WHY SHOULD I READ THIS?
THE REASONS AND PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS FOR A MULTIETHNIC LITERATURE CLASSROOM

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by

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Chapter I

Why should I read this?

The Reasons and Pedagogical Tools for a Multiethnic Literature Classroom

What is literature, and why do we teach it? To understand society so that it can be changed? Or to see ourselves and our world as a way of understanding human life and the society it deserves? Why read a slave narrative in a survey of the nation’s literature? To instruct ourselves on the inequities and suffering imposed on our fellows by slavery? To recognize that African Americans too can organize their experience and commit it to paper? Or is it for the sake of the narrative itself, to appreciate it in the context of human narrative generally, to expand our grasp of what we can suffer and create?

Richard Ruhland “Art and a Better America”

It is not uncommon for an ethnic literature instructor to have to defend the worth and the value of the texts included in the syllabus. “Why should I read this?” is a common question that most of us teaching in the field have been faced with. And it usually leaves us scrambling for an answer anywhere from a list of aesthetic and/or moral advantages from reading “different” literature to a defensive “why not?” The student’s
reactions, in return, are not always the expected avid enthusiasm for the material or the ideas.

The consequences of this lack are tackled in the conventional responses of redoubled attempts to instruct, interest, and motivate the students. As Mark Bracher points out, educators usually attribute this failure to appreciate the material “to [a] lack of cognitive ability or intelligence, or lack of interest or motivation” (xiii). The response is the “standard story” that Gerald Graff describes in Beyond the Culture Wars, “which implies that the business of teaching literature is basically simple: Just put the student in front of a good book, provide teachers who are encouraging and helpful, and the rest presumably will take care of itself” (72). However, the continuing student’s lack of interest in the classroom suggests that this approach is not working and that it is not enough to just provide new information. There also has to be a redoubled effort to teach differently.

The multiethnic literature classroom can, in fact, create an opportunity for the students to become not only active learners but also prosocial thinkers. Dee Fink defines learning in terms of lasting change that is important in the student’s life. I agree with this definition of learning. Learning must involve some sort of noticeable change in the student’s life which encourages them to interact with Others in more novel ways and develop new affective responses, cognitive representations, and prosocial motives. Teaching differently within the classroom must involve incorporating questions of social change. Students must learn not only how to engage in new kinds of intellectual and social actions by integrating different realms of their life (between school and life beyond
the classroom) but also understand the personal and social implications of their knowledge. The more they care about something (people, interests, or feelings), the more energy they will have to learn about it and take positive action that results in social change. Thus, when students learn something about themselves and/or about Others it gives them a new image of their self and a vision of what they want to become through interactions with Others.

This project formulates a pedagogy of multiethnic literature designed to enhance students’ prosocial behavior by supporting their identity development and security and by increasing their capacity for empathy. Prosocial pedagogy does this by supporting a secure sense of Self in the students and developing their empathic affects and motives within the classroom so that there is an alteration in their cognitive process to lead habitually toward prosocial change. Research by Damon shows that people are more willing to help another person if they can empathize with them and identify commonalities between the Self and Other based on universal affective states (happiness, sadness) and life-conditions (like birth, death).

An openness to finding similarities with the ethnic Other requires a Self who is secure in itself. A secure identity is characterized by certain typical qualities which have to be present before a person can engage empathically with new information. While some of the qualities are concerned with the intrapersonal process of maintaining a sense of Self, the rest are enacted in the relationship of the Self with the Other. “Consistency” refers to the integrated nature of the Self without which a person would have no sense of self. Simply put, consistency is the enactment of specific identity-components that define
the Self as a unique person who is different from another. “Continuity” is the sense of permanence of the essentiality of a person. It is not only the physical continuity but also the emotional and psychological persistence over time. “Distinction,” on the other hand, defines the Self in terms of difference from another. It is the experience of this quality that draws the margins and defines a person’s personality. However, the sociophilic tendencies in humans lead them to form groups. As Bracher explains, “…one’s sense of self is a function of one’s experienced effects on otherness: without at least a rudimentary effect on otherness, there is no evidence that the self exists” (7). Therefore, it is equally important to have a network of relationships with other people along with an essential sense of self for a unified identity. Finally, “meaning” comes from a feeling of mattering in the world through the relationships that people form with others. As Beck points out,

The experience of pleasure and pain [depending on whether the Self is being validated] reinforces our sense of personal identity, which is further consolidated by other people’s defining and rewarding or punishing us. As other people mark their boundaries, they also serve to define our sense of being separate individuals. (30)

An identity-supporting pedagogy has to provide recognition for these qualities in order to maintain the students’ secure sense of Self while bringing about lasting change in their identity-components to include more empathic, prosocial elements.

Empathy is defined here as the ability to take the space of the Other and occupy affective states more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own. Indeed, because of human beings’ ability to represent events and imagine themselves in another’s place
and the power of these represented events to evoke affects, people need to only imagine the Other’s suffering to feel empathic distress. Reading a novel, listening to an interview, or watching a video can evoke empathic affect that results in a desire to help the victim. Research by Batson, Klein, Highberger, and Shaw, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3, shows how reading a note or listening to a radio interview results in the participants feeling empathic distress for the people they read about or listened to and taking steps to help the victim. However, this process of identification is only possible if the Self is secure in its identity as a continuous, coherent, and vital agent.

Indeed, as Fink’s taxonomy of learning shows, pursuing one’s own desire and deepest needs results in empathy and caring for the Other, which is crucial for the student’s embracing the pursuit of social justice and prosocial action as a life-long goal. As the definition of the Self is dependent on the Other, the desire for a coherent identity in a person is closely related to the desire for the Other. In Lacanian terms, the Self is modeled through a constant exposure to otherness so that it shapes itself in the Other’s image or in opposition to it. The Other is a sum of all the unconscious desires and the Self’s own projection (mirror-image). Any hate or admiration directed at the Other, therefore, pertains to the affects directed to the Self’s own mirror-image in its efforts to fulfill its desire for the Lack. The Self desires what the Other represents to regain the original sense of wholeness (jouissance) that was lost with the entry into language and the symbolic order. Prosocial pedagogy attempts to transform the Self’s quest for fulfillment to reflect a desire of the Other’s well-being. If the empathic Self is more readily enacted and recognized for caring about the Other, then the Self would be closer
to fulfilling its desire for *jouissance*. The Other as such would become an essential
dimension of the one’s own identity. The maintenance of one’s own identity then
becomes dependent on caring and nurturing the Other. When a person one identifies with
suffers, the Self would feel empathy and become vulnerable. To counteract this identity
vulnerability, a person would take steps to alleviate the Other’s suffering and bring
empathic relief to the Self. Without caring about the Other, a person cannot pursue their
academic goal of social change very far.

However, there is a general tendency in human beings to sympathize with people
who live in the same culture and under similar conditions who constitute a person’s
primary group. This compassion becomes even stronger if it is toward a person one
interacts with frequently. Conversely, the level of caring greatly decreases between
people of different cultures who interact only rarely. A similar reduction in caring is also
seen if the claimant is not present in the immediate situation. Feelings of empathy are
weaker and the desire to help the Other is lesser than if the claimant is physically present
and Self can see the verbal and non-verbal responses. Students in the multiethnic
literature classroom are faced with a similar Other—alien and distant. The degree of
structural similarity between the students and the characters and the cultures they read
about is very low. Thus, empathy is vulnerable to the familiarity bias and here-and-now
bias.

These biases also affect a person’s cognition of justice and transgression. Any
harm done to the Self will result in affects of empathic distress, and/or anger and holding
the Other responsible for one’s suffering. Similar emotive responses are also felt by the
Self in incidents involving another whom one is familiar with or interacts with on a regular basis. On the other hand, people with whom the Self does not see any similarities are judged more harshly and in most cases held responsible for the situation that they are in. Any incidents involving a decision-making process to help another will result in cognitions that are self-enhancing.

These biases would not be a problem if a society was small and completely homogeneous with all members identical to each other in their physical appearances, systems of values, and beliefs. Then, people would not feel threatened from each other and empathize with all. People will help all other people. However, the world today for more and more people is coming to resemble a diaspora, inhabited by constantly moving and transforming populations. Modern travel and technology, by shrinking the world, are bringing different groups of people into close contact with each other. People do not live in a homogeneous world but are faced with a different Other constantly. Within the classroom, the student today is a citizen of the global “International Empire…made up of fusions (and confusions)” (Iyer 18). For a large number of students the world is becoming fluid, filled with “people who had grown up with many cultures at once” (Iyer, 18). They live in a world where they are constantly being barraged by different images and perspectives. If VHS is covering an Irish band, then the food network has a show on preparing Chinese food, and the commercial on Prime Time TV pans onto a Hawaiian panorama—the students are inundated by pictures and sounds of the ethnic “Other.”

These problems of bias can be reduced, I hypothesize, within the ethnic literature classroom when students are able to see similarities with the alien Other’s affective states
and life experiences, and to empathize with them while being secure that they have a unique self which is different from the Other in certain ways.

Indeed, when people who are secure in their sense of self face an ethnic Other who is suffering and can see 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 ethnic Other in the situation in a manner similar to how they would judge themselves, without the negative affects of the familiarity or here-and-now bias. 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. The whole cognitive process leading to action and change in a person’s situation (perception→ judgment→ motivation→ action→ change) is thus dependent on a secure identity that sees similarity and difference in its relationship with the Other.

This project, therefore, formulates a pedagogical theory for the multiethnic literature classroom that highlights the importance of maintaining a secure sense of self and the induction of empathy for enhancing students’ prosocial behavior. It also stresses the possibility that a secure, empathic identity can bring important changes in a person’s cognition (perception→ judgment→ motivation→ action→ (prosocial) change) to result in prosocial behavior. The aim of prosocial pedagogy is to describe the processes underlying the sustenance and development of a secure identity and empathy’s arousal and their contribution to social change through the reading of multiethnic literature.
Chapter 2 provides an account of how identity is central to prosocial pedagogy and how the different identity-components (images, affects, words) are enacted in the three registers of memory and experience (affective-physiological, imagistic, and linguistic) to either enhance or hinder the student’s abilities to find similarities and empathize with the ethnic Other. Since empathy and the willingness to help another, as well as a reduction of one’s prejudice and bias, depends on having a secure sense of self, I explore the process of developing a coherent identity within the multiethnic literature classroom. In chapter 3, the focus is on the importance of empathy and the processes of arousing and developing empathy within the multiethnic literature classroom. The aim is to help empathy become a part of students’ habitual cognitive process. To this end, the chapter presents strategies for helping students find similarities with more and more diverse groups of people, leading to a reduction in prejudice. I base my pedagogical interventions on the basic model of identity and general pedagogical theory presented by Bracher in *Radical Pedagogy*. Finally, chapter 4 maps out the changes that must happen in a person’s cognitive processes to lead to a reduction of their prejudice and bias and result in a willingness to alleviate the suffering of the ethnic Other. The fundamental requirement for this change is a secure identity that has the ability to empathize with an Other. The strategies of prosocial pedagogy not only enhance this sense of coherence and vitality in the students but also develop their empathic affects and motives to change their cognitive processing of an event in ways that promote social change.

The multiethnic literature classroom is especially fertile for this sort of pedagogical rethinking. As John Maitino and David Peck point out, ethnic literature is
“fundamentally unique” because “the cultural and historical context is so strong” (6).

Students read about and engage with cultures and people who are different and distant. Prosocial pedagogy provides the opportunity for the students to engage with the ethnic Others in new experiences and imagine themselves in the place of the Other while securing their sense of self by enacting their identity components.

**Traditionalist Versus Revisionist**

This pedagogical approach differs in important ways from current approaches to teaching multiethnic literature. The debate within the University about the need to include or exclude the ethnic literatures reflects the struggle to maintain an essentialist conception of the Self against the Other versus a more flexible relationship between the Self and Other. Traditionalists have used certain strategies to retain their sense of an inflexible Self. The first approach they have taken in attempting to maintain the student’s sense of a secure identity is to allow only the accepted canon to be taught in the University, since these works represent the values and beliefs of the majority Self. The revisionists, on the other hand, have struggled to change the body of literature in the curriculum to include more diverse and novel perspectives that give the students the opportunity to engage with different groups and experiences. The traditional canon, according to David Palumbo-Liu, is based “on a presumed set of accepted set of texts, each of which can be reconciled to similar aesthetic values (even as those values are modified in time yet anchored by the evocation of the same terminologies)” (14). On the other hand, ethnic literature attempts to encourage an ever-changing and fluctuating body of literature representative of different marginalized groups.
The traditionalists have attacked ethnic literature and accused the revisionists of attempting “to erase the values of the Western culture from the minds of the young by deliberately failing to introduce them to the history and literature in which those values are embodied” (Terry Teachout qtd. in Graff Beyond 19-20). The agenda of the revisionists is viewed by traditionalists as an active attempt to destabilize and change the centuries old status quo with a tilted social agenda. Frequently using the exclamation mark, Jonathan Yardley’s article in the Post is a reflection of this viewpoint:

[A]ccording to [current] vigilantes of the English departments, literary quality is irrelevant…To hell with Shakespeare and Milton, Emerson and Faulker! Let’s boogie! Let’s take courses in the writers who really matter, the writers whom the WASPish old guard sneers at. Let’s get relevant with courses on Gothic novels, bodice-ripper romances, westerns, detective stories—all of which, The Times advices us, “are proliferating” in the English departments.(n.p.)

Yardley, who is referring to a series of articles in various national papers about expanding the canon, expresses the panic that the right was experiencing in the advent of the revisionists. Indeed, a more realistic understanding of their fear can be gained from seeing their dismay in correlation to the increasing tilt towards diversity in almost all the fields of society. The reigning traditionalist belief was that the inclusion of the marginalized groups in the societal decision-making processes was the beginning of the fall of the ages-old structure of society and a threat to people’s sense of self.
To stem or moderate what was seen as the onslaught of an ideologically biased philosophy, the traditionalists revised their antagonism to a more flexible sense of Self and Other into subtler forms. They realized that a major dilemma for them in the ascendance of ethnic literature to visibility is the fact that in making the invisible group apparent, it also makes their literature a part of the dominant code. In other words, the increasing visibility of the minority sub-groups was making them a part of the larger normative society, making the Other more acceptable to the Self. People were beginning to see similarities between their life-conditions and those of the marginalized groups. The values and beliefs of the marginalized were becoming increasingly recognizable and acceptable to people from other groups.

Traditionalists responded to this challenge from the ethnic Other with the third strategy of promoting the view that ethnic literature is nothing but political, separate from the aesthetic. Lynne V. Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, wrote that “viewing humanities texts as though they were primarily political documents is the most noticeable trend in the academic study of the humanities today. Truth and beauty and excellence are regarded as irrelevant” (qtd. in Graff Beyond 20). Ethnic texts are seen only as political treatises that reduce everything to ideology. In ethnic texts, “truth,” “beauty,” and “excellence” loose their value and definition. Aesthetic standards attained flexibility in the experimental styles of the ethnic writers and lost all their underpinnings of respectability. Indeed, with no fixed definitions, ethnic literature became an easy target to be accused of having no standards or established truths, unlike the canon. This was also extended to the values and perspectives presented
within the ethnic texts. The belief was that if it was proved that ethnic texts represented only the biased beliefs of a group of people, then the readers would find it increasingly hard to identify with them. The subjectivity of literary standards underlined by a divorce between the political and aesthetic, therefore, became the starting point for the attack on the revisionist agenda.

This form of the traditionalist perspective becomes even more dangerous with the fourth strategy, in which the occlusion of the aesthetic in ethnic literature is supplemented by the claim that it is possible to get all the necessary information about race, ethnicity, class etc. from the canonical texts themselves. Ethnic texts are believed to present no new information that is not available in canonical texts. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explains this stance:

We can, in the spirit of contemporary theory, view teaching as an exercise in hermeneutics:

We reread our texts from the perspective of contemporary concerns. In addition, we can transform the entire focus of conventional courses by the themes we select. If one rejects all the pieties about the rise and triumph of the individual as the manifestation of progress and civilization, one can, for example, look closely at the tensions between freedom and authority for society at large: one can focus on the shift from particularism to universalism; in short, one can present the individual as the problem rather than the solution. (141)
This shift from particularism to universalism shows how the reader’s perspective and concerns can transform the message of the text to mean whatever he or she wants. This could be a dangerous movement which increases the hegemonic hold of the canon on the marginalized literatures. Claiming that “white male” writers write about the same things as the minority authors makes ethnic literature redundant: why should one read these minority authors when the established authors talk about the same things in aesthetically much more pleasing ways? And even if they don’t directly talk about the same things, it is very possible to do a hermeneutical analysis to find the universal human connections that all texts have. All the information that the Self needs on the Other can be found in the canonical texts, and there is no need for ethnic literature. This strategy allows programs to retain canonical courses and justify the continuing marginalization of ethnic subjects.

It therefore becomes very important to recognize the various obvious and subtle ways in which ethnic literature is co-opted and contained within the “othering” discourses. The traditionalists attempt to maintain an essentialist sense of self by engaging in practices that completely leave out the perspectives of the Other and give no opportunities for students to find similarities between Self and Other. Indeed, the traditionalist perspective actually deepens a sense of identity-vulnerability in the students by focusing only on the difference and threat from the Other. The focus only on distinctions might be a direct tactic or an indirect one and reflective of the traditionalist’s perspective about ethnic literature. Thus, ethnic literature must always be careful about its inclusion within the curriculum. While it may now have the visibility to comment on the
hegemonic dominant code from within it, there is always the danger of ethnic literature being assimilated into the values and paradigms of the dominant, traditional culture. As Palumbo-Liu points out, ethnic literature, “upon being bought in from the margins, looses its latitude as a counter-discourse and its ability to designate a shifting open space outside the hegemonic”(17).

Nonetheless, the gap between the commonplace and the ivory tower is inevitably decreasing with composition and feminist literary theories reflecting and bringing about change from the larger social sphere into academia. The force behind this effort has been a mixture of changing demographics inside and outside the classroom, the need for a skilled workforce, the shrinking of space and time, and unsettling new ideas in academia. Cornel West explains the transformation as one cultural formation confronts its antecedent:

During the late ’50s, ’60s and the early ’70s in the USA . . . decolonized sensibilities fanned and fuelled the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, as well as the student anti-war, feminist, gray, brown, gay, and lesbian movements. In this period we witnessed the shattering of the male WASP cultural homogeneity and the collapse of the short-lived liberal consensus. The inclusion of African-Americans, Latino/a Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and American women into the culture of critical discourse yielded intense intellectual polemics and inescapable ideological polarization that focused principally on the
exclusions, silences, and the blindness of male WASP cultural homogeneity and its concomitant Arnoldian notions of the canon. (24-25)

Challenging traditionalist thought, the heretofore excluded groups changed not only how and what was being included in the literature classrooms but also people’s personal concepts regarding the Self and Other and the values and beliefs they hold dear. This democratization and expansion of the canon to include texts previously kept out has alarmed traditionalists intent on holding on to centuries-old theories and practices.

Moreover, the premise that the University is the holding ground of honored traditions while heralding the new is slowly changing. The curriculum is now reflecting the developments and conflicts evident in the larger social framework. One such conflict is apparent in JanMohamed and Lloyd’s demand that,

> Because the dominant culture occludes minority discourse by making minority texts unavailable—either literally through publishers and libraries or, more subtly, through an implicit theoretical perspective that is structurally blind to minority concerns—one of the first tasks of a reemergent minority culture is to break out from such ideological encirclement. (7)

This conflict-ridden reflection of the society in the curriculum is especially pertinent today as the inability to understand the different cultures with their various rituals and customs is resulting in growing tensions between groups.

The identity-vulnerability of essentialist identities and the inability to see similarities between self and Other is one of the primary reason for the biases and
prejudices in this rapidly diversifying world. Thus, within this atmosphere of increasing interaction among various ethnicities, where identities are becoming increasingly vulnerable, it becomes essential to understand diversity while appreciating the possibility of similarity between individual people. Only then will it be possible to create a culture which is based on social equality and justice for all.

The traditionalist response to these contradictions that have slowly been accumulating as the University diversifies has generally been a concerted effort to minimize and play down the length and depth of the conflicts. Graff writes as follows:

Clearly, we still think of education as a conflict-free ivory tower, and the university tries to live up to this vision. While it welcomes diversity and innovation, it neutralizes the conflicts which result from them. This it does by keeping warring parties in noncommunicating courses and departments and by basing the curriculum on a principle of live and let live: I won’t try to prevent you from teaching and studying what you want if you don’t try to prevent me from teaching and studying what I want. (Beyond 6-7)

While this policy, which Graff calls “the amiable rule of laissez-faire,” allowed academia to painlessly add new subjects, programs, and texts and expand its curriculum, the increasingly diverse and novel forms of identities and socio-cultural structures now evident make it imperative to re-think the approach to diversity within the classroom.

Scholars in ethnic studies have responded independently to these problems. From the re-thinking of the generally accepted distinctions between the instructor and the student (“teacher-centered” or “learner-centered”), to the different pedagogical strategies,
ethnic scholars have attempted to transform the student’s dominant paradigms, which view knowledge as a fixed set of codes related to the primary group’s sense of Self and Other. These new pedagogies challenge the norms and rules generally accepted by the students and the University and attempt to present alternatives that embrace diverse Others more fully.

