that they will identify and empathize with his character. For empathy to be aroused, the students must judge that the victim has been treated unfairly and therefore deserves all the help they can get. This is also dependent on the extent to which the student identifies with the character and whether the victim is present in the situation. However, the familiarity and here-now-biases in this exercise are reduced by the students' initial identification with Hiccup. Being almost in the same age-group as Hiccup, most of the students identify with his dreams and fears, which are universal. Most people want to eat well, play, and have friends. The students usually identify with these universal needs. However, this identification is compounded by the unfairness with which Hiccup is treated. The students feel bad for him. The class discussion, therefore, asks the students to analyze their own feelings of distress which may or may not match Hiccup's, and analyze what expressive cues were used to make them feel the specific affect.

The analysis of why they were feeling either distressed or indifferent in response to Hiccup's cues might give the students a better understanding of their own conditioning process which results in pairings of affects to cues. This is important, as a student who is secure in themself could be encouraged to focus more often on the cues that result in prosocial action. Moreover, they could probably also try to develop their ability to respond to even the faintest expressive cues from a suffering and make it a conditioned response. The ability to be aware and "read" the slightest of cues is a crucial development in the students as it further sensitizes them to another's pain. This also increases the opportunities for the student to engage in prosocial acts and help the distressed Other.

Therefore, the exercise further asks the students to map out the exact steps that they would have to take to alleviate the Other's suffering. This is an essential step for translating thought into action. As studies by Hoffman show, people only feel empathic relief after they have helped another. Just thinking about helping another does not alleviate empathic suffering. This exercise, by focusing on every minute step that must be taken to help another, provides a ready blueprint to the students for future situations. Indeed, the importance of coming with a "prepared mind" to a situation has already been discussed. As Jerome Singer and Peter Salovey point out, this is especially true for information retrieval in non-prototypical cases. The confrontation with a new or unexpected scene becomes smoother and less threatening if there lies in memory the presence of conscious scripts and schemas which can be engaged to reveal the consequences and implication of a present situation. This exercise will make the students think in advance of the ways in which thought can be transformed into action to help another in pain. Indeed, if a student's identity-component includes preparedness for diverse situations along with openness toward different perspectives, then it is less likely that the Self will feel threatened when one encounters new people or information.

The film can thus be utilized within the literature classroom to arouse empathic distress in the students and to subsequently pair it with Hiccup's. The exercise is based on the correspondence of the distress and expressive cues between the students and the character based on the students' own independent experience of distress. It can motivate the students to not only think empathically about the character but to also realize the commonality of many human experiences and emotions. If this understanding of common human suffering (and happiness) expands from the previously familiar members to the Others, then the students' identity will become increasingly inclusive and complex. Not only will they become aware of multiple scripts and perspectives, they will also be more open to new information. Further, the thinking and mapping of the actual

steps necessary for alleviating another's suffering will prepare them for future situations.

> "Imagining the Other": The Student and the Other
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> The ability to imagine vividly, and then to assess judicially, another person's pain, to participate in it and then to ask about its significance, is a powerful way of learning what the human facts are and of acquiring a motivation to alter them.
>
> -Martha Nussbaum. *Poetic Justice*, 91.

As evidenced through the exercise, students and instructors thus have to negotiate between dominant strategies which articulate the boundaries of authorization by bestowing a specific frame of reference or appealing to natural inclination. Analyzing individual obligation or interest, Mark Johnson in *Moral Imagination* asserts that virtually all the fundamental organizing principles- right, freedom, duty etc- on which choice is based, are metaphorically defined. This negates the tenets of moral law theories which posit that univocal literal concepts can be applied directly to situations. Most moral reasoning is, thus, reasoning based on metaphors. Further, contrary to traditionalist views of the signifiers, meaning and knowledge, linguists and psychologists have now shown that the schemas, narratives, and the systems of belief that underlie moral reasoning and give coherence to the Self are based on a structure of related and interconnecting metaphorical mappings that connect one experiential domain to another. In fact, "we understand more abstract and less well-structured domains (such as our concepts of reason, knowledge, belief) via mappings from more concrete and highly structured domains of experience (such as our bodily experience of vision, movement, eating, or manipulating objects)" (Johnson 10). Therefore, physical acts structure the abstract concept and give meaning to the relationships.

The converse is also true. Action is irreducibly metaphoric. Human beings conceptualize any basic action according to the metaphorical mappings that define one's sense of self. George Lakoff's study about the conventional metaphors that underlie the semantics and syntax of English found the existence of an enormous metaphorical system that defines an individual's notion of an event. Human beings, therefore, understand their personhood, relationships, institutions, communities, and groups along with their notions of loyalty, nationhood, right, duty, family, and so forth through their conventional metaphorical structures.

This is crucial for any attempts at changing, substituting, or introducing complex structures of schemas and scripts that redefine the relationship of the Self/Other and facilitate the prosocial thinking and action of students attending a literature class focused on film. A focus on the metaphorical flexibility of the identity component would give the instructors a basis for organizing their class, especially as these structures underlie not only a person's cognition but also their sense of social justice. Just as the mundane, automatic understanding of an event is structured metaphorically, a person's prosocial reasoning and judgment are similarly intricately tied up with metaphors. Films, through their ability to evoke emotions, provide familiar and easy access to varied experiences, which points to such a metaphorical flexibility.