The Combat of the Pedagogies

The problem facing academia now, therefore, is that while texts about diverse ethnicities may be introduced in the classroom, students are usually ill-equipped to understand or comprehend texts outside their cultures and find similarities with the Other. The ethnic other remains the Other, separate from the student’s conception of self. This leads to their apathy towards not only the text but also the general perspective and the people presented in the text. Ethnic texts, especially, because they focus on a particular ethnic group, with their specific and unique narrative modes and metaphors, are often experienced as distant, unrecognizable, and disturbing by traditional American students. They are experienced as threatening to a coherent sense of self. Written from a different socio-cultural perspective, most ethnic literature is very conscious of the space it occupies. Authors describe the negotiations involved in being a minority and attempt to define consciously or unconsciously their relationship with the dominant culture. Marked by marginalization and fragmentation, these non-hegemonic voices are mostly alien to the members of the majority culture. Therefore, the question remains of how to make the diverse literary texts and values comprehensible to the students in the multiethnic
literature classroom so that they are able to find similarities while maintaining a secure identity.

One of the main trends in ethnic pedagogy has been to focus exclusively on the experiences and values of the ethnic group. People belonging to that group are seen as having similar experiences which are different from those of the people from the majority group.³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes the rise of this sort of pedagogy “in which we all occupy separate, different, and equally valuable places and where experience is defined not in terms of individual qua individual, but in terms of an individual as a representative of a cultural group” (195).

This ethnic collectivization is the basis of “minority discourse” developed by Abdul Jan Mohamed and Davis Lloyd, who suggest creating pedagogical strategies based on the similarity between ethnic groups as opposed to the universalistic traditionalist perspective. They argue that lack of institutional support of the “special programs” only emphasizes the marginalization and disintegration of the minority cultures.⁴ As a means of countering this repression, they propose that various minority discourses and their theoretical exegesis continue to flourish, but the relations between them remain to be articulated. . . . Cultures designated as minorities have certain shared experiences by virtue of their similar antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture, which seeks to marginalize them all. Thus bringing together these disparate voices in a common forum is not merely a polemical act, it is an attempt to prefigure practically what should already be the case: that those
who, despite their marginalization, in fact constitute the majority should be able collectively to examine the nature and content of their common marginalization and to develop strategies for their reempowerment.(1-2)

Minority discourse provides this polyvocal solution against the traditionalist model of development where all minority cultures are seen as being simplistic, with a single pattern of social development. As the political, economic, cultural, and ontological Other, the minority are defined and subjugated within this hegemonic metaphor of difference: Self versus Other. The students learn that I is not the Other—the identity of individuals is bound to who they are not.

As a result of this traditionalist thinking the minorities occupy only spaces of non-identity, where they have no sense of an active, creative Self. Minorities take the roles given to them by the dominant group *en mass*. Thus, all minorities become either “lazy,” “dangerous,” or “illegal,” despite the different ethnicities that they might belong to. Jan Mohamed and Lloyd attempt to provide a sense of Self to the minorities by stressing the similarities among the different groups resulting from their common history of marginalization and struggle against the dominant West. They want to create solidarity among marginalized people based on their common inter-cultural struggle against the dominant Other. This empowering minority discourse, according to them, is a prerequisite for any real progress toward social equality.

Nonetheless, through its assertion of this similarity among different minority groups, “minority discourse,” too, essentializes a specific ethnic or racial identity. Just as in the traditionalist view of identity formation as a simplistic binary negotiation between
the Self and the Other, the articulation of identity only in terms of similarity is based on the understanding of all ethnic experience as similar. While this results in the re-claiming of an identity separate from the subject position given by the dominant culture, it also negates strands of connection between the Self and an Other. Now, minority discourse separates the ethnic groups from individuals whom they view as belonging to mainstream or powerful groups. For instance, within this pedagogy all low-income Black women are seen as separate from all low-income White women. Similarities that might have arisen from comparable income range, neighborhood, socio-economic interactions, and cultural events are ignored. The essentialized focus on the ethnic self negates any possibility of finding commonalities between the different groups. The Self and Other are again completely separate from each other.

This distance created between the Self and Other by minority discourse deepens the separation felt by the students of the majority groups who are anyways feeling challenged by the novel and distant information presented in the ethnic texts. To maintain their sense of self, they may react by focusing on the differences between Self and Other rather than on the possible similarities. While within this pedagogy the students are being asked to focus on the similarities between ethnic groups, there is no attempt to create a connection between the majority student’s experiences and those of the ethnic Other. Majority students are learning that various ethnic groups have similar life experiences within an unjust social system. However, there is no attempt to teach them how to connect the ethnic Other’s experience with their own experiences and sense of Self. Indeed, without this ability to find similarities, the students might focus more on identity-
maintenance than on learning and empathizing with the Other. The ethnic Other can never become a part of the majority student’s sense of self in this model. Minority discourse, therefore, results in the same sort of hierarchization as that practiced by traditionalists, except now it is a particular ethnic group that becomes the center that “Others” the mainstream set.

On the other hand, the consequences of the assumption that the fundamental function of education is to educate the students into a singular, convergent literacy based on similarity is seen in E. D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy: What every American Needs to Know*. “Cultural conservatism” aims to promote a culture of communication by transmitting specific “traditional reference points of literate culture.” Consisting of a selection of words, facts, and traditional and civic concepts, this pedagogy is based on the “anthropological” view that human communities are all established on shared information and stresses that

> the universal fact that a human group must have effective communications to function effectively, that effective communications require shared culture, and that shared culture requires transmission of specific information to children. . . . Only by accumulation of shared symbols, and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community.

(xvii)

This focus on the “shared” is underlined by Hirsch’s acceptance of the assumption that the American points of reference are mostly biased toward English literate culture for
functional convenience. This leaves out all the cultures that do not fall within that definition. Moreover, this predominance of one culture is explained away as an “accident of history” with a claim for the advantages of similarity:

Our diversity has been represented by the motto on all our coins—E PLURIBUS UNUM, “out of many one.” Our debate has been over whether to stress the many or the one. If we had to make a choice between the one and the many, most Americans would choose the principle of unity, since we cannot function as a nation without it. Indeed, we have already fought a civil war over that question.(96)

The bias is clear in this statement: Hirsch assumes that diversity has to be diminished or at least moderated by a common thread of unity between the Self and ethnic Other within the classroom in order to create an effective, literate citizenry. Thus, with this push toward a cultural convergence that would lead to a united citizenry, “cultural conservatism” eliminates the space for difference. Instead, it promotes an either/or choice as the core of the educational system. Unfortunately, the bias is for a dominant cultural perspective, and anyone not included in that group is marginalized and left voiceless.

Students thus learn only the established “reference points of literate culture.” The values, beliefs, and influences of the sub-groups that do not form the majority are ignored within this pedagogy. While this supports the identity of the students belonging to the dominant culture, it does not encourage an understanding of the ethnic Other based on commonality of experiences and affective states. Without this awareness of similarity it is
highly unlikely that the students will be motivated to see similarities with the Other and empathize with more and more diverse people to lead to prosocial change.

To counteract this weakness in pedagogies, Gerald Graff attempts to develop a pedagogy based on the principle of difference: “teach the conflicts.” It looks at perspectives presented in the texts which are based on difference life-experiences of separate ethnic groups instead of just focusing on the similarities within the groups. This pedagogy attempts to broaden cultural and racial understanding within the classroom by involving the students in “the conflicts occasioned by new interests, ideas, constituencies” (Beyond 10). Graff argues that “the best solution to today’s conflicts over culture is to teach the conflicts themselves, making them part of our object of study and using them as a new kind of organizing principle to give the curriculum the clarity and focus that almost all sides now agree it lacks” (Beyond 12). Students are encouraged to look at conflicting viewpoints and analyze the differences along with the strands of commonality between the different groups. The discussion attempts to expand the student’s narrow understanding of the binary process of identity formation (Self versus Other) to include more diverse sub-groups and perspectives. However, while this enables Graff to negotiate a culturally diverse framework, he nonetheless acknowledges and accepts the existence and continuation of a binary structure of reference:

Numerous teachers, departments and colleges . . . have recognized the need to see the connections between the different interpretations, ideas, and values in the curriculum if they are to enter actively into academic discussions. . . . These teachers pick up at the very point at which today’s
disputes have become deadlocked. They assume that there is something unreal about the either/or choice we have been offered between teaching Western or non-Western culture, that in a culturally diverse society, a wide range of cultures and values should and will be taught. (Beyond 14)

The acknowledgment of the existence of established binaries within society is crucial to fully understand the cultural formation of identities and bring about change in the established structures of power. Indeed, the definition of the Self is based on the negative delineation of characteristics (I am not White, I am not a woman). However, it is equally important to supplement the recognition of difference with an acknowledgment of commonality (We are all Asian, We are all men). Indeed, the danger in Graff’s acceptance of the either/or position is in the fact that the consequences of this argument are seen not only in academia but in society at large. Indeed, this either/or perspective which focuses on difference between the Self and Other tends to crystallize the very cultures and values it celebrates into fixed, univocal voices. Thus, the celebration of St. Patrick’s Day as an exclusively Irish festival versus Diwali as a quintessentially Indian festival deepens the differences between the cultures and can result in essential identities for the members. The discussion on connections, therefore, becomes underlined by a deep dividing line of essentialized differences between the Self and ethnic Other.

JanMohamed and Lloyd point to the processes through which pedagogies based only on difference (such as “teach the conflicts”) become a “spectacle”:

The pathos of hegemony is frequently matched by its interested celebration of differences, but only of differences in the aestheticized form
of recreations. Detached from the site of their production, minority cultural forms become palatable: a form of political struggle like *capoeira*, a form of defense developed by Brazilian slaves whose physical movements were severely restricted by chains, becomes recuperable first as a Hollywood spectacle of break dancing and then as a form of aerobics.

(5)

If the students are not introduced to the possible strands of commonality between the self and Other that do not result in conflict, then they are only being given a limited view of an event. For instance, if they only read texts about the negative aspects of slavery without the many stories of kindness, caring, and bravery, then they will be only aware of human cruelty. The positive aspects of humanity, such as empathy, will be completely lost.

Moreover, within this dialectics of difference, prosocial learning becomes even more problematic when, as Mohanty points out, instead of noticing individuals, humanity is organized according to categories based on race, ethnicity, sex, and so on. Homi Bhabha’s conceptualization of the colonial ”subject” as a heterogeneous assemblage of essential cultural and social texts who is “overdetermined from without” can be extended to the perception of the ethnic Other. The ethnic subject within this pedagogy undergoes what Diana Tietjens Meyers describes 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” (“Emotion” 4). There is no space where students can understand and see similarities with the Other. The
physical and material conditions of an Other’s life (such as physical appearance, gestures, and choice of food) are seen as the defining factors of their identity with very little attempt from the Self to look beyond these and find similarities of affective states and experiences. Thus, though the “teach the conflicts” philosophy argues that multiethnic texts should be taught at the “points of intersection” (15) with the dominant culture, it ignores the commonalities among diverse ethnic groups that would allow the students to see similarities with their life experiences and identify with the Other. Instead, like the traditionalist discourses, it essentializes the Western and non-Western literary cultures.

David Palumbo-Liu’s “critical multiculturalism” resists the traditionalist appropriation of texts through the processes of essentialism by “reinstat[ing] the cultural politics of reading and interpreting literature” (18-19) to gain a sense of how different socio-political negotiations (i.e., gender and sexuality) have occurred in a history of cultural formations (i.e., ethnic relations). By centering on the way an individual’s multiple social positions are formed, sustained, and displaced, this pedagogy attempts to view the texts of a certain group as a “complex” sign, the result of cultural transformations which “turn the specifying or localizing process of cultural translation into a complex process of signification” (Bhabha “Freedom’s” 47). Instead of just accepting a passive subject position for the ethnic Self, Palumbo-Liu insists on a more active role where minorities create and define their own spaces of action and relationships with others. The simplistic either/or binary of Self/Other becomes more complicated within this pedagogy. By focusing on how the minorities negotiated the various cultural transformations (migration, displacement, diaspora, globalization, and so
on) and the claims these transformations made on them (for instance, of race and class),
critical multiculturalists aim to obtain a sense of the history of the politics of inclusion.

Since most people have undergone similar cultural transformations and respond to
them in a comparable manner, a pedagogical focus on these processes of identity
formation would allow the students of the dominant culture to match their life
experiences and affective states with those of the Other. Palumbo-Liu cites S. P. Mohanty
to trace out the common ground between cultures:

But the question of competing rationalities raises a nagging question: how
do we negotiate between my history and yours? How would it be possible
for us to recover our commonality, not the ambiguous imperial-humanist
myth of our shared human attributes . . . but, more significantly, the
imbrication of our various pasts and presents, the ineluctable relationships
of shared and contested meanings, values, material resources? It is
necessary to assert our dense particularities, our lived and imagined
differences; but could we afford to leave untheorized the question of how
our differences are intertwined and, indeed, hierarchically organized? (18)

The pedagogy stresses the importance of focusing both on similarities and differences
between the Self and Other as a means of making sense of the human experiences of
each. By centering the discussion on the history of social inclusion/exclusion, the
pedagogy presents the uniqueness of every group’s socio-cultural experiences. Likewise,
the ethnic texts created within and in reaction to the governing principles must be studied
and interrogated not only as the margin but also in to the context of the relationships that
shaped them. By extending the field of interrogation to include the accepted ideologies along with the minority discourses, critical multiculturalism addresses the problematic of “mainstreaming” by resisting the urge to focus only on a specific cultural or ethnic dialectic.

Its focus on cultural transformations, however, elides the unique life experiences of the individual. Ethnic groups are viewed *en masse* as undertaking socio-political negotiations in attempts to maintain their sense of self. Palumbo-Liu’s focus is group identity, not the personal experiences of the individual. While this is a valuable strategy to re-claim agency for a minority group, it does not lead students to connect and empathize with the Other based on their own personal experiences.

The pedagogies discussed here which reflect the main trends in dealing with the question of negotiating the Self-Other relationships mostly focus on either the Self or the ethnic Other as a defining principle. They stress either intra-group similarities or intra-group differences. Though there are feeble attempts at creating a pedagogy that is not based on essentialized identities for the Self or Other, there is no comprehensive theory that is based on both similarities and differences between Self and Other.

Indeed, the danger of providing recognition to only the unique self (as the surveyed pedagogies do) with no attempts at finding similarities with the Other makes the Self vulnerable. A narrow conception of Self results in an overinvestment in the self’s existing identity components. This is dangerous because if the Self is not recognized or cannot enact those identity components, then it feels threatened and occupies affective states that are not conducive to personal well-being or to feeling empathy. Instead of
trying to see similarities with the Others, the Self is invested in reinstating its sense of coherence. Moreover, the identity vulnerability limits the engagement with novel experiences and people, which could provide a better understanding of the Other and which, as we have seen, is crucial in accepting and enhancing one’s own identity.

The presence of the ethnic Other is a fact, and the full acknowledgement of that fact might be the problem. “The comic reality,” as Richard Rodriguez points out, is that “America is wildly, if reluctantly, multicultural” (3). The key to the problem might just be found in this reluctance. Is it possible that, despite the doomsday intellectual laments concerning the failure of the traditional educational system, the problem might have a simple solution? Could it be that the reason students question the legitimacy of ethnic texts within the classroom is because they want to know precisely why—why should I read this? What interest is it of us to spend time on novels, poems, and films which present a reality far away from the one I have to face daily? What makes this better than that? Why should I read this?

Why Should I Read This?: Prosocial Pedagogy’s Answer

The answer to this question can be found in the involvement of the student’s self in the experience of learning. As was explained earlier, the need for a coherent identity in a person is closely related to the desire for the Other, the Self’s quest for fulfillment reflects a desire for the Other’s well-being. The Other as such becomes an essential dimension of the Self’s identity. The maintenance of one’s own identity becomes dependent on caring and nurturing the Other. Prosocial pedagogy thus gives the students a new vision of not only themselves (self-image) as a caring, empathic person but also of
others as similar to themselves. And it is only with this understanding of themselves and others that they will care about something to a greater degree or in a way they never did before.

Why the I? Prosocial Learning’s Focus on the Egocentric Self

Ethnic scholars have reached a general consensus to view education as “a dialogic process of cultural analysis rather than the static transmission of information” (Alberti xix), which involves the students in a process of their own knowledge-making. While the acquisition of foundational knowledge is a crucial learning goal, it is also equally important to develop in each individual student the critical, creative, and practical thinking and skills required to actively engage with new ideas and texts and recognize the social and personal implications of that intellectual practice. It is only then that they will understand the process of learning and become life-long learners. This would also allow them to learn something about their own Self. Indeed, this can be the primary reason for students wanting to learn. Prosocial pedagogy, by focusing on the “I,” engages students’ attention by focusing on their issues, problems, and interests. And, when students gain knowledge and feel secure in their selves, they are more open to learning about the Other. This enables them to be more effective within society and work toward social change. By realizing the connection of education to the real life that they lead, they are able to discover the personal and social implications of their thoughts and actions. An understanding of themselves results in a better comprehension of why and how other people act in certain ways. In fact, Fink points out that “significant” learning is usually an integration of students’ ability to understand and remember specific information and
ideas with learning how to engage in new forms of action, feeling, and/or values about self and Other both inside and outside of the classroom. Prosocial pedagogy’s focus on the student’s Self makes this act of making new connections between realms of ideas and/or people possible. This is a necessary step toward learning something about their own self and acting more empathically toward the Other possible.

Moreover, social problems like prejudices, biases, and abuse have been clearly shown within clinical research to stem from the egocentric monitoring of events and people. People are constantly monitoring events and relationships to ascertain their significance to the self. Beck’s research shows how the anti-social actions can be traced to the identity vulnerabilities exhibited by the perpetrators who need to demonize the Other to bolster their own sense of unified Self. Students might feel a similar threat in relation to the ethnic Other of the multiethnic literature texts. The feeling that one is helpless, open to danger, and trapped results in the students reacting with hostility and exaggerated anger toward the Other. Usually, the perceived threat is out of proportion to the actual transgression. Nonetheless, the desire to either escape or remove the threat is so great in people that researchers like Barash believe that revenge-taking is innate to human being, resulting from evolutionary pressures. The fundamental nature of the survival instinct cannot be denied. As Beck points out, “The patterns are primal not only in the sense of being basic but also because they probably originate in primordial times, when they would have been useful to our animal and human ancestors in dealing with dangerous problems with other individuals or groups” (31).
Preserved from primal time, human beings monitor events and people egocentrically. In interpreting the information about the surrounding events and the ethnic Other, the self is constantly reviewing the place (or, respect, importance, admiration, centrality, etc.) given to itself in relation to the Other. Even the degree of harm that the Self and Other suffer influences the decision-making process. The familiarity bias and the here-and-now bias in helping another person point to a similar process of egocentricity: one is more willing to help people who are familiar and/or immediately present in the situation. Prosocial pedagogy is based on this knowledge that signals and information are interpreted, or misinterpreted, according to the centrality, profit, responsibility, degree of harm, or cost to the Self. By being aware that students identify with Others dependent on the investment required of the Self and degree to which their identity is secure, the instructors can take steps early on in the structuring of their exercises and content-selection to counteract the biased reading that can result from the prejudices.

This evolutionary habit of constant vigilance and fear of injury to the Self also contributes to cognitive biases like cognitive conservatism and beneffectance that people display. In general terms, cognitive conservatism is seen in people’s tendency to cling to well-established and repeated concepts of the Self that they have developed since childhood. Therefore, if one’s concept of the Self includes signifiers like “stoic,” “manly,” or “strong” then the Self will tend to return to them, especially if there is a threat to their identity, rather than alter or substitute them for other signifiers. These identity-contents which give a person their sense of Self and Other and provide the
structural basis for any action have been developed since childhood. Obviously, people also construct new identity-contents over their lifetime. However, these schemas and scripts usually are comparative to the established contents and sustain the Self’s identity in a similar manner. Singer and Salovey propose that “a major function of ongoing conscious thought streams, and, indeed, of time spent recalling nocturnal dreams (in daily life as well as therapy), may reflect a continuing effort at construction of new schemas or strengthening of established ones about the self” (51). Cognitive conservatism can be seen in students’ return to their core identity-contents when they feel threatened in any manner in the class. So, a student who identifies himself as “Irish” in a challenging situation would cling more to that identity-marker. This would not only maintain and enhance the student’s sense of Self but also define any new situations to make sense of the present. Indeed, research has found that people would rather cling to familiar scripts that are shameful to their sense of self than desert them in the face of new material.

Indeed, this seeking of analogues to old scripts in the novel contents might lead to the perpetuation and reiteration of the student’s biases and faults. Within the multiethnic literature classroom it is crucial to recognize the role that the different perceptual biases play in the behavior and attitudes of the students toward the ethnic Other. Careful attention to the interpretations made by a student can point to recurrent patterns in thinking. For instance, if a Black student reads racism into every text, he or she may have an over-developed sense of racial prejudice. While it is important for the students to be aware of the distinction between the Self and the Other along with the possible biases which may arise from this differentiation, the dependence on inflexible identity-
components might hinder their ability to experience new incidents or emotions.

Instructors also need to be aware that for some students all new information might be tinged with their personal bias leading to a misinterpretation of situations in texts and life. Prosocial pedagogy’s focus on the Self, however, would allow opportunities for the students to recognize, interpret, and possibly substitute or alternate the harmful identity-contents with contents that entail less harmful actions. While this is a Herculean task to be undertaken within one semester, instructors can at least introduce alternative narratives to the ones previously held by the students. For instance, to present different “readings” of sexuality and ethnic identity, instructors can include Cherrie Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years*, Walker’s *The Color Purple*, and Wong Kar-Wai’s *Happy Together* in the class. These new narratives while presenting a different reading of an event, however, have to also support the student’s identity in a similar or enhanced manner as the old scripts. Otherwise there is a possibility that the students will retreat in panic from the novel information. This can be done by giving opportunities for the students to enact and be recognized for their core identity-contents. Nonetheless, the substituting of these narratives is essential for minimizing or negating the biasing effects of egocentricity, which hinders openness to new information.

The other bias is benefecctance, which refers to the tendency in people who feel threatened to shift their thoughts toward remembering situations which enhanced their sense of Self and create feelings of well-being in the present. This retrieval of identity-enhancing memories and affective states reestablishes the Self and reduces the identity-vulnerability from the threat. Kihlstrom’s study shows that people whose identity is being
challenged recall more successes than failures. Indeed, there is considerable proof in Alloy and Abramson and Langer’s studies that human beings display “illusionary control.” This is a reflection of beneffectance where people will attribute positive outcomes to themselves in what were actually chance performances on their part rather than conscious acts. For instance, students working in groups sometimes take credit for work that they themselves did not do. This creates a distancing from the present situation and might hinder the student’s ability to fully analyze and focus on the Other or Other’s situation. The result can be a misinterpretation of the situation and a reduction in the actions to help another. But, on the positive side, this bias can be used to help students focus on positive recall when they feel challenged to help them act or perform well within the class rather than focus on reestablishing the Self. This would not only raise their self-esteem but also act as a motivation to keep doing well. Positive reinforcement from the instructor plays a crucial role in this recall. The memory that if “we do our work, then we are rewarded” helps to make students want to do well, not only for the grade but also for the positive support to their self-esteem. The recognition can become a part of their repertoire. In fact, Singer and Salovey place an even greater onus on the cognitive bias of beneffectance in that it “may help us keep our “sanity” in a dangerous chaotic world, a gift, like hope from Pandora’s box, not available to the clinically depressed” (51). This might be especially useful in the multiethnic literature classroom where the students might feel constantly challenged.

Egocentricity is therefore not just a mixture of arrogance and inward-looking attitude but also relates to the support and safety of interests vital to the sense of self.
Prosocial pedagogy by focusing on the Self and its relationships to the ethnic Other attempts to not only maintain and enhance the student’s secure identity but also substitute the negative, anti-social identity-contents with more beneficial, empathic elements which are more readily enacted and supportable so that the Self is more willing to help another.

**A Secure Sense of Self: Recognition**

Indeed, recognition and the opportunity to enact one’s identity are the essential requirements for a person’s psychological well-being and sense of secure self. Recognition is necessary for one’s own conception of the Self. Tingle asserts that “fundamentally, elementally, and basically, one wants to be recognized” (110). In fact, Todorov goes even further and claims that for this principle of recognition “there is no price we are not prepared to pay to obtain it. . . . The need to be acknowledged is not just one human motivation among others; it is the truth behind all other needs” (Facing 15-16). The need for recognition is thus not only a prerequisite for identity sustenance but also a prime motivator in most of the actions taken by people.

In fact, human beings will do anything to achieve that recognition for themselves. Instructors need to use this knowledge in motivating students to become empathic, prosocial thinkers and activists for social change. Positive reinforcement can play a crucial role encouraging a student to be involved in the prosocial learning process and see similarities with the ethnic Other. If the students’ identities are being recognized within the classroom, it would make them more secure in themselves and less threatened by new information and people. Thus, instructors have to recognize the student’s identities, especially their attempts at becoming better citizens of the world. The memory of the
recognition might make the students’ more encouraged to continue their prosocial efforts in the future. This is especially pertinent if the students’ think of themselves as good people. Houston’s model of a person’s conception of a Self is pertinent here. According to him, people have cognitive representations that correspond to an “actual self,” an “ideal self” (which contains one’s aspirations and hopes), and an “ought self” (which consists of one’s duties and obligations). While discussing self-discrepancy, Houston asserts that specific emotional distress results from the inconsistency between the actual self and ideal self or actual self and ought self. This discrepancy is based on the definition that the subject has of the self. The level of consistency between who the person wants to be and who the person is becomes dependent on the recognition he/she receives from other people. With the degree of recognition received, the adequacy of the sense of Self either increases or decreases, thus affecting the behavior and emotive states of that person. Instructors have to be aware that students are constantly attempting to create a consistency between the different senses of the Self.

The strategies used within the classroom can be structured so that they encourage students to have a prosocial ideal image and connect them to their habitual actions and responsibilities. If being a “caring” person starts involving a sense of obligation to help someone in pain, then the student will be more motivated to act prosocially. Further, taking actual steps to alleviate the suffering creates a consistency between all the three representations. Reinforcement from the instructor and peers for doing good not only reinforces students’ sense of Self but also motives them to act in a similar fashion
throughout their life. The anticipation of recognition and the feeling of happiness in helping another can thus be a prime motivator of students’ behavior.

Moreover, research shows that most people do not think of themselves as simple human beings but rather as a certain sort of good human being. There is a distinct biasing effect toward the goodness of the Self in the interpretation of any material. Indeed, every person is biased about his or her own goodness and relevance. Thought sampling studies shows the high level of self-relevant material which mostly includes positive daydreams or planning and “current concerns” of unfulfilled intentions that occupies every person’s ongoing thought. Constantly rehearsed, this material points to the sort of person one wants to be (ideal self). Usually that sense of Self consists of characteristics that are deemed positive within society. Indeed, a lot of learning is derived from students’ efforts to present themselves as intelligent, smart, or good people. The motivation is usually to impress the instructor and/or the peers and secure positive reinforcement for one’s self-definition. Of course, there are exceptions where people build their identities on negative attributes—for instance, gang members who want to be perceived as violent and aggressive. Such “negative identity” (Erikson), based on identification with anti-social values and behaviors, can be seen in students who are disruptive in class or refuse to learn and participate. Usually labeled the “bad kid” in the class, these students usually actively attempt to typify that role. The inclusion of these anti-social attributes in identity is usually a result of a failure to gain recognition for positive characteristics. When people do not get validated for positive attitudes, they take over negative ones. Connecting it to psychoanalysis, Bracher explains, “Recognition in the form of
disapprobation positions one as what Lacanian psychoanalytic theory refers to as the object a, a factor that is excluded from the social-symbolic order in general, or from a specific system (such as the education system, a knowledge system, the economic system, or the system of morality or propriety)” (10). Nonetheless, even these students need recognition. Moreover, this definition is based on a certain opposition to a particular negative sort of character. Rorty explains that for people “it is crucial for their sense of who they are that they are not an infidel, not a queer, not a woman, not an untouchable…We have contrasted us, the real humans, with rudimentary, or perverted, or deformed examples of humanity” (75-76). For people with negative attribute identifications the anti-social characteristics become their core identity-components that underline all their actions and behaviors. This self-definition is a familiar strategy used by students to create a unified identity while obtaining recognition and support for that Self. For, as Leary points out, “self-presentational motives underlie and pervade nearly every corner of interpersonal life” (xiii).

Instructors can provide this recognition in multiple forms. The obvious, direct, and voluntary validation is the most common kind. Students seek to be directly recognized based on the impressions they make on instructors and peers). This recognition comes in the form of compliments, awards, and nonverbal gestures like smiling, shaking hands, patting on the back, and so on. However, students can be recognized in indirect ways as well through tacit actions. In fact, Bracher points out that these are sometimes more preferred than the explicit recognitions, especially when it is from the Real rather than another person. Feeling good after giving to charity is an
example. While this may elicit open recognition from peers, the feeling of well-being is also an important affirmation for the Self. This can also be seen in the classroom where the students react positively to praise and verbal acknowledgement. This feeling can, however, be magnified if it is accompanied by indirect praise in the form of greater responsibilities within the class or better grades. While the explicit recognition gives students a standing within their peers and instructors, the tacit validation sustains their identity and enhances the feeling of well-being and satisfaction to a greater extent, since it cannot be easily forged.

The egocentric monitoring of events and people, especially within the multiethnic literature classroom where the students are facing an ethnic Other, is crucial to maintain their sense of self. However, it also can have a debilitating effect by preventing the more empathic and prosocial cognitive processes which lead to a desire to help another and reduce prejudice. Prosocial pedagogy provides not only recognition for the students’ existing, unique identity-contents but also pedagogical strategies that can be applied within the classroom to encourage students to substitute their biases and harmful identity components with more prosocial, empathic elements based on similarities with the ethnic Other.

Self-Other Relationships and Enactment of an Identity

Along with recognition, people need to enact their identity-components in order to have a secure sense of self and be willing to find similarities with the ethnic Other. Maintaining a coherent sense of Self, therefore, is a crucial motivation behind almost all human behavior and action. This signification-process is consolidated by an
understanding of the boundaries between the Self and the Other. As people define and recognize or disrespect the Other, they are marking their own domains. As Beck explains, “As other people mark their boundaries, they also serve to define our sense of being separate individuals” (30). Parents laying down the rules of behavior are marking the boundaries between themselves as responsible adults and the child who doesn’t know any better. Students in the multiethnic literature classroom are especially in a constant process of boundary marking where they are defining and are being defined by the instructors, peers, and all the ethnic different Others they come in contact with. Depending on their level of identification with another person based on similarity of life-experiences and affective responses, they will either empathize or distance themselves.

Enactment of an identity is closely connected to maintaining a consistency between the ideal self, ought self, and the actual self. Instructors can use various strategies (like self-reflection essays, analysis of the reasons behind one’s action) to make students aware of these representations and conceptualizations of the Self. These generally include a sense of personal identity along with a concept of their defining psychological and physical characteristics. This is especially crucial in the multiethnic literature classroom, where the student might feel very threatened by the ethnic Other. The classroom experience must enhance the student’s coherence, consistency and their sense of being a unique agent that matters in the world. By making the students aware of their identity-components, instructors can help students enact their identities more successfully and provide opportunities for substituting the harmful elements with more
readily supportable components. Indeed, the successful enactment is essential for creating a secure sense of Self.

Recognition and enactment, therefore, play a crucial role in the student’s attempts to create a coherent, vital sense of Self. This is seen right at birth when the most basic desire that an infant has is to be desired by the mother. However, a more subjective sense of self develops between the ages of seven and nine months when the child becomes more attuned to the moods of others and can sense its similarity and difference from the Other. Research by Piaget and Singer shows in this stage the child transforms “booming, buzzing confusion” into “my games, my toys, my make-believe” and, finally, “my thoughts and myself” (Horowitz 48). The interesting thing for prosocial pedagogy, however, is Stern’s observation that children have a sense of Self as different from the Other from infancy. There is also a simultaneous recognition of similarity with the Other. This progressive differentiation and integration process is continued throughout life. Any lasting change in a person’s schema of the Self and ethnic Other has to be derived from these two processes of maintaining a unique sense of Self and being able to see similarities with the Other. Instructors have to stress the importance of the ethnic Other in the student’s definition of the Self to facilitate empathy and the reduction of prejudice and bias in their core identity-contents.

**External Domains**

Prosocial pedagogy recognizes, moreover, that people invest not only in these relationships between the Self and the Other but also in external domains (for instance, religious groups, political parties, music scenes etc.). These domains play an equally
important role in defining the student’s sense of a unified and separate identity. For instance, a Japanese person might invest heavily in religious ceremonies and temples as they see their religious zeal as a defining characteristic of their identity. In fact, most of the voluntary donations made to non-profit organizations can be traced to this investment in the “external” components of one’s domain. Within the multiethnic classroom this investment may have a negative effect. Students with a strong socialization into a community or group find it much harder to be open and accepting of Other cultures. They see any thought or act different from their group’s as a sort of betrayal of all that they stand for. Thus, a student from a European background may cling to his/her own heritage and sense of self. This might result in a hesitation—or worse, resistance—to an understanding or acceptance of a culture that they see as separate and alien. In fact, their egocentricity would urge them to hang on even more urgently to their ethnic make-up than to be open to other cultures, even at the expense of not doing well in class. The fear of losing the sense of self is generally so great that most of the disruptions in transnational and multiethnic classes can be traced back to this psychological move. Beck points out that any threat to one’s domain can be seen as a threat to the Self: “we may construe any attack on our domain as an attack on our personal identity” (30). Since domains can extend from individuals and institutions to objects that one owns, people may also be extremely sensitive to threats to these articles. Indeed, there is a clear boundary drawn between the Self and the ethic Other. The secure sense of Self that a person has acts as the trigger of this boundary making. Beck points out that “our self-esteem acts as an internal barometer that pressures us to expand our resources and our
domain and registers the fluctuating evaluations of our domains. We feel pleasure when our valued domain is expanded, and pain when it is constricted or devalued” (30).

Recognizing this, instructors should attempt to develop pedagogies that foster the sense of self that students have while introducing new material in a non-threatening manner. An awareness that the class is not a direct challenge to their personal boundaries might reduce the impulse of self-preservation that can activate at any moment of threat from the ethnic Other. In fact, an open atmosphere within the classroom would facilitate learning and lead to a better understanding of the Self and Other.

**Conclusion**

In today’s world, students are introduced persistently to novel values, beliefs, cultures, and people. While there is growing confusion about the definitions of Self and Other with students unable to create a secure sense of self, studies are increasingly showing the need to reduce identity-vulnerabilities in order for any sort of change to happen. It is therefore crucial to focus on the students’ world if we expect them to be involved in the texts and to be pro-active in their efforts to learn and empathize with the ethnic Other. The goal of prosocial pedagogy is to produce cognitive changes in students that will result in greater prosocial action. By focusing on students’ conception of their Self and the ethnic Other, and an understanding of the cognitive structures that foster empathy, prosocial pedagogy aims to alter students’ attitudes and behaviors toward the Other. If prosocial pedagogy makes caring for the Other essential to the maintenance of the student’s sense of Self, then it will lead to greater awareness of similarities with Others and a greater willingness to alleviate their suffering.
Of course, the “student-focused” approach does not mean mollycoddling students or compromising on the educational process. Nor does it mean that the instructor becomes marginal within the classroom. Instead it means an investigation of students’ growing lack of interest, especially exaggerated in the multiethnic literature classrooms. By focusing on the reactions of the students to the text and to larger social issues bought up in class discussions, it becomes possible to identify the kinds of factors leading to biased thought and action. This knowledge can help in the formulation of pedagogical strategies that promote the development of a socially proactive multiethnic citizenry.
Notes

1 Damon’s study found that by the time most children are 4 years old they have a firm sense of obligation to share with others. Also, the children gave empathic reasons for sharing. He suggests that empathic reasoning derives from a child’s well-developed ability to respond empathically along with the induction (“Give Jack some candy or he will be sad”) that they receive from their parents. He also found that half of 4 to 8 year olds and 80% of 9 year olds gave empathic reasons for why stealing is bad.

2 David Palumbo-Liu, in The Ethnic Canon, claims that the belief that canonical texts can supply all the knowledge a student needs about race, ethnicity, and other minority groups is one of the most dangerous steps taken by the vanguards of the established order to stop the expansion of ethnic programs within the University.

3 This argument also reflects on who is able and best suited to teach multiethnic texts. The racial fundamentalists on both sides of the argument insist that only people belonging to a specific racial category should teach texts from that group, since they are the ones who have experienced the consequences of a dominant hegemony and lived the antagonistic relationships to such a system. By virtue of their shared experiences, thus, for instance, only Asian-American should teach Asian-American Literature. This was part of the debate in the ”Common Ground” reform project started in 1990 to train the Houston teachers in conjunction with the University of Houston and funded by NEH in the Houston Independent School District (Houston ISD) to bridge the gap between schools and universities, between students and teachers, and between cultures. Suzanne Sutherland points out in “Finding a Common Ground” that instructors teaching outside
their culturally familiar ethos might be “uncertain about cultural distinctions, unfamiliar with the text, and reluctant to try the unknown with the students” (134). Therefore, they frequently tend to rely on their own past experiences and common sense when they teach, rather than on innovative and experimental techniques and strategies that would add to their burdens. This was the major drawback of the Common Ground program, with the result that teachers are unable to incorporate varied teaching methods to help students learn better.

4 TuSmith and Mohanty add negative evaluations within the university along with lack of institutional support as a major strategy of marginalization used against the minority programs.
Chapter II

The Focus on the “I”: Prosocial Pedagogy and Identity-Maintenance

A fundamental requirement for prosocial pedagogy’s goal of enhancing student’s identity and the ability to find strands of commonality and empathize with the ethnic Other is a secure sense of Self both inside and outside the multiethnic literature classroom. The attainment of a secure identity involves the performance of the core identity-bearing qualities in a person’s schemas and scripts of the Self and Other as well as receiving tacit and objective recognition of one’s coherence, agency, and continuity from the ethnic Other. A secure identity is unique but can see strands of similarities with the Other. In a very general sense, students learn to make connections between different realms of ideas and people and become an active learner when their identity is being supported and enhanced within the classroom. This not only makes them secure in their sense of Self but also makes them more willing to accept new ideas and people that were seen as potentially threatening in the past. This openness to novel information is crucial if students are to be motivated to find strands of commonality with distant Others and be more caring toward them. This is especially true for the ethnic groups who do not belong to the same socio-cultural domains and with whom the Self rarely interacts. The ethnic literature classroom usually focuses on exactly these distant Others, which results in the student’s lack of interest and apathy toward the people and the cultural values and beliefs presented in ethnic literary texts. These texts seem not only useless to them but, more
dangerously, they feel threatened by the unfamiliar cultural codes and knowledges. The lack of interest or distancing within the classroom is a reflection of the students’ attempts at restoring their sense of Self. Prosocial pedagogy helps students to enact and be recognized as embodying beneficial qualities (like compassionate, intelligence, or hard-working) thus providing the identity support necessary for students to be able to empathize and attempt to alleviate the pain of a suffering Other.

Clinical research by Beck shows that people with secure identities are less focused on egocentric monitoring of events and maintaining a coherent sense of Self. While formulating cognitive therapy to modify his depressive patient’s cognitions, Beck found that almost all anti-social behaviors reflect the same kind of erroneous thought: “the aggressors have a positive bias regarding themselves and a negative bias toward their adversary, often conceived as the Enemy” (xiii). Most people who partake in emotions and behaviors that are prejudiced and biased perceive themselves as the innocent victim who has to protect themselves by taking certain identity-maintaining steps against the Enemy Other. Claude Steele’s self-affirmation theory posits that a “self-affirmation system” is activated when a person feels threatened by new ideas or information and that this system influences all cognitions and behavior. In his experiments he found that people will take practical steps depending on the available options to reestablish their identity-coherence when challenged and take no action when their identity is affirmed. In one experiment, subjects were told that as members of their community they were either a) uncooperative with community projects, b) bad drivers, or c) cooperative with community projects. These subjects were contacted two days later
along with a fourth group that had not been involved in the earlier process and asked to help with a food co-op in their community. He found that the subjects whose identities had been threatened in the initial contact (group a and b) showed a rate of cooperation that was twice that of people whose identity had been recognized (group c). Steele’s conclusion was that people whose core-identities are threatened will focus more on reestablishing their sense of Self and in taking steps to address the threat. However, people who are secure in their sense of identity are not in constant vigilance against the Other. They can instead focus their energy on other cognitions like finding similarities with another person and rethinking the benefits of their own master scripts and prototypes. Prosocial pedagogy attempts to show that altering or substituting their harmful existing ideals (like anger, hyper-vigilance, possessiveness) with multiple, complex, beneficial ones (like empathy, caring, compassion) will lead to an identity that can be more easily sustainable and recognizable. Also, an identity which comprises of a multiplicity of complex components is more effective in engaging with new ideas and information as the Self has a larger repertoire for predicting an event-sequence. The ready retrieval of information results in a preparedness of the mind which reduces the threat from non-prototypical situations and information. This would allow the Self to focus more on finding similarities with the ethnic Other. Thus, prosocial pedagogy encourages the students to rethink their own core identity-components and the processes of enactment of these components which lead to prejudice and bias instead of empathy and prosocial action.
The Nature of Identity-Components

An important point that has to be made in this discussion about the re-conceptualization and altering the student’s identity-components toward more empathic and prosocial conception of Self is the conception of the master signifiers, schemas, and scripts as metaphorical. 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 organize 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, parents can understand the concept of “love” based on the actual processes of feeding an infant or taking care of their other bodily needs. The physical acts structure the abstract concept and give meaning to the relationship between a parent and child.