"FEELING *WITH* THE OTHER": NEXUS OF LITERATURE AND FILM

For the pedagogy based on teaching film within the literature classroom, the metaphorical representation as the space of ethical change presents a possibility of subverting the Self/Other divide by questioning the very basis of the symbolic frameworks of judgement. The literature classroom with its focus on narrative analysis, more than any other discipline, allows the instructor the opportunity to include pedagogical strategies which lead to a re-thinking of the basic concepts and actions of the Self. As both concepts and actions are inherently metaphorical, the use of films within the literature classroom is effective in promoting discussions on non-

prototypical situations and actions where the students can imagine themselves in the shoes of the Other. As Kelly et.al state "Literature offers that kind of experience, uniquely activating our metaphorical sensibilities to the might-be-could-be in our lives and works" (67). The use of films in addition to the written word deepens the critical imagination of the students as they now engage not only in the linguistic registers of memory and experience but also in the imagistic. As Maarten Coëgnarts claims "we can distinguish between two general categories of form in which the embodiment of concepts may appeal to us, namely the category of form that is solely or primarily *verbal* in nature (for example, language) and the category of form that is solely or primarily *non-verbal* in nature (for example, film)" (5). Films engage the students through images as well as words. The same conceptual metaphors presented in language are transferred to images in films as meaning is structured similarly in both mediums, despite obvious ontological differences; where language is formal and symbolically structured, films reflect the reality it presents. Nonetheless, the image schemas that are activated by the application of formalistic strategies in films (editing, mise en scene, camera angles and such) resemble the conceptual and metaphorical structures underlying linguistic expressions. For instance, by organizing the composition of a frame, a filmmaker inherently creates meaning, which transforms with each shifting frame. The change in composition that becomes visible when Hiccup raises his knife to kill Night Fury but then gazes into his eyes subtly indicates the shift in his perception and decision-making process where he starts to hesitate. At that moment, through the changing frame, the audience is made aware of the internal struggle within Hiccup as he decides whether he should kill a helpless creature. When an instruction is able to engage both words and images, they can focus on this transmission of meaning through conceptual metaphors to rethink the relationship of the Self and Other. This interaction with both forms possible in a literature classroom would further engage the students' affective-physiological register and enhance their ability to find similarities to and empathize with the Other.

Indeed, the imaginative flexibility of metaphors underlying linguistic expressions and images also stresses the fact that there are probably no moral absolutes. For instance, Johnson asserts that "justice may be grounded on an image schema of BALANCE in two different cultures, but *what* gets balanced and what *counts* as balance in the two cultures may vary considerably" (194). The cultural assumptions that define morality highlight the possibility that while basic metaphors might be hard to transform, situating students within a new experience or having them encounter a non-typical case might alter their conception at a particular level. Further, the realization that multiple metaphors define a single complex concept thus makes it possible to extend the knowledge from a specific previous experience to a non-typical case. Multiple scenes within *How to Train Your Dragon* clearly present varied definitions of the word "courage" for instance.

This multiplicity is, therefore, especially crucial while teaching film within the literature classroom as Meyers observes that "it is not possible to refute [faulty knowledge about Others] with counterexamples or statistics…[because] empirically grounded arguments attacking propositional paraphrases of these figurations fail to make contact with their emotional underpinnings" (55-56). For the problem is not only that students reject evidence and argument but that this information is more directly connected to emotions. Any attempts at changing these flawed meta-cognitions must involve changing the emotional basis of the non-propositional forms of knowledge as well.[3]

CONCLUSION

The use of film within the literature classroom is, thus, well-suited for the creation of this new form of assessing, evaluating, and judging the Other in order to lead toward pro-social change. In general, the film

3 Research by George Lakoff and Drew Westen clearly shows how people's positions about social issues and policies is determined more by emotions than logical reasoning.

could present the absentee Other—unfamiliar and distant. The characters that the students view might be neither in their in-group nor present. Indeed, there is no need for the students to empathize with the Other presented in films. Moreover, students are increasingly finding it hard to maintain their secure identity in a world that is rapidly becoming diverse. Films by their very content could challenge students' core identity-contents by introducing and asking them to make connections with diverse realities. Students are increasingly focused on reestablishing their identities rather than finding similarities with the Other. This self-enhancement affects not only the degree of structural similarity that the students will perceive between themselves and the characters and cultures they read about but also their cognition of transgression and justice in a situation. Just as any harm to the Self is interpreted egocentrically, similarly any harm to a member of the in-group is judged with more empathic bias toward the familiar or present member. The Other in the situation is given less leeway and judged more harshly.

A pedagogy based on film and empathy within the literature classroom, however, attempts to reduce these biases by encouraging students to engage with novel material and discover similarities between themselves and the alien Others' affective states and life experiences. This allows students to empathize with another while being secure in the knowledge that they have a unique self which is different from the Other in certain ways. The focus on their similarity and difference from the Other counteracts the identity vulnerability that the students might feel if they were asked to identify completely with the Other in films. Indeed, when people who are secure in their sense of self face an Other who is suffering in films and can pinpoint similarities in their life-conditions or affects (with comparisons to their memories of their own past experiences and emotive responses), they empathize with this Other. This allows them to judge the role of the Other in the given situation in a manner that is similar to how they would judge themselves. If they decide that the Other has been harmed, they will be motivated to take steps to alleviate the Other's suffering and thereby reduce their own empathic distress.

As Lakoff points out, the persuasive power of language comes not from reason but from "frames, prototypes, metaphors, narratives, images, and emotions" it engages (15). And film by its very nature comprises these narratives and images. Instructors within the classroom can, therefore, appeal not only to the student's logic but also reveal the flaws in their knowledge of the Other in emotionally compelling ways. By using exercises as presented, here instructors can encourage the students to see alternate perspectives to their own. Further, the content in films provides ample material and opportunities to read experiences/identities which reflect collective concerns/beliefs and alternatives to them. A pedagogy, therefore, which focuses not only on changing stereotypes of the Self/Other by encoraging empathy by using film could lead to prosocial thinking and action.

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