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 facilitate prosocial thinking and action in the students. A focus on the identity-component’s metaphorical flexibility would give the instructors a basis for organizing their class, especially as these identity 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, similarly a person’s prosocial reasoning and judgment is intricately tied up with metaphors. Johnson discusses this in terms of a person’s morality and asserts that

morality is metaphoric through and through. Our folk models of morality are based on systematic metaphors. . . . And, even our most abstract, ‘pure’ rationalistic theories of morality are shot through with metaphors . . . since our most fundamental notions of action, purpose, rights, duties, personhood, and so forth are irreducibly metaphoric, so that any moral theory in our tradition will necessarily appropriate some set of basic metaphors for such concepts. (76)

Indeed, this conception of moral cognition as metaphoric is intricately connected to all aspects of prosocial understanding, reasoning, and theorizing about the Self and ethnic Other. Not only are the central concepts (like right, duty, laws, action, and so on) defined by a system of metaphors, but challenging situations about helping an Other are also understood through metaphorical mappings. However, these metaphors and the way they
are understood are steeped in subliminal cultural messages that naturalize and rationalize all the systematic relationships between people and the conceptualizations of the self. Questions about helping to alleviate the ethnic Other’s pain are answered based on the culturally formed identity-tokens which were used to assemble one’s sense of self-identity. Therefore, the cultural commitment of a person from America will be different from someone who is South African. Instructors need to stress the point throughout the class, either verbally or in the content of the class. The concepts defining the relationships between people in different cultures will be different from one another and, therefore, there is no universal perspective or belief-system.

Therefore, relationships of love and bias are influenced by the cultural messages of group belonging or separation. If the culture’s declared commitment is for social growth, then the subliminal message would be to achieve this goal regardless of the negative consequences (such as inequality, oppression, or environmental hazards) that might result from it. However, the cognitive schemas that shape a person’s perception can judge the relevance of the cultural code to the development of the self. Meyers asserts that

Whereas the culture’s official moral beliefs stand at a remove from moral perception, for they are expressed in abstract principles or values awaiting interpretation and implementation, the cognitive schemas in which the subliminal cultural messages are encoded bear immediately on moral perception, for they specify the moral meanings attached to membership in this or that social group. (“Emotion”200)
If the declared cultural message is a hindrance for the maintenance of the basic schemas of the self and the other, then the individual can reject it. The subliminal cultural messages, framed according to a person’s perception, can stand against a group’s moral precepts and create a separate understanding of an event from the accepted dominant reading. This separation between a culture’s official moral system and an individual’s cognition would explain the different alternative cultures (Emo, Gangsta or Goth subversive cultures) that exist within a conventional society (white, upper and middle-class society). For instance, Gina is a person who has grown up and stays in a racially exclusive neighborhood with only superficial contact with people from other groups. She has been taught throughout her life that it is better to stick to “people of the same kind.”

The official cultural message has been that people from different racial groups are inherently different and there is no point of connection in the life she lives with someone who is not of her racial group. Now that she is in college, Gina comes in contact with people from a lot of different racial backgrounds and she begins to realize that despite the obvious physical and some social differences, there are a lot of similarities as well. The texts that she reads, along with the exercises that are conducted in the classroom, further make her realize that human motivations and behavior are universal at a basic level. With this change in cognition, it becomes possible for Gina to expand her self-schema to include different perceptions about people from different racial groups. Her initial judgment which viewed people of certain social groups through honorific stereotypes and members of other social groups through derogatory stereotypes would become redundant when she realizes the uniqueness of every ethnic Other with the new cognitions. The
awareness that there are multiple possible metaphorical perceptions of a single event can change the way a person interprets and judges a situation or person. Indeed, it might become hard to cling to inflexible “readings” and beliefs. However, the students have to accept that their identities are metaphorically created first before any changes can be expected in their basic constructs and understanding of events.

Within the multiethnic literature classroom, this conceptualization of metaphoricity has far-reaching consequences. As in the case of Gina, if the students accept that the fundamental concepts and contents which create the sense of Self and lead to an individual’s perception, judgment, motivation, and action are metaphorical, then it could become hard for them to apply fixed, univocal codes and frameworks of judgments to an event or person. It would become very difficult for students to support and sustain frameworks of Self and Other based on notions of essentialized differences. Actions that are justified in the name of “right” would have to be investigated again and “read” from the perspective of the Other as well. For instance, Alice argues that racial quotas are fair and should not be removed from schools and workplaces. She argues that minorities, especially African-American, need time to develop themselves and become affluent before arguments about equality can be taken seriously. However, the metaphorical conceptualization of events makes Alice’s claim a personal interpretation, not a universal truth. Concepts like “white/black,” “upper-middle class/lower-class,” or “equality/inequality” become flexible depending on the framing in which they are placed. The continuation of racial quotas that is seen as “good” becomes justifiable only within a particular metaphorical reading of the situation. This metaphoric conception, thus, can
encourage the students to re-think their application of inflexible and prejudiced identity-contents to the processes of cognition (perception, judgment, motivation, change, and (prosocial) action) and redefine their sense of Self and the ethnic Other.

The question for instructors, then, is two pronged: what qualities have to get enacted for a Self to have a secure identity and where do these qualities have to be enacted to have beneficial implications for learning and prosocial thinking and action? Then, what kinds of psychological changes must be introduced in the student’s identity-contents to create a secure, prosocial identity? The first part of this chapter will define the different elements that constitute a person’s identity and relationships with the Other along with the different identity-states where change must take place to create a secure identity willing to engage in prosocial thinking and action. It is by altering elements in a person’s registers of experience and memory that the qualities which hinder learning and empathy can be transformed into more empathic qualities and states. The second part of the chapter will focus on the different changes which must be bought in a Self’s conception of itself and the ethnic Other to alter and substitute the harmful identity-components with a more complex, prosocial identity-structure.

**Components of an Identity**

The elements of identity that get enacted for a person to have a coherent sense of self and Other are affects, schemas, and scripts. Clinical observations are being substantiated by an expanding body of experimental evidence to support the conclusion that individual experiences from infancy through the entire cycle of life produce affects, schemas, and scripts of the self and Other. People repeat the core identity-components
throughout their lives and they delineate a person’s personality type. What is crucial for this discussion is that these components also have an enormous influence on people’s every decision making process, including the decision to help an ethnic Other. While it is true that some aspects of the development of these identity components are determined by genetics, and the structures of meaning and context are preserved and promoted by the group one belongs to, all other aspects develop progressively from infancy. For instance, prejudice against an ethnic Other might be supported by the community, but only when the patterns of oppression are repeated in decision making processes and actions constantly throughout one’s life does it lead to a biased individual. The creation and stability of the sense of oneness in “I” over time and its relationship to the ethnic Other are thus dependent on the development of a complex set of affects, schemas, and scripts through life.

Affects

Affects are complex experiences that occur as a result of human beings physiological reactions to events. They not only shape the Self’s perception of itself and the ethnic Other but also influence any decision to take action toward another. Wukmir proposes that affects are the mechanism that interprets all external stimuli and judges the level of threat to the Self’s core identity-components from them. If the novel situation or person seems to maintain the Self’s sense of coherence, then the person experiences a positive emotion (happiness, satisfaction, desire, peace, etc.). Or alternatively, if the situation seems unfavorable, then the Self experiences a negative emotion (sadness, disillusion, sorrow, anguish, etc.). Depending on the interpretation, the Self takes a
decision to act a certain way. Unfavorable situations result in an effort to reestablish a sense of coherence while a favorable situation can result in increased involvement. All human beings have this mechanism of emotion which guides them throughout their life to ascertain situations that enhance their chances of survival or move away from those that seem threatening. The student’s experience of affects, thus, will influence the way they will perceive the ethnic Other and act toward them.

Emotions and perception are therefore closely entwined. Nussbaum points out that “perception is not merely aided by emotion but it is also in part constituted by appropriate [emotional] response” (Love’s 179). The way one perceives a situation or an event exacts a certain affective state. Indeed, the James-Lange theory of emotion claims that affects are a physiological response to external information and are dependent upon how one interprets those physical reactions. For instance, while walking home alone, Jane senses that someone is following her. She begins to tremble and her heart begins to race. According to the James-Lange theory, Jane will interpret her physical reactions and conclude that she is frightened: “I am trembling, therefore I am afraid.” As James claims, “the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and . . . our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion” (14).

The way the Self perceives another is dependent on the focus of an emotion. Affects are always directed toward an object. In other words, the object figures in the emotion as it is perceived by the person who experiences the emotion. Therefore, Jamie’s anger is not simply an impulse; it is directed toward a person who has wronged her. Once again, the way of perceiving an object is essential to the character of an emotion.
However, the way one perceives an external stimulus is dependent on not only a person’s past experiences and memories but also cultural norms. For instance, the way one perceives and reacts to an ethnically different person’s actions is affected by the culture one belongs to and the experiences one has had with the ethnic Other. If the past interactions were positive and the socio-cultural setting that one belongs to is open to novel ideas and people, then it is very likely that the perception of the Other will be favorable and the resultant emotions positive. However, if the experience was painful and the cultural norm is to be wary of strangers, then it is likely that the person will judge the Other’s action more harshly than if the other person were someone one identified with. Emotional appraisal can therefore affect the judgments made by a person about an event or an Other. As Nussbaum asserts, “emotions can lead or guide the perceiving agent” (Love’s 78).

It therefore becomes crucial to cultivate emotional responsiveness while approaching novel situations and people. As emotions are the result of a subjective measurement (or evaluation) of the probability of maintaining a coherent unity of Self in a given situation or in front of any perceived stimulus, they posit the possibility of multiple interpretations of any person or event. This is essential knowledge in any discussion about empathy and prosocial action, because the way one perceives others and judges their actions affects the actions that one will take. If the actions of the Other are seen in a positive light, then the Self will experience positive affects and be more willing to help. However, if another’s actions are seen as threatening then it would probably result in blaming the Other and attempts at reestablishing the Self. Either way, for people
to have a stable and coherent sense of Self which can engage effectively with novel people and information, they must attempt to include a multiplicity of complex emotions in their core affective states. Indeed, prosocial pedagogy encourages students to engage in a democracy of emotions, both positive (caring, compassion, empathy) and negative (hate, anger, hypersensitivity), so that their identity constitutes an “emotional vindaloo” not “emotional vanilla.”

Schemas

A focus on schemas is essential for prosocial learning, since they guide how people take in, remember, and make conclusions about new information about people and incidents. Schemas are the basic cognitive process through which students learn and make decisions about all events and their intra- and interpersonal negotiations. Defined as general knowledge structures about a specific domain, schemas were introduced into experimental psychology by Bartlett, Piaget, and others. Most easily understood in terms of their consequences for cognitive processing, schemas include a definition of the Self’s principle attributes, the relationship between these attributes, and specific examples or instances of these attributes (Taylor and Crocker). According to Hastie, schemas encode a person’s expectations about the pattern of the future and past events while embodying the structures of events and behaviors that are valuable and essential to the person’s sense of Self. A schema provides a template for classifying, retaining, and coordinating incoming lower-level units of information, consisting of the most tangible information closest to peripheral perception, into a higher-level cohesive and meaningful unit, establishing
relationships between the separate components of an event or entity (Cohen and Ebbesen).

Instructors must be aware that there are different types of schemas applying to individuals (person schema), oneself (self-schema), social groupings (role schemas), inter-personal relations (relational schemas), and to events (event schemas) that they must contend with in an attempt to change a student’s conceptions of Self and ethnic Other. For instance, when many students see a photograph of a turbaned and bearded man, their schema about Middle-eastern Arab men come into play which makes them conclude that he posed a danger to society. However, if they find out that the man is a doctor who helps displaced people with no hopes of personal gain, the conclusion will be that he actually has kind eyes and a gentle smile. Different schemas lead people to focus on different aspects of a situation or person and to arrive at different interpretations. Here, the “evil Arab” schema changed with additional information to “kind doctor” schema, which caused the ambiguous details of the photograph to be read differently.

However, one of the most significant features of schemas for prosocial learning is their persistence even in the presence of conflicting evidence. Since the principal function of the schema is to apply general knowledge to specific cases, it is more efficient to stick to the general case than to change the entire schema. Fiske and Taylor point out that the benefits of schemas are mitigated if they attempt to take in every new detail from every new situation. Therefore, schemas mostly persist in their original form even in the face of contradictory evidence.
In fact, further attention or search for information often strengthens the perseverance effect. This is especially true about schemas of the Self, which provide cognitive generalizations of the self and guide the processing of self-relevant information in social situations. Beck provides an example:

Bill, a thirty-five-year-old salesman, was addicted to a variety of street drugs and was particularly prone to rage reactions and to physical abuse of his wife and children, as well as to frequent fights with outsiders. As we collaboratively explored the sequence of psychological experiences, we found that when another person (his wife or an outsider) did not show him “respect,” as he defined it, he would become so enraged that he would want to punch or even demolish that person.

Through a “microanalysis” of his rapid-fire reactions, we found that between the other person’s statement or action and his own flare-up, Bill experienced a self-demeaning thought and a hurt feeling. His typical self-deflating interpretation leading to this unpleasant feeling occurred almost instantaneously: “He thinks I’m a wimp,” or, “She doesn’t respect me.”

Bill’s self schema that “disagreeing with me means that people do not respect me” could not be revised by simply pointing out that his reading of the situation was not accurate. As Tesser points out, once a person has a mature and “enduring” schema, simply thinking about the issue only strengthens the judgment in favor of the original schema. This results
in a perceptual process that in the 1950s and 1960s was termed the “perceptual vigilance” or “perceptual defense” by the “New Look” researchers.

**Enduring Schemas and Working Models**

Prosocial pedagogy aims to replace certain harmful enduring schemas with more flexible, positive, and complex schemas that lead to a more adjusted and empathic sense of Self and enriched inter-personal interactions with the ethnic Other. Defined by Horowitz as “intrapsychically retained meaning structures,” enduring schemas “maintain generalized formats of knowledge and can be activated by other mental activities related to that knowledge” (*States* 15). Triggered by wishes, internal motives, or goodness-of-fit to external stimuli, enduring schemas populate “working models.”

Influencing the interpersonal sequence between people, working models are transient groupings of external and internal sources of information. As Horowitz explains, “working models integrate stimuli from the real situation with past knowledge derived from associative networks of ideas and form enduring person schemas” (*States* 15).

However, instructors must be aware that a working model may be discrepant from the external situation. Since working models rely on enduring schemas, they may replicate errors contained in the enduring schemas they rely on. Sullivan calls this process of realizing the same elements of the enduring schema the “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Students have an inventory of multiple enduring schemas to apply to any given situation, person, or relationship. Different elements from the enduring schemas are activated, depending on the perception of a specific occurrence, to construct working models. For instance, Jane conceives of herself as an open-minded, friendly person who has friends
from a variety of different ethnic groups. However, when her neighborhood becomes increasingly racially diverse, she starts to feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Here there is an obvious mismatch between her working model (the perception of occurrences) and the enduring schemas (the expectation of future occurrences). The increasingly diverse neighborhood damages her working model and creates an incompatibility with the enduring model. This mismatch between the working model and enduring schema may lead to an “alarm reaction,” resulting in strong emotional outcry and an attempt to take protective actions. Within the multiethnic literature classroom this is apparent in a student’s disruptive or distancing behavior when faced with a new schema. Since the ethnic texts represent their own socio-cultural realities and knowledge, the working and enduring models of the students are usually challenged by such texts. However, as Horowitz points out, “The more mature a person, the wider his or her repertoire of enduring person schemas, and the more flexible he or she may be in constructing working models of interpersonal situations” (States17). This has been shown in clinical studies to hold true for enduring self-schemas as well. The result of this multiplicity is equanimity in appraising critical life event. In the multiethnic literature classroom the material automatically reflects a multiplicity of schemas. The teaching strategies, then, must develop the student’s abilities in processing, analyzing, and integrating these alternative schemas with their existing schemas without reacting with panic and identity-defending tactics. Exercises which ask students to focus on less obvious parts of a text develop their capacity to look beyond the apparent information. For instance, the students can be asked to study a picture of the turbaned Middle-eastern Arabic man and focus on the less
obvious information (like the state of his clothes, the expression in his eyes, or his posture) and analyze what this information says about him without instantly projecting their prejudices onto him. This allows the students to focus on minute information that they might have ignored or not seen and to perhaps find similarities between themselves and the ethnic Other. Also, the class material could involve the genetic, cultural, and historical interpretations of relationships between the Self and the ethnic Other. This is especially pertinent in creating a more empathic citizenry that instead of acting reactively is encouraged to carefully analyze the new situations and construct prosocial models of responses based on finding similarities with the Other. Thus, by carefully observing and evaluating the novel information, instructors can encourage students to create and repeat new working models leading to new enduring person schemas.

Scripts

Scripts have an essential function in the sustenance of identity and creating empathic relationships with the Other because they guide both understanding and behavior. Abelson points out that to act out a script, there must be an understanding of not only the possibility of such a role but also a dedication to its performance. For instance, to enact the script of a helpful, empathic person, the Self must accept the possibility of such a role for him/herself and then complete the role, attending to all the required expectations. Focusing on the Other’s reactions, reading the responses correctly, and taking steps to alleviate the suffering are some of the required tasks that the person is expected to perform for this script.
To understand a script a person has to cognitively retrieve an earlier event which is closest to the present occurrence and activate the appropriate behavior based on the recalled information. This requires three conditions, and an understanding of these is important for instructors who want to understand the student’s actions and the motives behind those actions: “First, the individual must have a stable cognitive representation of the particular script. Second, an evoking context for the script must be presented. Third, the individual must enter the script” (Abelson “Phychological” 719). To put it simply, the decision to become a helpful person is based on a couple of relevant conditions. The person must first know how to be a helpful person. Moreover, there must be some stimulus making helping another a relevant option (for instance, a desire to get recognition from peers or self-affirmation). Finally, a decision must be made to help the Other instead of just thinking about it. This last point which is the crucial step of moving from cognition to behavior. The assumption is that it is dependent on the satisfaction of an “action rule” or policy connected to the script. While as Abelson points out these policies are probably not present in conscious thought or articulated, a decision to actually take steps to help another is likely to be made based on an action rule that the person has constructed over a lifetime. It might be something like: “If Jimmy and the gang doesn’t act respectfully today toward me, I’ll prove to them that I deserve respect by giving to charity.” For a quick retrieval of the script there are probably certain triggers like incentive, mood, cost, etc. that let a person recognize and get to the relevant action rule.
A script is a particular type of event schema that is organized around an anticipated sequence of events for a stereotypical situation. Bower, Black, and Turner define scripts as the stereotyped knowledge that people have about routine events. It can be thought of as a coherent sequence of occurrences that is expected by a person involving him/herself either as a participant or an observer. It is a conceptual stereotype that is activated when an event is expected to follow a certain pattern. For instance, the statement “Jack went to jog in the park and felt in his pocket for his i-pod and realized that he had forgotten it at home,” would probably lead to the inference that Jack wants to listen to music while jogging. While this was not specifically mentioned in the text, one’s script for jogging might include these elements as the potential next occurrence. Tomkins explains that

Scripts deal with the individual’s rules for predicting, interpreting, responding to, and controlling a magnified set of scenes. Scripts involve the connection of one affect-laden scene with another affect-laden scene. Through memory, thought, and imagination, scenes experienced before can be coassembled with scenes presently experienced, together with scenes which are anticipated in the future. (213)

It is this function of assembling information about Others that makes it crucial for instructors to focus on scripts in their pedagogical strategies. Indeed, the seminal test of this ability of scripts to organize comprehension is the gap filling phenomenon. Bower, Black, and Turner and Schank and Abelson show that people have scripts about familiar events like shopping, attending a lecture, or visiting the doctor. When students encounter
a known situation, the relevant script is activated. Thus, if the encounter is with a threatening ethnic Other, the student reacts by activating a protective script. The script acts as a guide for making inferences about what is going to happen, what is the sequence of the event, and how one should act. This script affects not only one’s perception of an event but also the actions one takes in response. In a strong sense, the script involves anticipation about the occurrence and the sequence of the event. In a weaker sense, Abelson points out that “it is a bundle of inferences about the potential occurrence of a set of events and may be structurally similar to other schemata that do not deal with events” (“Psychological” 717). Nonetheless, the tendency to fill in the gaps in incomplete scripts is evocative of projecting from vague personality schemas (Cantor and Mischel) and finishing of implicit inferences (Johnson et al.). If the memory or the perception of the event is hazy, then the person can refer back to the script to fill in the gaps.

However, while gap-filling can aid memory, it is also an opportunity for error. Research has found that there is a tendency to result in the “script pointer plus tag.” Abelson explains this harmful tendency: “Gap filling is consistent with the hypothesis that people’s long-term memory representation of a scripted situation consists of the generic script, modified by explicit memories of usual events” (“Psychological” 717). When subjects have been presented with script based stories with the typical sequence displaced, there was a strong tendency to “regress” back to their usual positions (Bower et al.). When the subjects tried to reconstruct the order of the events, they reverted to the memory of the generic script and filled the gaps in order to activate a realistic script. “The ‘regression’ of displaced events in memory can thus be understood,” according to
Abelson, “as a compromise in reconstructive memory between the known typical event ordering and the actually presented atypical ordering” (“Psychological” 718).

Gap-filling is very pertinent to the understanding of events and the resultant social behaviors that students exhibit. Unless the occurring event is exactly similar to the generic blueprint, they have to reconstruct the script according to their memory. If the memory of a past encounter with an ethnic Other was negative, then the gaps will be filled likewise. The alternative is also true. It is because of this reason that it is very hard to change people’s perceptions and thoughts about issues and events. The gap-filling phenomenon tends to proceed towards scripted knowledge, sometimes sustaining and abetting biased thinking and behaviors.

Thus for students to be able to decode a variety of new situations and not respond in panic identity-restoring mode, they must expand their core scripts to include a multiplicity of other scripts. If the new scripts reflected in the content of the ethnic texts are supplemented by exercises (like perspective-taking) which encourage students to become more familiar with and open to these alternatives, then it might be possible for the students to develop more complex and empathic relationships with the Other.

Enactment of an Identity

Where do the schemas, scripts, and affects have to change to have implications in sustaining a sense of Self, developing feelings of empathy and prosocial action? I base the answer for this question on the general identity and pedagogical framework presented by Bracher in Radical Pedagogy. People create and sustain their identity in relation to the Other by continually reiterating certain self-states. Bracher points out that the repetitions
of these particular inter- and intrapersonal experiences happen in three different registers of experience and memory in the mind: affective-psychological, imagistic, and linguistic. Wilma Bucci envisions these fundamental registers as codes: the subsymbolic, imagistic and linguistic or verbal codes. According to this theory, from early infancy information is represented in the mind in complex symbolic and subsymbolic nonverbal forms. Each register produces a basic sense of continuity and sameness that is essential for a coherent identity. This sameness is also identified by the others and used as a means of identifying a person’s character. So, if identity maintenance is the primary motivation of all human action and behavior—and therefore also learning and prosocial action—and one’s identity enactment is a function of the repetitive activation of certain states in the different registers, then what are the components of the different registers, and how do these components enhance or hinder learning, empathy, and prosocial action?

Subsymbolic codes

The most basic register where a secure sense of identity is enacted is a function of “subsymbolic or connectionist codes.” Since these codes determine a student’s awareness and ability to “read” the Other’s non-verbal emotive cues, it is essential to focus on them in any attempts to change students’ perception and reactions to the ethnic Other. An enhanced capability to interpret these codes would allow students not only to become more receptive to the Other’s cues and life-conditions, but also to find similarities between the Other’s affective states and their own. Subsymbolic codes produce experiences such as visceral sensations, odors, tastes, and affects. Occurring along a continuum along multiple parallel channels, the subsymbolic sense of self resides
in the realm of affects which are relatively unchanging throughout life. As Bucci explains, “Subsymbolic processing operates with rapid and complex computations on implicit continuous dimensions, based on principles that are analogic and global, without formations of discrete categories and without explicit metrics”(6). The processing in this format is sensitive to the content. Therefore, subsymbolic “computations” determine students’ abilities to use a laptop effectively or to “read” the visual codes in other people’s facial expressions and respond accordingly.

**Within the Multiethnic Literature Classroom**

The primary function of this register is to create in the Self an awareness and ability to read the subtle shifts in the Other’s body language and to recognize one’s own visceral state. This affects the Self’s “reading” of the Other’s life-condition and influences the responses of the Self to the Other. This capacity is crucial for the growth of prosocial attitudes and behaviors. By monitoring the state of the Self and the Other, a person is able to judge an event and the actions of the people involved. This is crucial in the process of deciding the responsible party and the justness of the actions taken. Depending on these computations, a person may either decide that an action is just and the person deserves what he or she got or that it was an immoral act and the victim deserves retribution. This process of attributing blame or responsibility for an action is the crux in a person’s decision on how to respond to other people. For instance, if Brad comes to the conclusion that his bad grade is a consequence of the Asian teacher hating him because he is white and has nothing to do with the poor quality of his work, then his response will be very different than if he took responsibility for the shoddy work. The
basis of his judgment is the (mis)reading of the subsymbolic codes operating during the interaction between Brad and the instructor. In a similar manner, the ability to “read” the distress in the ethnic Other’s facial expressions and body gestures when the Self acts out in a biased manner is the basis of feeling guilt. Research has shown that if people see the pain that their action is causing in the facial expression, gestures, and postures of the victim, they are more affected than if the victim was not present. If the person judges the action toward the Other to be unjust, then the guilt that is aroused can lead to taking steps to alleviate the pain. Indeed, this guilt can lead to a willingness to help the ethnic Other or at least curb the acting out with prejudice.

It is the arousal of such visceral sensations in the students when they watch movies and actually see the expressions of the different characters and imagine the affective states aroused that make multi-media texts so useful within the classroom. Instructors can see the students gasp with a character in surprise or wince in pain, mimicking the emotive responses. These reactions can be used within the classroom not only to arouse the subsymbolic codes that are conducive to finding similarities with the ethnic Other but also to create a better understanding of one’s own affective states. Exercises involving attention to the Self’s and Other’s visceral reactions and the corresponding affective states can help students see similarities between their own and another’s emotive reactions and thereby empathize more with the Other better. Indeed, since a lot of the events people go through are universal (like birth, death, separation), the emotions they arouse are also universal. The awareness of this similarity can be the basis of identification with the Other.
Symbolic Codes

The symbolic codes are defined as discrete entities referring to or representing other entities and can be combined from a finite set of components to generate varied rule-governed combinations. These symbols are either images or words, with the major distinction in processing being between nonverbal and verbal forms. The registers of affective-physiological and imagistic experience are a function of nonverbal “imagistic codes” whereas the conceptual-linguistic register is composed of “linguistic or verbal codes.” To become more prosocial, students need to not only interpret the information they receive in an unbiased manner but also, be aware of the distinctions between the different processes through which they are receiving the information. This would help them to alter the elements in the interpretation process which hinder the unbiased reading of the cues and to further develop the skills that are conducive for prosocial thinking and action.

Imagistic codes

The maintenance of a unified, distinct sense of Self is also dependent on certain prototypical images. Bucci observes that in order to have a continuous sense of our bodies, we need prototypical images of both our external and our internal worlds. One’s bodily identity is a sense of oneself as “a single, coherent, bounded physical entity” (Stern 82). This includes the affective states and the imagistic identity that a Self enacts. Students actively start seeing similarities and empathize with the Other when they are secure in their identity. As they are not in a state of constant vigilance, students are able
and more willing to focus on the process of identifying with the Other and are open to novel ideas that they might have previously thought of as threatening. It is this willingness to experience new domains that creates the possibility of finding commonality with other ethnic groups while maintaining a unique sense of Self. Students must, therefore, be secure in their own affective and imagistic identity before they can engage in the process of prosocial learning.

**Imagistic Identity-Contents**

Part of one’s sense of self is based on a prototypical image of one’s body and its agency in relation to other people and objects. The need to maintain and enhance the ideal body image is a concern shared by most. Within the multiethnic literature classroom, students can feel especially challenged by the various physical images of the ethnic Other presented in the content of the texts. These images are usually alien to the students’ sense of Self. Indeed, physical difference from the ethnic Other is the first marker of distinction from the Self. As is evident in almost all colonial histories, the colonizers took special effort to create a structure of physical difference between themselves and the colonized. The primary aim of the many colonial discourses devoted to the exact physical measurements of the colonized subjects’ physical features was to show how the body of the Other was different and inferior to their own. A less intense but similar process can be seen even today where people differentiate from each other based on their imagistic features and each socio-cultural group had its own hierarchy of the “ideal” and unacceptable physical appearances. Students in the multiethnic literature
classroom who are being presented with multiple different imagistic ideals separate from
their own, therefore, might feel especially challenged.

In this situation, reestablishing their imagistic identity might seem crucial for the
students. This would involve according to Bracher “repeated experiences and memories
of prototypic images of one’s bodily form and agency, and of the specific spaces, places,
and objects in relation to which this form and agency are optimally enacted” (14). Every
person has an image of their physical appearance and their abilities as an active agent
which separates them from the others. Most of these ideals are built over time and
impacted by the cultural norms. For instance, in countries where most of the populace is
dark-skinned, like India, fair complexion is highly coveted. People are willing to spend
thousands of dollars and undergo painful procedures to achieve their ideal image.
Moreover, a part of maintaining the ideal is remembering the situations and the
objects/people in relation to whom the self’s sense was enhanced and searching for them
constantly. This would create opportunities for the Self to enact the core images and
maintain an identity that is unique. Yet, people have to also see some continuity with
Others to have a secure Self.

Imagistic codes allow a person to have a unique Self while seeing similarities
with the Other by enabling a person to identify the change in the form and location of an
object and identifying objects as same even if they change form or location. Bucci
explains that

We identify changes in the position or facial expression of the people we
know or changes in the look of familiar places in different lights or
different times of day; we also identify things or people as the same entities across such manifest transformations. The recognition of alterations involves analogic and parallel processing on continuous dimensions with implicit, modality-specific metrics. (6)

It is because of the experience of imagistic codes that an individual is able to differentiate between changes in expression or bodily gestures and still recognize the implications of those expressions in a general framework. For instance, a student may recognize the Other’s shift from a smile to a frown along with a range of continuous variations in between and recognize it as a transformation of the affective states from happiness to anger. Individuals identify others in a multitude of changes in features from being angry to sitting down or running. These variations are grouped into visual prototypes which are referred to for identifying changes in non-verbal cues. The recognition of the Other as a different body is also seen in a person’s recognition of expressions as they appear in different people. So, while Brad might recognize that Steve is happy, Brad is also aware when Jill is happy. The process of categorization in this register, therefore, disregards differences in a functionally corresponding set of representations. As Bucci explains,

The prototypic images—of Jane, a triangle, an apple, the living room couch, the physical features of tension—are stored in long-term memory and provide a basis for symbolic processing within the nonverbal system itself. Such images are organizing categories that operate within the visual system itself, providing discrete symbolic entities that may be named. . . .
system itself, without intervention by language, to provide the basis for construction of the type of discrete symbolic representation that may be mapped into language.(6)

Thus, the secure sense of self crucial for prosocial learning has to be maintained through the sufficient processing of sensory data. Indeed, students’ senses of Self and ethnic Other are derived from these imagistic prototypes. The sense that one is, for instance, “tall” or “blonde” is essential to define one’s imagistic identity. These body-images are crucial for creating structures of similarities and difference which affect a person’s feelings of empathy. If the Other is physically similar to the Self, then one might be more willing to identify and help them. Alternatively, physical difference can be the first point of prejudice and biased behavior.

Imagistic Identity: Maintenance and Alteration within the Classroom

It is clear to see that students, especially in ethnic literature classrooms, pay a lot of attention to appearance. As Bracher points out, “... people constantly monitor and adjust their bodily shape and impact and also the visual and material environments that variously enable and constrain their enactment of their imagistic identity” (38). The general belief is that proper body image reflects inner qualities. Body posture, movement, gestures, expressions and the accoutrements that one surrounds oneself with in the form of tools, technologies, automobiles, and so on are the strategies that the Self is using in enacting the identity-bearing images of one’s bodily form and agency. Thus, students want to sustain their sense of Self with iPods, cell phones, and designer clothes that
differentiate them from an Other who is more backward or dependent on different objects.

Bracher points out that people employ various means to establish and maintain their imagistic sense of self. The most common is the importance given to daily grooming in the form not only of taking care of one’s teeth, skin, hair, and nails but also in the care people take in selecting outfits or putting on make-up. The various practices of body sculpting through either dieting, surgical procedures, or cosmetics are the extreme steps that people are willing to take to maintain their bodily appearance. Millions of dollars are spent every year in the pursuit of these practices. Following the “trends” in fashion, looks, or appearance is a major activity of many students. These present the most acceptable “ideal” body type and appearance, which people try to replicate. For instance, in many cultures having a fair complexion is seen as a sign of beauty or status. For people who do not have these features, this ideal can be traumatizing, so people do everything possible to become fairer. Indeed, the skin-tone of a person is an important racial marker, and people all over the world still cling to the colonial notions of fairness as a sign of superiority. This is embraced not only by the earlier colonies but also the people who belong to ex-colonizing nations. Sometimes this can be seen reflected in the student’s relationship with the Other. Since their notions of beauty are dependent on cultural notions, they might reflect the accepted norms. This shows an investment not only in the enactment of the self’s imagistic prototype, but also, the desire to be distinct from the ethnic Other.
Instructors must attempt to introduce different imagistic ideals within the classroom with explanations of the metaphoricity and cultural-constructedness of these images. This might encourage the students to rethink their own existing ideals. If students are obsessed with the enactment of their imagistic prototype, then learning about the Other could become secondary to the physical differences. On the other hand, someone whose image is incompatible with society’s dictates might take refuge in an investment in other external domains. Neither response is ideal. For students to see similarities and empathize with the Other, they have to feel secure in their sense of self within the classroom. It is highly unlikely that students who feel threatened for the way they look will be able to participate fully in the class. For prosocial learning to happen, students have to feel secure in their identity while understanding that a majority of the prototypic images are created and sustained by socio-cultural forms of communications and structures like magazines, television, peers, and parents. Comprehending the lengths to which people go in order to achieve and maintain their bodily images through discussions and online chats about texts that present both the pros and cons of such an obsession could lead the students to an understanding of how these motivations arise and affect their life and processes of identifying with an ethnic Other.

In addition, in order to maintain a coherent and continuous sense of self, people need not only to enact their imagistic identity but also to prove that they are active agents. As Bracher points out, “our prototype of bodily agency and efficacy is also crucial for us” (39). The ability to perform physical actions with one’s body is central to a unified sense of self. That is why colonial treatises presented the colonized Other as “lazy and
lethargic” whereas the Self was “active and physical.” A more common instance can be seen when one is deprived of a bodily activity that one usually performs without special effort. The irritation that people feel when they become short or long sighted or if they get hurt and are unable to walk or use their hand is an indication of the importance of the sense of bodily coherence. Another indication is the unusually large amounts of time, energy, or money many people devote to cultivating special physical skills—for instance, those required to be good in any sport. The pride seen in people who can swim for a long time or make baskets from a great distance is a reflection of their motivation to sustain their image. This, however, becomes dangerous when people project certain abilities to a whole group of people and the Others internalize them in their identities. This othering process can be seen in the general belief today that African-Americans are better in sports than other racial groups. This affects not only the perspectives and behaviors of students from other groups but also African-Americans who internalize these images and act out accordingly. Therefore, instructors generally find that many African-American athletes who excel in their sports are not motivated to achieve academic success, because their identities are centered on their body’s ability to perform at a high level in a given situation. They are mostly uninterested in the process of learning or changing their conception of self or Other. However, it is possible to engage these students through the content and the exercises within the class. By including discussions on the nexus between athletes and racial/ethnic groups, the instructors would provide an opportunity for these students to contribute from their personal experiences and enrich the learning process. Indeed, instructors should also try to encourage these students to analyze their own
involvement in the stereotyping process. If nothing else, this would at least provide an outlet for students to discuss topics that affect their everyday life and hopefully gain a better understanding of their own and Other’s prototypical images and emotional/behavioral patterns.

Bracher points out that student also attempt to maintain their body image by collecting accoutrements around themselves that reflect their agency. These things are seen as extensions of the Self. They function to enhance a person’s identity and create a certain image of the Self as against the Other. However, sometimes the need to have the biggest boat, or the newest sports car might reflect a Self that is vulnerable and is attempting to regain its coherence through these additions. Again, the nexus with ethnicity can be seen. Asians are deemed to be more technically savvy, and the very fact that most technical support back- offices for Multi-national Corporation’s are now in Asian countries supports this assumption. While there might be some strands of truth in this prototype, there are also many other external stimuli (such as focus in these countries’ educational systems on technological training of their students rather than other academic skills) that affect the creation and maintenance of these images. However, the dangerous implication of this situation is that many Asians have internalized this image into their identity. More and more Asians are turning toward technology in their careers whether they have an aptitude for it or not. This not only is a kind of racial profiling but can also result in identity-vulnerabilities in the people who start depending on external accoutrements for their security and coherence.
These accoutrements, moreover, sometimes play an additional role: as surrogate images and agents. As Bracher explains, “motor vehicles often function as surrogates as well as prostheses for their owners, as do houses: one’s car and one’s house are one’s externalized body” (40). The attempt to maintain the body’s agency through surrogates is seen within the classroom as well. As mentioned before, Asian students are becoming increasingly dependent on different technologies to reflect their efficacy. Indeed, the use of cell phones and iPhones is a constant distraction, forcing most instructors to include a clause in their syllabuses banning the use of them during class. The intense emotional attachment that the students have to their electronics is an indicator of their investment in these surrogates. This attachment can, however, be used as a discussion topic within the classroom. Communication and analysis on why and how people communicate through these different technologies and why they prefer those to face-to-face conversations might help the students in understanding the function of these gadgets in their life. This is an important discussion as increasing hordes of people are becoming over-dependent on these tools. This is resulting in a reduction of physical human communication where the communicators have to be in the same room and creating a population that is increasingly isolated from others. This is dangerous for prosocial thinking and action as people who conceive of themselves as separate from everyone else would be reluctant to engage with novel people and situations and find similarities. Indeed, this could result in not only indifference to the ethnic Other’s situation and suffering but also a harmful self-centeredness where the Self is seen only as distinct from the Other.
The same arguments, according to Bracher, could possibly be made concerning the spatial, physical, and visual surrogates that people surround themselves with. People are always looking for a physical space that reinforces and sustains their sense of Self and agency. This is generally reflected in people’s search for the “perfect” home. This urge to find settings that sustain one’s identity can also be seen in the choice of virtual spaces that people choose to look at or surround themselves with. The physical places that individuals usually enjoy gazing upon in paintings, photographs, and films usually very closely replicate the physical surrounding that that person prefers. Even in these it is possible to see the process of identification tilting toward people who depend on the same accoutrements as the Self. Usually this is also defined by socio-cultural structures surrounding a person. A person in a developed country might base his or her identity on owning a yatch whereas a person from a different culture might be focusing on a car. These differences can be used in a similar fashion as body-ideals to create and sustain differences between the Self and Other. Instructors must encourage students to rethink their concepts of agency and the use of surrogates to sustain the sense of self through exercises that allow them to reflect on the reasons behind their attachments. If this is supplemented with multiple alternative images and surrogates that Other people have, it might be possible to help students realize the socio-cultural formation and flexibility of their own images. The awareness of multiple images might encourage the students to re-think their own existing ideals and substitute the harmful elements with more easily supportable beneficial contents. This would not only create a more secure identity but also be make the students more open to engaging with novel concepts and images and
find similarities with the Other. Therefore, while a unique and unified image of the Self is crucial for a person’s well-being, over-attentiveness to maintaining the body’s ideal-image might result in harmful self-centeredness and increased distinction from the ethnic Other.

Enacting one’s imagistic ideal, nonetheless, is an important force behind the actions and emotions that people exhibit. The processes of maintaining a sense of Self and developing the capacity to empathize with the ethnic Other are equally dependent on this register. The memories of prototypic images of one’s bodily form and agency along with experiences of the specific spaces, places, and objects which enhance the sense of Self to the optimal are repeated throughout one’s life to maintain one’s sense of self. Similarly, the attempts at maintaining one’s agency are continued throughout one’s life and affect the Self’s perception and behavior concerning the Other. Prosocial pedagogy uses this knowledge to make the learning environment and the content of the class as sustaining of the student’s identity as possible while introducing alternative ideals in a non-threatening manner. It also provides opportunities for the students to reflect on the creation process of their own image. This might lead them to a better understanding of the metaphoricity of the ideals and a willingness to substitute the harmful ideals with more beneficial ones.

**Affective-Physiological Identity-Contents**

Along with the body-image, people also maintain a sense of themselves and the ethnic Other through the body’s affective and physiological functioning. This includes the coherence gained from not only the processing of sensory stimuli but also the more
basic processes such as breathing, eating, and sleeping, which manifest themselves in various physiological states. The variations in people’s affective-physiological states are grouped into visual prototypes which are referred to for identifying changes in non-verbal cues from the Other and interpreting a situation. These prototypes generate meaningful combinations of various and multiple elements into coherent sets which help people name what they experience. Thus, emotions like rage, sadness, happiness, empathy and the corresponding non-verbal gestures (smiling, crying, frowning, and extending a helping hand) would have no meaning if they were not processed and grouped in understandable sets for later retrieval. This is crucial for the empathy-arousing process where the Self depends on interpreting cues from the ethnic Other to match their own situation and affects with another’s and respond empathically.

However, people need to build up schematic patterns for these emotions and characteristics to be accessed easily in different episodes of life. Thus, along with the proper physiological functioning of the body, there has to be a repetition of episodes and analogous core affective states to form functionally corresponding classes. These classes are then represented as prototypes and they form the structure for all the emotional, affective and physiological processes of life. The affective state is repetitively connected with various representations of people and places in these episodes. Indeed, this is the most crucial element in the process of expanding the student’s affective-physiological identity-contents. A complex set of core affective-physiological contents would enable the students to engage more easily and affectively with new information. Therefore, instructors must not only introduce multiple emotive responses to a single situation to
show them alternatives to their own state but also encourage students to see the advantages of a complex range of affective-physiological contents. If the students accept the advantages of a complex identity with multiple affective-physiological elements then they must also repeat the new pairings of episode-affect so that they become a part of their prototypes. Stern’s concept of the Representation of Interactions that have been Generalized (RIGs) presents such prototypic episodes. The sense of Self and of the Other is shaped by the memories of repeated episodes from the past which are retrieved for interpreting the various characteristics of the present experience. These episodes, according to Stern, are small, coherent groups of experience including “sensations, perceptions, actions, thought, affects and goals . . . which occur in some temporal, physical, and causal relationship” (95). Formed at birth but developing throughout one’s life, these prototypic episodes influence both the sense of Self and the inter-personal relationships with the ethnic Other. Dominated by the affective core, these episodes are visible in different emotive vocalizations and in different affect states which Stern calls “activation contours.” What is important for prosocial pedagogy is that these cores are dissimilar for different people. For prosocial pedagogy to be successful, the instructors must address this multiplicity in the structure and content of their class.

Affective-Physiological Identity: Maintenance and Alteration within the Classroom

Prosocial pedagogy attempts to develop complex pairings of episode with prototypical affective cores in the students which maintain their secure identity and enhance their capacities to empathize with the ethnic Other. Indeed if the learning strategies and subject matter within the classroom enhance the students’ core affective-
psychological states, then they are more apt to be better learners and participators.

Alternatively, if the pedagogical strategies and subject matter hinder or intimidate their identity-bearing affective core, they will be more focused on identity reestablishment. For instance, if Jane’s identity is focused on a state of stability, she would not react positively if the multiethnic literature classroom experience were too aggressive or competitive. Instead of focusing on finding similarities and empathizing with the Other, Jane’s mental, emotional, and psychological energies would be spent in maintaining a secure sense of self. Alternatively, Briana, whose affective core is centered more on anger, would be stimulated within the same class. This atmosphere would allow her not only to sustain her identity-bearing affective-physiological core but also reinforce that core through an episodic repetition of the prototypes.

Instructors in the process of creating pedagogical strategies that attempt to substitute the student’s harmful affective-physiological identity-contents with prosocial elements must therefore be aware that different people have different affective cores. While someone could feel complete in a state of hyper-vigilance toward an Other, someone else could only function effectively in a state of mental openness and quiet where he or she is supported by an identity-sustaining environment. The pedagogical strategies have to create an atmosphere within the classroom where the affective-physiological cores of most of the students are sustained. Indeed, students may become so used to the existing states which sustains them that they will constantly find ways to return to those affective-physiological affects. Therefore, students whose sense of self depends on their being helpful to others will continuously engage in charitable acts that
allow them to maintain this identity-bearing affective state. Instructors must aim to encourage such prosocial cores in their students where they habitually take actions to help another as the basis of their identity. The problem for an instructor is in creating a supportive environment for students who depend on negative affective states like anger, who might attempt in class to create that affect through biased comments or actions toward another. Since these are also attempts at identity-maintenance, instructors should attempt to find means for transforming harmful anger into prosocial anger. For instance, through role-playing or perspective taking, a student’s anger toward a group of people (illegal immigrants) might be redirected to the actual root of the problem (the oppressive social institutions) to motivate actions of social transformation in the students.

Indeed, any extreme threat to one’s sense of Self will result in the student focused on identity maintenance rather than identifying with the Other. Bracher points to five strategies that people use in restoring their affective-physiological states when threatened with contents that are alien to them. The knowledge of these strategies can help instructors to structure their class and exercises in ways that will facilitate the student’s maintenance of their affective-physiological states, and thereby, enhance their sense of Self and capability to emapathize. The strategies used to maintain a coherent state of affective-physiological well-being are: the use of mood altering substances and activities along with a stress in maintaining certain identity-supporting interpersonal relationships.

Instructors have to be aware of that students use substances like caffeine-infused drinks, alcohol, and drugs or sensory simulations that affect the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) to facilitate a more identity-sustaining affective state.
The negative effects of the abuse and over-dependence on any of these substances (like, drugs) or stimuli (like, food) have been well-documented. However, if taken to substitute negative cores with positive affective states, then the use of these substances and stimuli can be productive. Indeed, a student who is battling insecurity and an incomplete sense of Self will not be motivated to think of others. The atmosphere within the classroom should, therefore, be sustaining for these students. It becomes especially important within the multiethnic literature classroom where there is added challenge from novel and distant information and people. Instructors must, therefore, take supplemental steps to recognize these students and provide opportunities for enacting their identities and reestablish a secure sense of themselves.

The core states which enhance a sense of Self are also maintained by participating in physical activities which stimulate certain chemical changes in the body. Bracher points out that these can include anything from “having sex, engaging in endorphin-releasing exercise, subjecting one’s body to severe stress or even danger (as in adrenaline- activating extreme sports), or enacting more calming movements and postures (as in yoga and other Eastern bodily disciplines)” (33). Within the classroom, the attention that a student gives to the exercises and texts can depend on how reliant they are on large-motor activity for their sense of self. Most instructors have had at least one hyper-active student who is unable to sit still or one who is lethargic. Within the classroom it is necessary to engage all the different kinds of students. While it might be impossible to engage in rigorous physical activities, alternating teaching strategies might help in facilitating a greater degree of focus. For instance, including small group
discussion, larger class discussion, and individual work in the lesson plan would make sure that students do not become either “antsy” or completely lethargic. Physical movement involved in alternating between small groups and large class discussions would stimulate the students and keep them alert. This is extremely important to ensure that students are focused on expanding their conception of the Self rather than on identity-maintenance.

This strategy of alternating learning activities is also effective in facilitating prosocial learning in those students who seek to produce and maintain certain affective-physiological states by engaging in certain interpersonal interactions. Students whose core is dependent on friendliness will attempt to create situations and relationships in the classroom that will sustain their identity. It is also possible that they will approach the multiethnic texts in a similar manner. Similarly, students whose identity is focused on aggression will find such an atmosphere threatening and will try to alter the atmosphere in the class through disruptive behavior or language. The pedagogical strategies used by the instructor must take into account this difference so that the student’s attention is not diverted by identity-maintenance.

This prosocial learning process is also a cultural process where individuals learn not only within the classrooms but also through socialization into their respective cultures. The fifth stimulant that Bracher points out is the maintenance of core states through engagement with different kinds of cultural events and activities. This is closely connected to all the four strategies mentioned above. People consume mood altering substances and participate in various sensory and physically stimulating activities and
interrelationships in cultural events ranging from the religious to the mundane. The classroom is also a cultural space where students are socialized into their culture. Instructors must attempt to transform this space into a prosocial one where the students learn to be habitually willing to engage and see similarities with the ethnic Other. While it is true that students respond more positively to teaching strategies if they match and support the general cultural belief systems of the society that they belong to, it is still possible to alter the harmful contents and refocus the students’ focus on the Other. For instance, exercises within the classroom can be structured so that they reinforce the positive qualities (like compassion) which are recognized by society. Exercises based on role-playing are one such strategy which can enhance their fellow-feeling and lead to compassion. Prosocial pedagogy, thus, encourages the instructors to fashion exercises within the classroom according to the cultural stimuli that the students experience in their lives so that they are more motivated to internalize the socially-affirmed positive identity-contents (like, empathy) that they had previously distanced themselves from.

Obviously, there are some affective-physiological (like compassion, empathy) states that encourage prosocial pedagogies more than others. Since these affective states are developed over a life-time, it is an ambitious project to attempt to change them within one semester of a class. However, instructors over and over again have observed how students react positively or negatively to subject matter, class exercises, and pedagogical methods emotionally rather than indifferently. The very fact that these components of a classroom have the ability to touch the student’s personal emotions and life points to the immense influence they exercise in the student’s basic identity-maintenance. While it
may not be possible to completely alter an individual’s affective-physiological core within a class, it is possible to sustain and develop some positive states which lead to effective learning and pro-social thinking. A focused attention to states like empathy, openness, friendliness, calmness, and collaboration through the texts used within the classroom and the pedagogical strategies and methods employed could maintain and develop a more positively centered core.

This strategy becomes more effective if students also accept the possibility of multiple affective cores in their own identity and strive to attain such a complexity. Indeed, the inclusion of diverse and varied affects into the student’s affective-physiological identity would make them able to engage more efficiently and easily with novel situations and information. Even the negative affects like anger, possessiveness, and hyper-vigilance can be altered so that they function prosocially rather than hindering the formation of connections with another. The more complex affective-physiological core that students have, the more they will be see similarities with the Other and feel secure in their sense of Self.

Linguistic or Verbal Codes

The verbal codes allow people to understand and verbalize their thoughts and emotions and communicate them to others in a coherent format. Without this ability to verbalize, human beings would not only have no sense of a rational Self but also be unable to engage with the Other in an efficient manner. Indeed, prosocial thinking and action is dependent on the communication of the suffering and the desire to help between the Self and Other before actual action takes place. Not only that, the failure to engage
and find similarities with the ethnic Other which leads to empathic action is often motivated by students’ need to maintain their linguistic identity components. Even the motivation to be open to novel ideas and people is closely connected to feeling secure in one’s verbal sense of Self. Essential for a sense of Self language, thus, provides the optimal mode to converse with other people and analyze events, past and present. As Bucci expands,

Language is the code of communication and reflection, in which private, subjective experience, including emotional experience, may be shared, and through which the knowledge of the culture and the constraints of logic may be brought to bear upon the contents of individual thought. It is also the code that we may call upon, explicitly and intentionally, to direct and regulate ourselves, to activate internal representations of imagery and emotion, to simulate action, and to control it. (7)

The point of importance here for prosocial pedagogy is that language is a cultural code and the culture that one lives in influences and creates the linguistic codes which people from the same group share. This is also the point where differentiating the Self from the ethnic Other based on similarity or difference between the codes becomes possible. Prosocial pedagogy, therefore, aims to expand the students’ linguistic-conceptual contents so that they can connect with more and more people and engage in prosocial action. Like the other identity-contents, the linguistic-conceptual register is also composed of elements that are metaphorical. Within the multiethnic literature classroom, the students are anyways introduced to a diverse array of linguistic codes starting from
the names of the characters in the texts to the belief systems. Instructors need to reduce the threat from the novel information by attempting to expand the students’ core linguistic identity-contents so that they have a complex set of codes that they share with Other people. This would help them to engage more easily and efficiently with the Other while finding strands of similarity to lead to prosocial action.

To help students develop a complex set of linguistic codes, it necessary to first understand the components of this register. According to Bracher, the linguistic-conceptual identity of a person consists of systems of master signifiers, systems of beliefs and knowledge, and narratives which structures people’s conception of the Self and relationships with the Other. People have to enact and be recognized for their core codes to be secure in their identity.

This register maintains a sense of coherent Self, which consists of personal schemas, through what Lacan calls identity-bearing “master signifiers” as well as systems of knowledge, belief, meaning, morality. The master-signifiers, words such as “man,” “woman,” “capable,” “empathic,” “Arabic,” “Christian” constitute the attributes that an individual enacts to elicit recognition. Master signifiers are those words to which a subject’s identity is most intimately bound. These identity-bearing words are either valorized or avoided in action and discourse as the acceptable or unacceptable norm. Individuals strive to either maintain or avoid these social ideals and attributes according to their sense of right or wrong. According to Bracher, “Our identity depends, first, on the integrity and the statues of such master signifiers and, second, on our assurance that we
actually embody these signifiers” (17). Thus, anything that bolsters the status of a master
signifier or enactment of the signifier strengthens one’s sense of self.

Indeed, these signifiers become crucial in this discussion for the way that an
individual’s identification with a certain signifier commits him or her to a certain
orderings of all the rest of the signifiers. For instance, if Jane identifies herself as a
“liberal” person, the meanings of all the other signifiers then automatically get stratified
according to that identification. Words like “liberty,” “equality,” “democracy,” and so on
take on a meaning that is based on Jane’s sense of what constitutes being a liberal.
Similarly, characteristics that threaten her sense of Self get eliminated or marginalized
from her structure of master signifiers. This hierarchy is obviously different from that of
people who do not identify themselves as a “liberal.” Prosocial pedagogy attempts to
expand the students’ set master signifiers.

People also depend on other systems of meaning to sustain a sense of Self and
Other. These consist of: systems of belief and systems of knowledge. Systems of belief
constitute the moral system that a person builds their identity on. The belief in the
institutions of marriage, education, religion, parental responsibility, and charity are
examples of belief-systems on which people base their whole life. These are the socially-
affirmed goals that most people strive to attain. Indeed, most of the their actions are
structured with the aim to attain these goals. These systems of belief play a similar crucial
role within the multiethnic literature classroom. If students feel that their belief system is
being threatened or belittled, they will react accordingly. Distancing from the class or
even becoming disruptive are common reflectors of feeling insecure. Students from a
minority ethnic or racial group sometimes feel threatened in this manner, and it is incumbent upon instructors to create an atmosphere where prosocial and beneficial values are respected, whether they personally agree with it or not.

Systems of knowledge (like those contained in different socio-religious sects) also maintain a person’s identity in a similar manner. Individuals usually embrace the systems that provide opportunities for them to enact and enhance their sense of Self. Indeed, most of the social rules that a person lives by are a part of that Self’s knowledge system which they have consciously or unconsciously learnt since childhood. Any threat to these knowledge systems that sustain a person’s identity triggers efforts to reinforce and enact them in the optimal way possible. Within the multiethnic literature classroom, students whose knowledge systems are challenged in any way react negatively by exhibiting boredom, indifference, or avoidance of the novel information being presented. In fact, depending on the level of a student’s sense of a secure self, some might even be threatened by even an encounter with an alternative system:

The mere existence of differences between oneself and others calls into question the absolute validity and correctness of one’s own beliefs, values, and lifestyles. Because such threats challenge an individual’s faith in his or her worldview, he or she is likely to respond to those with divergent worldviews with disdain and hostility. (Schimel et al. 906)

Thus, instructors have to be careful not to create an identity-threatening atmosphere where students feel identity-vulnerability. This could lead to not only to a focus on
reestablishing a sense of Self but also a distancing from finding commonalities with the Other.

The final way linguistic identity is carried is through narratives and scripts. This identity component is especially important within the multiethnic literature classroom, where the mode of learning about the Self and Other is mostly based on narratives. Individuals maintain and enact their identity-bearing signifiers through scripts and schemas of the self and the ethnic Other. These schematic representations of events and relationships often take a narrative form. Mandler, Nelson, and Schank and Abelson all assert that the narrative is an essential form of schematic representation. It is crucial in the learning process because people categorize, understand, store and relate to the events in their life through the narrative form that a schema takes. As Russell and van den Broek explain:

These narrative schemas enable individuals to organize and represent experiences and/or events as meaningful wholes that function as the bases for the comprehension and the behavior. In other words, the form of these representations help to bind or congeal an individual’s behavior and experience into meaningful unities. (344)

Narratives thus not only reveal the master signifiers and belief systems that sustain an individual’s identity in relation to the ethnic Other but also comprise the contexts and organization within which these knowledges have meaning.

Dynamic and cognitive-behavioral theory shows that knowledge-systems which shape a person’s beliefs are expressed and memorized primarily in narrative format.
According to Russell and van den Broek, “the narratively represented events contain information concerning interpersonal relationships, emotions, etc. but it is within this narrative context that they acquire meaning. Narrative organizes and thus partly constructs the information it contains” (352). This knowledge can be used by instructors to introduce new narratives about the ethnic Other to lead to better understanding and greater empathy.

**Linguistic-Conceptual Identity: Maintenance and Alteration within the Classroom**

The change toward prosocial action in a person’s character must include a transformation in their linguistic-conceptual identity. Instructors must focus on the student’s core signifiers, belief systems, and narratives and attempt to substitute the characteristics that hinder the sustenance of a secure self and identification with the Other with ones that facilitate increased involvement with novel ideas and belief-systems presented in the ethnic texts. Further, prosocial pedagogy aims to replace egocentric signifiers that focus a person’s attention only on their personal well-being with signifiers that entail caring for and nurturing the Other as well.

However, just as in imagistic codes, individuals react with panic to any threat to their sense of Self organized by the structure of master signifiers. This can be seen very clearly in the multiethnic literature classroom where the students are being introduced constantly to new and alien master signifiers. In response, they generally hasten to re-embody and enhance their own master signifiers in whatever manner they can. Any hurt is usually followed by an attempt to reclaim a coherent, secure identity through bolstering strategies. It is usually by behaving in a way that reiterates the centrality of that master
signifier to their identity. Beneffectance is a common strategy used in these times. Students try to find alternative means immediately after feeling a threat to their Self that makes them more secure. One typical strategy used to feel better is punishing the person who is seen as responsible for the feeling of being diminished. Distancing oneself from the ethnic Other and focusing only on elements that create distinction from the Other is one such strategy.

The systems of beliefs and knowledge are also important in prosocial learning, since they play a decisive role in deciding people’s feelings and behaviors toward others. People depend on these systems to guide their judgment and actions in their interpersonal relationships. Research has shown that people are more empathic to someone who shares their belief system than to someone who does not. Students use their own codes to “read” a person’s situation and make judgments. However, motivated by egocentricity, it is possible to interpret or misinterpret one’s own motivation as well as those of others. For instance, what one person considers “right” or “wrong” may be very different from another person’s definition of the concepts. Pedagogical strategies like role-taking and mimicry can be used to help students become aware that their interpretation of an event is only one of multiple possibilities. This understanding is essential for prosocial action as it might make the students understand the Other’s situation better and make them more sympathetic to the Other’s thinking and actions. Indeed, this might also influence the Self’s judgment of the Other and lead to a willingness to help alleviate the sufferer’s pain as the way one judges a situation decides the action that one will take. For instance, to do good one must think that the person
needing help deserves it. This question of “deserve” is based on a person’s belief system. Jake, a religious person, might like to help a poor immigrant because he sees a person down on his luck, whereas Brad might think that the immigrant is illegally in the country and deserves no assistance. Jake’s belief system is centered on religion, which teaches him to be helpful to all people, and doing these acts makes him feel good. On the other hand, Brad believes justice. For him anyone who breaks the law does not deserve any help. Both the men see the same poor, illegal immigrant, but they react differently because of the different belief systems that define their identities. Therefore, instructors must present the possibility of alternative belief systems in a non-threatening manner.

However, a person’s ability for evaluating a candidate narrative for its cognitive, linguistic, and emotional intricacy is dependent on his/her narrative schematic complexity. Prosocial pedagogy attempts to change the way students act in the world by targeting their limited, inflexible narrative sets. Instructors should attempt to show the students that if an individual with, for instance, a limited emotional vocabulary can expand his/her repertoire, then it would becomes easier and easier as time passes to be more vocal and emotionally available. The beginning of inclusion of certain enunciations like “I appreciate your help” or “I am glad to be your friend” can lead to statements like “I love you.” Instructors can provide opportunities for the students to engage in role-playings where their empathy for another is aroused and practice saying prosocial enunciations (like, “I would like to help you”). With practice, this empathic vocabulary might become a part of the students’ identities to lead to habitual prosocial action. However, this progression only happens if the increase in the intricacy and variety of the
vocabulary is accompanied by more complex cognitive, and emotional interpretation of the experiences.

This is more easily explainable in terms of making pertinent changes in people’s representations of life experiences. Cognitive and psychodynamic theories view the narrative schema as the cognitive structure that assists and restrains habitual attitudes and actions. Therefore, an understanding of the narrative structure underlying the students’ experiences can allow an instructor to have a more in-depth understanding of their internal state and introduce ways to alter the more harmful elements. For instance, by focusing on a student’s repeated use of a metaphor of drowning in a personal essay can lead to a greater understanding of the representational significance of the metaphor and its connection to the student’s affective and psychological state. Thus, as Russell and van den Broek states, “transforming, restructuring, relativizing, and/or enriching the structure of an individual’s narrative schemas can provide the type of cognitive reorganization that underlies theories of change in psychodynamics and cognitive therapies” (344).

These attempts at reorganizing the cognitive and narrative representations of the self and inter-personal relationships, according to Russell and van den Broek, requires information about a) organization and content of the narrative schema and b) strategies that result in maximum change within the scriptural and schematic narrative representations (344). While it is not possible to recognize the problematic narratives to the extent and depth that a therapist can, an attentive instructor could be able to recognize persistently reiterated schematic representations. The extent of the student’s dependence on the schema or the script can indicate the level of reliance on the script. It would also
indicate the type of script it is. This is important information for the instructor as a core schema would be more difficult to change than a more external one. For instance, it might be easier to change a student’s attitude about a certain person in a text rather than about the process of prejudice in itself.

Russell and van den Broek provide some guiding characteristics which can help in evaluating the narrative competency of a student through their “degree of narrative elaboration (e.g., whether a narrative has a single or multiple plots) and complexity of narrative elaboration (e.g., average clauses per main clause)” in their narratives (347). These provide an indication of the student’s ability to express and comprehend life experiences at various levels of complexity and react emotionally and behaviorally to the ethnic Other. Also, sometimes the complexity of a student’s narrative is evident in his or her actions and behaviors. Disruptive or indifferent behavior in reaction to a certain topic might be an indication that the student feels threatened and is attempting to maintain his/her prototypic narratives.

Nonetheless, narratives along with master signifiers and systems of belief provide a crucial tool within the multiethnic literature classroom. By encouraging the students to substitute their harmful, antisocial schematic and scriptural narratives with prosocial identity-contents, prosocial pedagogy attempts to lead to a secure identity and a willingness to empathize with the Other.

**Strategies of Psychological Change**

Now we turn to the second question: what kinds of psychological change must be introduced in students’ identity-contents in order to create a secure identity by
eliminating selfish motivations and their consequent enactment in prejudiced action?

Based on Bracher’s model of intervention to eliminate identity-threatening elements, the psychological changes that must happen in a self to promote prosocial learning are: developing a more secure identity, altering and substituting negative identity-components, and integrating multiple and diverse identity-contents.

Developing a Secure Identity

The key point for prosocial learning is that one’s sense of a continuous, unified self is at stake in moments of choice and consideration about helping an ethnic Other. The decision to help or not to help another is closely entwined with whether the conception of self will be sustained by the act. Human beings are not essential, fixed identities but rather because of the metaphoticity of the identity-contents, people can maintain, alter, and/or substitute their core contents to be in a continuous process of change and development. Indeed, a person is constantly reflecting on events and people and acting to attain a coherent sense of Self. This insight has crucial significance for the process of maintaining a secure sense of self and responding more empathically to the Other. Prosocial pedagogy proposes that the pedagogical strategies and content of the class should be structured around the assumption that it is possible to change and develop the student’s identity-bearing components to prosocial components that more easily supportable and that involve more commonalities with the Other so that it maintains the student’s sense of Self and leads to prosocial action. As was discussed earlier, there are certain affective-physiological states like hyper-vigilance or possessiveness which are not very conducive to finding similarities with a diverse group of ethnic Other. Students
whose identities incorporate such qualities might find it hard to empathize with the varied Others and engage in prosocial action. However, students whose identities are supported by affects such as compassion or caring will be more open-minded about new information and empathize better with more various people. Since they are not involved in a constant state of identity maintenance, their attention can be focused on finding connections with other people.

Indeed, prosocial qualities like caring and compassion in a person are the readily supported identity-contents as these are the traits that are socially recognized in almost every culture. If a person learns within the classroom not only that the enactment of these qualities usually results in their feeling good themselves for helping another person but also that there might be recognition from peers for these acts as well, then in subsequent chances of helping another they might anticipate this felling of well-being and recognition and be more motivated to help the Other. Instructors can include exercises in the class involving role-taking and perspective-reversal which would help students take the space and perspective of the Other and match their own experiences and affective states to them. This might encourage students to identify situations in which prosocial action can take place and the practical steps that need to be taken to alleviate the pain of the Other. The inclusion of prosocial qualities (like empathy, caring, compassion) will allow the students not only to judge others and events more empathically but also to take steps in reinforcing them again by re-enacting them in their life. Once they anticipate feeling good, they will try to repeat the actions in subsequent events to regain that feeling.
Within the multiethnic literature classroom, however, sometimes the greatest threat to students’ identity bearing contents comes from the material itself. If the texts and ideas within the classroom challenge students’ identity-bearing signifiers, systems of knowledge/belief, or narratives, then the students react in panic and hasten to defend their sense of Self. Since these elements are crucial in defining the students’ identities and in delineating the relationship with the Other, students are always operating with an eye to any danger. Indeed, many students might resist finding similarities with the ethnic Other by putting in effort to learn certain topics (like ethnicity) because they fear that the knowledge that they will gain will demonstrate to them that their own identity-bearing signifiers and scripts are not positive or honorable, or even that they do not completely embody them. The anticipation and fear of this happening is enough to obstruct prosocial learning. In these cases, instructors have to introduce points of similarity between the students’ identity contents and the threatening material in order to diminish the degree of threat. For instance, instructors might point out examples in the text where the distant Other is responding to a universal occasion (like birth) with the same responses as the student might have (happiness). This would help reduce the tension in the students while making them aware of possibilities of similarity with people they had previously thought of as different. Moreover, this also recognizes their sense of a unique self and might then encourage the students to develop more positive qualities like caring and compassion which can lead to empathy for the Other.

Thus, instructors should encourage students to develop easily sustainable identity-contents while providing support for students’ existing identity contents as well.
Instructors must provide opportunities for the students to not only enact their identity contents but also be recognized for them. The importance of identity recognition and enactment prosocial learning has already been discussed. It is an essential requirement for a person’s psychological well-being and willingness to empathize with another. Instructors can provide recognition to the students in a variety of ways. Direct recognition by complimenting the student’s work or giving a good grade is an obvious example. However, literature classrooms can also provide a more sustained and systematic recognition for the student’s positive identity-bearing contents. Including exercises within the class which positively recognize some aspects (like compassion) or identity-markers (like, helpful person) of a student’s identity can be very effective. Similarly, including texts and contents within the class which reflect the students’ interests and perspectives can also provide feelings of being recognized.

Recognition, however, has to be supplemented with the feeling that one deserves the recognition to result in identity-maintenance. That can only come with enacting one’s identity. Instructors have to provide opportunities within the classroom for the students to comfortably enact their identity-components. While the students should be able to enact most of their identity-components within the class, the focus should be on encouraging them to enact prosocial contents that enhance a sense of Self and empathy. This is usually harder to achieve than imagined. Students usually do not get chances to enact compassion, empathy, or reflection in a continuing manner. However, instructors can provide opportunities for the students to enact these qualities in the classroom through a series of exercises that reinforce the advantages of incorporating them in an identity.
Multiple exercises based on mirroring, role-taking, perspective-taking and other empathy-arousing modes can engage students in a repeated process of enacting prosocial qualities so that the skills (self-reflection, critical analysis) learned from these practices will not only develop but also slowly be embraced by the students as part of their identity.

Educational practices, therefore, have to not only introduce new, more sustainable identity-contents to the students but also provide them with opportunities to enact the existing ones. Since people react with panic to any threat to their identity-components, instructors in the multiethnic literature classroom have to be doubly careful about the content and the structure of the class. The class should not result in the students focusing more on identity-maintenance than on finding similarities and empathizing with the Other. It is also important that students receive recognition for their prosocial identity-components which enhance learning. And the recognition should be in a systematic and effective form so that the students can develop into secure, prosocial learners.

**Altering and Substituting Negative Identity-components**

While the identity-components which facilitate prosocial learning need to be sustained and developed within the classroom, prejudice-entailing identity contents have to be starved of recognition and substituted with positive components. Affects such as aggression, or hyper-vigilance not only hinder the finding of similarities with the Other essential for empathy but also make the sustenance of the person’s identity difficult. While it is true that some students depend on these negative affects to maintain their sense self, nonetheless, they do so usually in a hostile environment where they see their
classmates and the instructor as a threat. Repressing the qualities that they see as threatening, these young people incorporate very aggressive ideals and affects into their identity. These young people see involvement in the prosocial learning process as a questioning of their sense of self. Rather, they are aggressive toward Others and doubtful of anything that they see as challenging of their notions. It is usually an unstable, fragmented identity that leads to these behavioral patterns of repression on one hand and fiercely conforming to certain ideals (aggressive person) and actions that sustain a more comforting identity on the other. While instructors have to be careful not to alienate these students further, it is possible to also introduce more prosocial, empathy-conducive identity-components. Involving these students in exercises which help them take the perspective of the Other can encourage them to see the strands of similarities and identify with the ethnic Other that they earlier saw as different and distant. This would enact qualities such as caring, which with practice and repetition, can become a more permanent part of their identity.

The “foot-in-the-door effect” that Freedman and Fraser point to is a good example of how a prosocial schema can replace a negative, egocentric schema. Their clinical experiment shows that subjects induced to comply with a small first request were more likely to agree to a larger request later, even if the person asking for the request was different. According to Abelson:

The usual explanation of the foot-in-the-door effect is that the subjects tell themselves that they did the first action because they are helpers of good causes or are generally helpful people. Thus, when the second request
comes along, the respondent’s self-image requires being helpful again.

(“Psychological” 720)

The practice of prosocial thinking and action can thus change the earlier action rule to a new one propagating a different behavior pattern. The new schema could facilitate more linkages between the Self and the Other’s situation while strengthening the self’s capabilities of attending to another’s pain. The instructor, by pointing to the similarities of experience and response of different people, can expand students’ conception of Self and Other and encourage them to learn more about diverse groups.

These processes would not only alter the basic schemas and scripts of the student’s identity which hinder prosocial learning but also create the basis for a more caring, empathic person who is willing to help diverse Others in pain. Instructors have to attempt to rewrite the negative identity-components and replace them with more prosocial elements so that it facilitates not only learning but also empathic action in the student. Indeed, the revised identity-components will help them become fulfilled, responsible members of the world.

**Integrating Multiple and Diverse Identity-contents**

As is evident from Steele’s research, it is very comforting to continue according to one’s scripted knowledge without experimenting with new information that can threaten one’s sense of Self. Students sometimes refuse to learn and engage with new information and diverse people because they fear that the new knowledge might challenge their identity-components and force them to recognize the existence of other alternatives or become conscious of their unconscious elements of self. For instance, a
discussion on ethnic relations may make students realize that while they might think that
they are open-minded, they still would not be able to be close friends with someone from
a different ethnicity. There is an inclination to cling to the familiar, well established
concepts of the self and other arrived at in childhood, even if sometimes they are
outmoded. In fact, studies have shown that children by the age of 3 or 4 begin to establish
feasible and reliable sequential representations of familiar social events in their lives,
such as eating lunch at school (Nelson and Gruendel). However, it is crucial for
instructors to introduce multiple and conflicting scripts to change the narrow identity-
contents of the students so that they are able to accept new information more easily and
effectively. This is especially so because identity scripts and schemas are not just linear
structures of fixed cognitions. They are instead flexible structures which predict
sequences of events that are magnified and changed from childhood through adult life.
For instance, Tomkins proposed that scripts are formed by linking together “scenes” from
an affect-laden childhood to guide the cognitive processing and social interactions
throughout life. These “nuclear scripts” form the basis for people to mentally replay
recent events and search for analogues in the past. Thus, people judge present situations
and people based on their scripts and other identity contents. This becomes problematic
if the contents are anti-social and hinder finding similarities and empathizing with the
Other. Students will still continue to enact them to sustain their sense of Self. Not only
will there be no attempts to identify with different Others but if the students’ group of
identification is narrow, they will not be motivated to expand it to include different
people.
However, instructors should encourage the students to see similarities with Others based on the structural similarity of human beings and the flexibility of their own identity-components. This can be done by showing how the strategies of gap-filling and the “ghost effect” in humans allow people to encounter variations in the expected occurrences and respond without panic. The metaphoric nature of the identity components also points to the flexibility of scripts and schemas. Instructors can present different perspectives and readings of a topic and let the students see that it is possible to interpret a situation through multiple frames, depending on the reader’s socio-cultural background. This is very important in the decision to help someone, since the flexibility of interpretation might transform a person whom one perceived as undeserving into a victim who deserves one’s help. Having a diversity of contents makes a person’s identity less vulnerable to threats to any one content. Thus, if a student’s identity included openness to different people, it is unlikely that the Self would feel threatened if he/she meets new people. Even the confrontation with a new or unexpected scene becomes smoother and more non-threatening if the person has a complex identity with a broad repertoire that consists of more rather than less prototypical cases. However, studies show that helps more than anything in the confrontation with new events is to come with a “prepared mind.” Singer and Salovey explain that this involves a combination of a relatively conscious metacognitive strategy (e.g., “Look for the unusual; turn the problem in its head”) and a series of highly differentiated schemas in the domain, all of which have been subject to considerable prior mental rehearsal. Indeed, creative persons probably
assign greater propriety than others to playing and replaying with
schemas, scripts, and prototypes from their chosen domain. (61)

Prosocial pedagogy aims to encourage the students to become these creative people who are in a constant process of re-thinking and re-inventing their identity-components. It is, however, possible that they end up with unsuitable schemas and prototypes because of hasty decision-making processes based on an over-reliance on automatized scripts. Also, obstructed attention to external cues might result in a faulty processing and engaging of a particular script. According to Singer (1975) central procedures like interior verbalizations and imaging can lead to faulty attention to external signals and missing of cues that may result in negative consequences. For instance, a student on the brink of helping another and engaged with multiple schemas and scripts (such as, Can I help? Am I capable of helping? What would I have to do to help?) might appear to be hesitant and unsure, leading to no action at all on their part in the end. However, as Singer and Salovey point out, the reviewing in itself is not a problem; the problem is the time that it was done in. Appraising these scripts and schemas in advance it would have led to a more effective plan of behavior and action.

The level of easiness or difficulty with this process of being “prepared” is dependent to an extent on the degree of differentiation and integration of the new schema or script to the original core identity-contents. As mentioned before, the more mature a person, the more differentiated and complex the schemas and scripts that he or she will have. Similarly, unbiased, prosocial students would be open to multiple experiences and
be able to process and refer back to a multi-layered network of associational links in their relationship with diverse groups of people.

In fact, Blatt in his work on object representation while discussing the stereotypical and well-established schemas for parental figures and their extensions, stresses the role of the boundary condition. Generally seen in the characteristics which define the self as different from the other, Lewin also points to the flexibility of these boundaries. This movement between and among the components of the inner personal regions is a defining characteristic of schemas. However, an extreme overlap between the concept of the Self and Other can lead to thought disorder as seen in schizophrenics. Nonetheless, flexibility of boundaries between and among the components of identity is crucial to the development of increasingly more complex associational networks necessary in prosocial thinking and action.

The negative effects of the permeability of boundaries, moreover, can be mitigated to an extent by a well defined structure of the self and Other identity-components. Indeed, the inclusion of multiple components in a conception of the Self allows more opportunities for a person’s identity to be enacted and recognized. Unlike a person with a limited amount of contents, an individual who is complex will be more willing to experience new situations. Prosocial pedagogy aims for such a multi-layered identity, which means that students will be interested in diverse subjects and be more open to new information. Indeed, the existence of multiple scripts and signifiers would help students in becoming critical thinkers who are able to organize and integrate varied information into coherent units. Moreover, a defined structure of self results not only in a
complex integrated associational network but, more importantly, helps in a more efficient retrieval of schemas and scripts. Singer and Salovey explain this in terms of a clinical study which, suggests that for obsessional personalities (in contrast with the hysteric or repressor style . . . ), the individual schemas may be dense and also highly organized into increasingly abstract categories. These patients may rely primarily upon the abstract higher-level formulations rather than follow the schema through all its associational paths. Thus, an obsessive may say, “I guess it boils down to my Oedipus complex” or “I’m still in the grip of posttraumatic shock,” but is unable or unwilling to instantiate all of the nodes of the associational structure underlying this organized schema (Horowitz et al. 1984; Shapiro 1965; Sullivan 1956). The so-called splitting off of the affective component in obsessives may be the result of reliance on the verbal abstractions that form the superstructure of a schema, and much of the tedious therapeutic work with such patients involves helping them through concrete instantiations of elements of schemas about family or spouse. When specific imagery is employed, the patient suddenly seems to be in the traumatic situation, and the “appropriate” emotional response, avoided by earlier verbal abstractions, is produced in therapy session (Singer 1979). (64)

Singer and Salovey connect the processes of concept making and categorization in maladaptive practices to the routine working of schemas in everyday life. This brings the
focus on the efficiency of retrieval of information from a person’s repertoire if it consists of complex, interconnected associational networks. If a student is able to initiate all the structured categorization of beliefs about the self and other it may improve their competence of retrieving data and making them automatic. This is true even for highly complex networks of information.

However, instructors in the multiethnic literature classroom have to be careful that students are not overwhelmed by conflicting information. Students might respond to this by focusing on their identity-maintenance rather than the prosocial learning process. If the instructor recognizes the feeling of threat in a student’s behavior then he or she must take immediate steps to recognize the student’s existing identity-components as well. This can be done by either steering the discussion to topics that students identify with or by providing tacit compliments.

The threat can also come in the form of a conflict between identity components. When components are incompatible or in conflict then none can function optimally. As Bracher points out that in most cases, “they entail two-mutually exclusive sets of behaviors to achieve enactment and recognition” (45). For instance, Jack’s affective state of caring might be in conflict with his stoic image. While being caring requires one behavior, being stoic demands another. It is essential for a person’s sense of self that these registers be integrated. Otherwise the conflict hinder a secure sense of Self and openness to new information and people.

Therefore, instructors must provide tools to the students to be able to integrate and make sense of all the different identity-components. Since the coherence and security of
their identity is dependent on this information, just introducing multiple schemas and scripts is not enough. Students must also practice identifying, categorizing, analyzing and judging the favorability of the multiple contents to the Self so that they only incorporate prosocial elements. Critical essays and self-reflective exercises can provide the students with the skills necessary to include a multiplicity of identity-components without the existing Self becoming threatened.

Since learning is a process for acquisition, representation, and processing of knowledge, the introduction of multiple identity-components is especially pertinent in any discussion on changing the students thinking and behavior within the multiethnic literature classroom where they are frequently introduced to new information. Indeed, the multiplicity of components allows the students to realize the existence of diverse interpretations and perspectives and helps them enact new states. This not only maintains the student’s identities but also, by integrating multiple and conflicting identity-components, makes their sense of Self more secure. By encouraging students to incorporate multiple associational networks in their identities, instructors can thus facilitate not only an expanded but also a secure sense of Self, which enhances the possibility of finding commonalities with diverse Others.

Conclusion

The maintenance of a secure sense of Self that is unique but can still see similarities with the Other is the basic requirement for empathizing and taking practical steps to help another in pain. A secure identity is the result of the repetitions of particular inter- and intrapersonal experiences in three different registers of experience and memory.
(affective-psychological, imagistic, and linguistic) which was envisioned as codes (the subsymbolic, imagistic and linguistic or verbal codes) by Bucci.

Prosocial pedagogy attempts to alter the qualities in these registers of experience and memory which hinder learning and empathy into more empathic qualities and states. It does this by focusing on the metaphoricity of the student’s identity-contents. It encourages the students to not only enact their existing identity but also alter and replace the anti-social elements with more readily-supportable, prosocial contents. This focus on the Self is especially crucial for the multiethnic literature classroom, where students might feel threatened by the novel material being constantly introduced to them. As is evident from Beck’s and Steele’s research, any real or assumed threat to the Self results in efforts to reestablish identity instead of finding similarities and empathizing with the Other. A secure identity, on the other hand, is less focused on egocentric monitoring of events and more willing to see similarities with Other across different groups. Indeed, over time the maintenance of such an identity is itself dependent on caring for and nurturing the Other. The reduction of identity-vulnerabilities, therefore, can result in the recognition that the Other as not always threatening and an openness toward empathizing and taking steps to help another.
Notes

1 These are expressions are coined by Meyers to reflect the different affective attitudes that a person might embrace. While “emotional vanilla” refers to the safeness of feeling only the core emotions that maintain a sense of Self and provide no awareness to new stimulus, “emotional vindaloo” nurtures all emotions, both positive and negative to decode a variety of experiences.

2 For further information on this consult Markus; Derry and Kuiper; Klein and Kihlstrom.

3 Research on the relation of format of narratives and the experiencing of an event has been done by Brandell; Landau and Goldfried, Beck.

4 Gap-filling is the inclusion of information in scripts which is not there in the present situation based on experiences from the past. Ghost effect occurs when in acting out a script a person encounters multiple variations of the same script. Then there is an effect where “as if the ghost of the general case is invoked by one script, then hovers over related scripts” (Fiske and Taylor).

5 For more on the connection of experiencing a new event with a sense of preparedness consult Stein.
Chapter III

Imagining the ethnic Other: Prosocial Pedagogy and the Arousal of Empathy

In addition to a secure identity, empathy can play a fundamental role in enhancing the ability to find similarities with the ethnic Other and reduce the Self’s prejudice and bias. Empathy is an underlying motive in the desire to change another’s life-condition. It allows a person to imagine the Other and occupy affective-states that are more appropriate to the Other’s situation than to one’s own as it is closely connected to the ability to imagine another’s suffering. Focusing on the verbal and non-verbal cues presented by the victim might result in the initiation of similar affective-states in the observer. Indeed, because of this ability in human beings to represent events and imagine themselves in another’s place and the power of these represented events to evoke affects, people need to only imagine the Other’s suffering in order to feel empathic distress. If the distress felt by the observer is strong enough, then he/she takes steps to alleviate his/her own suffering by taking actual steps to help the Other. This not only results in actions which lead to a change in another’s condition but also gives the students a new understanding of a secure Self as entwined with the Other’s well-being. Indeed, Fink points out that when students discover the personal and/or social significance of what they have learned, it gives them a new understanding of themselves and the Other which may result in caring for the Other. Prosocial pedagogy extends Fink’s conceptualization to hypothesize that pursuing one’s own desire and deepest needs results in empathy for
the ethnic Other which is crucial for the student’s embracing the pursuit of social justice and prosocial action as a life-long goal. Prosocial pedagogy, therefore, aims to encourage students in empathizing with a larger group of Others by focusing on developing their abilities to imagine themselves in the place of another and taking their affective states.

However, as discussed before, human beings are constantly focused on self-preservation and self-promotion. Thus, the basic question that students ask before acting prosocially is: who will I help? Human beings tend to answer that question based on an ego-centered monitoring of the situation. The person they end up helping the most often is—theirself. As much as people care about others, when push comes to shove, they will always put themselves first. Nonetheless, there are numerous stories of people helping others in need, sometimes with detrimental effects on their personal, emotional, or material well-being. Sacrifice and charity are qualities that are celebrated in most societies today. Children are taught from early on to share.

However, clinical research has found that people tend to help people with whom they can identify or interact frequently. As Hoffman points out,

Evolutionary theorists agree that humans evolved in small groups and that although altruism was necessary for survival within groups, the scarcity of resources often pitted one group against another. It should therefore not be surprising that a person is more likely to empathize with and help those who are members of his or her family, ethnic, or racial group—his or her in-group, in short. And when we consider that members of one’s in-group are similar to each other and to oneself, and share feelings of closeness
and affection, it should not be surprising that a person is most likely to empathize with friends than with strangers and with people who are similar to oneself than with people who are different. *(Empathy* 206)

This “familiarity bias” was evident in Klein’s study where slide sequences depicting black or White girls in happy, sad, or fearful situations that were relevant to White and African-American cultures were shown to a racially-mixed group of girls.\(^1\) All the subjects verbalized more empathy in response to children of the same race. Thus people whom one is familiar with are also the people who have similar life experiences and are in constant contact. The self feels empathy and more acute distress if people from the in-group are in pain than if the victim is unfamiliar.

People also display a here-and-now bias. Empathy is biased in favor of victims who are present in the immediate situation. According to Hoffman this is because “the automatic, involuntary, and salient empathy-arousing processes (conditioning, association, mimicry) require situational and personal cues that are at their peak when a victim is present” *(Empathy* 209). Clinical support can be found in a study done by Bateson, Klein, Highberger, and Shaw where the subjects were told about a 10 year old girl who had a fatal muscle-paralyzing disease. There was no cure but there was an expensive drug but that could improve her quality of life. Since her family could not afford the drug, she had been placed on a waiting list. The subjects then listened to a radio-interview with the girl describing her disease and ending with how great it would be if she got the drug. The subjects were then informed that children were ranked on the list depending on the date of their application, the seriousness of their need, and their life-
expectancy. They were also told that children remained on that list for months and that some died before they could be helped. Then they were told that they could, in return for their assistance and if they wished, move the girl to a list where she would get the drug immediately. This would however mean that some other children who had applied earlier, had greater need, or had shorter life-expectancy would have to wait longer. But the girl would have a much better quality of life. The subjects were told that only they controlled this move and that the girl and her family knew nothing of it.

One group of subjects was instructed to “imagine how the child who is interviewed feels about what has happened and how it has affected this child’s life. Try to feel the full impact of what this child has been through and how she feels as a result” (1047). The control subjects were told to “take an objective, detached perspective and not get caught up in how the child who is being interviewed feels” (1047). Three-quarters of the first group as compared to half of the control subjects empathized with the interviewed girl and moved her to the immediate-help group. Thus, people are more willing to help a victim who is the focus of their attention here-and-now than absentee victims, even if the absentee victims’ need is greater.

The multiethnic literature classroom presents the absentee Other—unfamiliar and distant. The characters that the students read about are neither in their in-group nor present. Indeed, there is no need for the students to empathize with the ethnic Other. Moreover, students are increasingly finding it hard to maintain their secure identity in a world that is rapidly becoming diverse. The multiethnic literature in its very content challenges students’ core identity-contents by introducing and asking them to make
connections with diverse realities. More and more students are focused on reestablishing their identities rather than finding similarities with the ethnic Other. This self-enhancement affects not only the degree of structural similarity that the students will see between themselves and the characters and the 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.

Prosocial pedagogy, however, attempts to reduce these biases by encouraging students to engage with novel material and see similarities with the alien Others’ affective states and life experiences. This allows students to empathize with another while being secure that they have a unique self which is different from the ethnic Other in certain ways. The focus on the similarity and difference from the ethnic Other counteracts the identity vulnerability that the students might feel if they are asked to identify completely with the Other. Indeed, when people who are secure in their sense of self face an ethnic Other who is suffering and can see 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 ethnic Other in the situation in a manner similar to how they would judge themselves, without the negative affects of the familiarity or here-and-now bias. 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.
The crucial point here that could motivate students to habitually act prosocially is their being aware that they have to actually reduce the suffering of the Other in order to reduce their own empathic distress. Just thinking about helping another does not result in a diminishing of the one’s own suffering. A study by Darley and Latane found that the intensity of the empathic distress reduces after helping another. Subjects heard sounds indicating that someone was having an epileptic seizure. The subjects who responded with action found an immediate reduction of their distress and experienced a feeling of well-being. On the other hand, the subjects who did not take action to help continued to feel upset, as indicated by their trembling hands and sweaty palms. If students become aware of this transformation in their own affective states that behaviorally expressing their empathy induces, then they will be more inclined to take prosocial actions.

Moreover, the expression of relief and gratitude in the victim’s face can also arouse feelings of empathic relief and well-being. Indeed, the recognition that the Self gets from helping another creates a more secure identity. People can learn from experience that helping Others can make them feel good, and anticipating this, they will be more willing to help another in the future. Over time helping another can become a habitual practice that can lead to a reduction in the person’s prejudices and biases toward the Other. Since helping another is based on finding similarities between the Self and Other, students will be less influenced by the familiarity and here-and-now bias. Prosocial pedagogy attempts to help students understand the advantages to their own identity security if they focus on finding similarities, empathizing, and acting prosocially.
toward the ethnic Other. Not only will they be recognized for their actions but also experience that helping another makes them feel good.

It is, therefore, crucial for instructors to help students develop more complex identity structures and be aware of the empathy-arousing modes. There are multiple cues that can arouse empathic distress in a person: a cry, a look of hurt, or imaging oneself in a painful situation like the one the Other is experiencing. These cues reflect the different empathic modes that a person has. Developmental researchers have found that empathy is elicited from five modes that develop from infancy through early childhood. Between birth and about age 7, children learn all the cognitive and motor requirements for the all the different modes. When they learn a new empathizing mode, it is added to the earlier repertoire and the child then draws on the mode that is most directly triggered by a cue. As adults, people have access to all the empathic modes and, as Omdahl argues, “It is the diversity of modes that enables us to respond empathically to the words in a letter, to the expression on a face, or to complex combination of cues, such as seeing a friend stare at a picture of a former romantic partner” (21).

A point that needs to be made here is about the transference of the student’s empathy from a character in a novel or movie to a real person in their life. Studies by Bateson, Klein, Highberger, and Shaw have found that empathic distress aroused in subjects from reading a note results in actions aimed toward helping a real person in pain and achieving empathic relief from the act. In their study, subjects had to assign desirable or undesirable work to two or three other subjects designated as workers. They were told that “flipping a coin is the fairest way to assign tasks to the workers but the decision is
entirely up to you. You can assign the workers any way you want. They will not know how they were assigned, only to which task they were assigned. And your anonymity is assured” (1044). Before they assigned the tasks, the subjects read a “personal note” from one of the workers that described a recent life-event. The subjects were instructed “to try to imagine how this student feels about what is described. . . how it has affected his or her life and how he or she feels as a result” (1044). Two-thirds of the subjects assigned the desirable work to the person whose note they had read and the undesirable work to the other workers.

This is in contrast with the two control groups. One was told to read the note but instructed to “take an objective, detached perspective and not get caught up in the writer’s feelings” while another group was not given the note to read. The subjects in both the groups flipped the coin and assigned work randomly. These findings show that people are more likely to empathize and act accordingly if the “victim” was the focus of their attention and in that sense “present” in the situation for their empathy. The victim, who was bought to focus through the reading of the note, received the same empathy and help as if they were a part of the subject’s in-group or present in the situation. Thus, reading about a person suffering in a text can translate into real action to help another. Prosocial pedagogy aims to help the students make this translation from the classroom to the outside world and take practical steps to help the ethnic Other.

The question then is how is empathy aroused? What are the different modes of empathy arousal that would allow students to occupy affective states more appropriate to the Other’s condition and take steps to alleviate another’s suffering? The five empathy
modes are Classical Conditioning, Direct Association, Mimicry, Mediated Association, and Role-Taking. The following sections will describe the content of these modes along with actual exercises within the classroom that can be utilized to arouse each specific mode. The exercises will be based on Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss*, an Asian-American novel that presents the interaction of people with multiple and diverse groups, and Siddiq Barmak’s movie *Osama*, which presents the struggle of Afghani women during the Taliban regime. The exercises will focus on analyzing the text while connecting it to the student’s identity and life experiences. Every exercise will be followed by an explanation of how it both arouses empathy in students and also reinforces their sense of Self.

The short-term goals of these exercises are based on the discussions in the earlier chapters which present strategies to enhance the students’ prosocial behavior by supporting a secure identity and by increasing their capacity for empathy. These exercises attempt to make the students aware of the metaphoricity of identity components and stress the advantages of a complex, multiplicity of scripts and narratives. These exercises also aim to introduce identity-components that can be more easily supportable and replacing the harmful components with beneficial, prosocial ones. Repetition of such exercises will help bring permanent changes to students’ master signifiers, enduring schemas, and prototypical cases that lead to reduction of prejudice against the Other and greater willingness to help the Other.
The Texts

Based in a world where everyone clashes with Otherness, Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss* explores issues of identity in a world that is marked by multiculturalism, globalization, fundamentalism, and political identity. Intricately weaving together life in Kalimpong, New York, and Cambridge, Desai presents characters who are all struggling to define their Self in a world that is rapidly changing and blurring the boundaries between races, classes, and genders. The Judge clings to his colonial world-view with a strict code of behavior. Sai, orphaned and alone, attempts to find fulfillment and happiness in her relationship with Gyan (her tutor), while the cook and his son Biju try to move up in the world by whole-heartedly embracing the prosperity of the new world. All the characters are, however, forced to face the challenges of a world that is rapidly overturning the accepted hierarchies and finally create alternatives for themselves that give them a sense of belonging.

*Osama* is Barmak’s 2003 movie portraying the life of women during Taliban rule. The narrative focuses on 12 year old Osama and her family of women who have no means of making a living due to the Taliban’s law that women shall not work. Persuaded by her mother and grandmother to disguise herself as a boy and find work, Osama is forcibly taken by the Taliban to a training school. Betrayed in the end, Osama is forced to marry an elderly mullah and forget all her dreams and hopes as she is locked in a room by herself. This movie thus intricately weaves the political scenario in Afghanistan with the personal struggles of the women to present the conflict faced by women whose basic
rights (like the right to make a living, to travel freely, and to procure food) were snatched away by an oppressive political state apparatus.

Modes of Empathy Arousal

Classical Conditioning

There are five modes of empathy arousal. The first two that are described here are memory-based conditioning paradigms. Classical-conditioning is a basic mode of empathy arousal that allows a person to match his or her own affective states to the Other’s through expressive cues like facial expression, body posture, tone of voice, and so on. Within the multiethnic literature classroom, this mode can be utilized effectively by introducing exercises which repeatedly pair the student’s actual distress with verbal and non-verbal cues of distress from the ethnic Other so that the students respond habitually by attempting to alleviate the suffering, of the Other and the Self. This empathy-arousing mode is important in childhood, especially in the pre-verbal years. It is a process through which human beings respond in a certain way to a stimulus because of the repeated pairing of that formerly neutral stimulus with a stimulus known to induce a particular response. For instance, Hoffman notes that there is a pairing of the mother’s actual distress with expressive cues of distress in the child (who is also having its own independent experience of distress) so that the mother’s feelings are conveyed to the infant through her physical handling of it. The physical stiffening of her body or the appearance of a frown on her face can be transmitted to the infant. The infant in turn becomes distressed as well. The mother’s distress thus becomes the direct cause of the infant’s emotional state. The infant might respond to this distress appropriately by crying
aloud or becoming upset. The accompanying facial and verbal cues of the mother will become conditioned stimuli which can subsequently evoke distress in the child even when there is no physical contact.

This is true also for positive affect. The mother’s feelings of happiness are transferred to the infant through her verbal and non-verbal cues. The infant learns to connect feeling good with the mother’s smile or the relaxing of her body. Furthermore, this transmission of emotions from the mother generalizes into conditioned stimuli where anyone’s smile or frown can make a person feel happy or distressed.

For prosocial pedagogy, this transference is crucial in contributing to a certain degree of connection between the student and the ethnic Other’s feelings. If people have been conditioned to recognize and respond in a specific manner to a particular stimulus from a person in their in-group, then with practice in the classroom, it is possible that they will start reacting in the same way to the stimulus from the characters in the ethnic texts. If empathic distress is aroused in the students by responding to the Other’s cues then it is possible that they will take steps to alleviate the Other’s suffering and bring relief to themselves. Indeed, empathy toward the ethnic Other is aided by the study of Ekman et al. which shows that distress is produced in a person by observing the expressive cues in the victim and matched because: a) all human being have certain experiences that are universal (loss, injury), b) because human beings are structurally similar to each other, they are likely to process distress-relevant information similarly and, c) human beings are therefore, likely to respond to similar distressful situations with similar emotions.
The empathy arousing exercises should thus allow students to analyze their reactions in response to cues and realize the universality of certain human emotive responses to certain situations. Most people feel the same joy when meeting a friend after a long while or the pain of separation when a father goes away for work. If students’ empathy is aroused through classical conditioning and they react in a similar manner to the same expressive cues from the ethnic Other as they do to people who they are familiar with or victims who are present in the situation, then this process would lead them to find similarities with Others. The realization of this basic connection between people (starting from their classmates, extending to the characters in the texts, and eventually matching Others in real life experiences) might encourage the students to identify and empathize with more diverse groups of people. Not only would this change their conception of the Self and the Other as distinct from each other with no points of similarity but might make the students feel the same empathic distress for a diverse group of people. This might result in their attempts to relieve it by taking practical steps to help the Other.

Moreover, if prosocial pedagogy can help students to develop their capabilities of “reading” the ethnic Other’s cues and responding to them in a similar manner as they would if the Other were a friend. This would enhance the chances of the students’ actually taking steps to help another. Also, classical conditioning, as mentioned above, is not just confined to negative affective states. The empathic relief that the Self would feel when matching the smile of gratitude on the victim’s face after he/she has taken actual steps to alleviate the Other’s suffering would be stored in memory. Indeed, the memory and anticipation of feeling good for helping Others is a prime motivator why people even
engage in acts that bring relief to another. Thus, a developed capability in the students to respond to the Other’s situation would make them more secure in their sense of Self by reducing their bias, expanding their empathy and leading to prosocial action.

Exercise:

Prompt while watching *Osama*—Watch Osama’s face closely as she is about to be found out to be a girl in the Taliban school. Pay attention to her facial expressions (her eyes, brows, mouth). Also, focus on the other expressive cues that are there, for instance, her body posture, tone of voice, activity level (standing, sitting, or running).

**Written Exercise**—Part 1: How do you feel watching Osama’s expressive cues? Do you feel distressed? What is Osama feeling in this scene? Do you feel some of the distress that Osama is feeling?

Class Discussion:

Why do you feel a similar distress as Osama, or, if you don’t, why not? What in the scene aroused the feelings of distress or created a distance from Osama’s situation in you?

Would you help Osama 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?

Explanation:

This exercise is divided into two main parts: a written exercise followed by a class discussion. The questions in the discussion follow the ones in the written part to encourage the students to think sequentially 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 asks the students to pay attention to Osama in a scene of the movie that most people find very distressing. She is just about to be found out to be a girl and condemned to a horrible fate for the rest of her life. The movie had already shown Osama’s hesitancy in pretending to be boy and the impossibility of the political situation where she (or, her mother/any woman) had no other option to find work. For the sake of survival, therefore, the students realize, Osama had agreed to take part in this dangerous charade. She had no other option in this unfair situation. By time this scene comes on the screen, Barrack had firmly established the unjustness of the socio-political structure that Osama lives in. She is clearly the victim who has been treated extremely unfairly. Students usually “identify” not only the wrong done to Osama but also to an extent with her dreams and fears as young girl who is only a little younger than them. These conditions are crucial for arousing empathic distress in the students. If the students see similarities to a certain extent with the Other and feel that a person is being deprived of something that belongs to them will they be more open to respond 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, the sweaty hands, the running in panic, trembling voice along with the words and images of pain might make the sadness and threat to the victim’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 student’s attention on their own emotional response to the cues. By matching the victim’s expressive cues with their own actual 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 the victim’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 put. If the students after reading the scene in the text decide that the victim deserves to be treated the way they are being treated because he or she is responsible for his or her own misfortune, then it is highly unlikely that they will identify and empathize with the character. For empathy to be aroused, the students have to judge that the victim has been treated unfairly and therefore deserve all the help he/she can get. This is also dependent on the extent 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 student’s initial identification with Osama. Being in the same age-group as Osama, most of the students identify with her 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 Osama is treated. The students feel bad for her despite being an ethnic Other. The class discussion, therefore, asks the students to analyze their own feelings of distress which may or may not match Osama’s and analyze what expressive cues were used to make them feel the specific affect.
The analysis of why they were feeling distressed or indifferent to response to Osama’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 his/her self 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 makes them more sensitive to another’s pain. This also increases the opportunities for the student to engage in prosocial act and help the distressed ethnic 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 actually helped another. Just thinking about helping another does not alleviate the empathic suffering. This exercise, by focusing on every minute step that must be taken to help another, provides a ready blue-print to the students for future situations. Indeed, the importance of coming with a “prepared mind” to a situation has already been discussed. As Singer and 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 is in memory the presence of conscious scripts and schemas which can be engaged to reveal the consequences and implication of the 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 included 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.

Classical conditioning can thus be utilized within the multiethnic literature classroom to arouse empathic distress in the students and pair it with the victim’s. The exercise is based on the matching of the distress and expressive cue between the students and the character based on the student’s own independent experience of distress. It can motivate the students to not only think empathically about the character but 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 ethnic Others, then the students’ identity will become more and more 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 prototypical or non-prototypical situations.

Direct Association

Direct association can be especially useful in the multiethnic literature classroom to reduce the perseverance effect, gap-filling, and ghost effects in scripts of prejudice against the ethnic Other. This form of empathy arousal occurs when people are reminded of past situations in which they experienced the similar emotion as the claimant. The victim’s verbal, non-verbal and other situational cues alerts a person to their feelings. It is
a direct association of cues in the claimant’s situation that reminds the individual of similar experiences in his or her past and evokes feeling that match the victims. Hoffman presents an example of direct association as described by a college student:

Getting off the bus I saw a man slip and fall and hit his head on the stairs. I was shocked. An accident flashed through my mind when I slipped on the sidewalk and cracked my skull. I don’t know what came over me. I didn’t think of anything but to rush to help and somehow get him to feel okay. I remember yelling at people to call 911. I must have spent over two hours making sure everything was okay. I know myself, and I know I wouldn’t have felt okay just to get him up and leave it to someone else to take care of him. (Empathy 48)

This example shows how the memory of a past experience is triggered by a cue in the victim’s situation and results in empathic distress which motivates prosocial action.

Unlike classical conditioning, direct association does not require a co-occurrence of distress in the observer with distress cues from the other. An individual does not actually require previous situations where one’s distress is matched to another’s distress cues. For empathy to be aroused through direct association it is enough that a prior feeling of anguish or discomfort is evoked by cues in another person’s situation that are associated with one’s own past painful experiences. Instructors can base their exercises on Omdahl’s description of the sequential arousal of the mode to make them more effective in arousing the student’s empathy. It would not only help in the creation of exercises within the class but also give an understanding to the instructor of how empathy
can be aroused in the students. Omdahl explains this arousing of empathy without a direct cue match through network theories. Each emotion has a node or a unit in memory so that every person has nodes for sadness, anxiety, happiness, and so on. These nodes affect cognitive appraisal, bodily changes, facial expressions, subjective states, and characteristic behavior for each emotion. For the arousal of empathy what is important here is that the emotion nodes are connected by associative pointers to other situations and events in one’s life in which the particular emotions were aroused. Thus, when a person experiences anguish in the present, the emotion activates memories of past painful occurrences and produces bodily sensations and expressive behavior assigned to that emotion. This process is explained in sequential steps by Omdahl:

1. A target conveys a cue that conveys emotional meaning (e.g., your mom laughs).
2. This cue is attended to and encoded by the observer (e.g., you notice the laughter).
3. The cue is matched with a node in the observer’s memory (laughter is matched with happiness).
4. If this node is connected to an emotion node, the emotion node is activated (e.g., happiness is activated in your mind).
5. Activation of the emotion node elicits the autonomic and expressive components of the emotion (e.g., because your happiness node has been activated, you begin to smile and feel happy).
6. This constitutes empathy to the extent that the emotion elicited matches the emotional state experienced by the target. (25)

Arousing empathic distress in a person thus requires verbal, non-verbal, or situational cues from the claimant that remind the observer of a past painful situation. The similarity of the situation (as seen in the college student example) arouses the same emotions in the observer as the victim is experiencing. This motivates the observer to feel empathic distress and help the claimant in the most effective way. If students’ emotions are aroused in response to a character’s distress in the novel (or, alternatively to their happiness), then they will be able to connect their own experiences and responses to those of an ethnic Other. This will increase their understanding of the Other as human beings with similar experiences and responses to those life situations as their own. Consequently, their own definition of Self-Other might expand to include more diverse populations toward whom they have fellow-feelings. This fellow-feeling can reduce their familiarity and here-and-now bias and enable them to feel empathy toward claimants who had been completely alien to them.

Direct association is especially effective in the multiethnic literature classroom, since its arousal is dependent on the memory of a past experience and emotion. This creates an instantaneous connection with the Other’s situation and emotions despite the Other’s being distant and alien. Moreover, the retrieval of information from the past engages all the three registers of experience and memory. This provides an opportunity for prosocial pedagogy to engage the students in exercises that allow them to focus on the perseverance effect of the prejudice arousing identity-contents and replace them with
more prosocial elements. Similarly, it becomes possible to attempt to reduce the negative elements in a student’s gap-filling and ghost effect processes in the retrieval of past information. Therefore, direct association reduces and replaces harmful identity components in the students and allows them to find similarities with more diverse Others by arousing the initial emotional connection required for that feeling.

Exercise:

**Written Exercise:** Part 1: Describe an incident in Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss* that reminds of a past experience and aroused strong emotions in you. It could be something as simple as walking into a strange house with people whom you are not familiar with (like Sai when she arrives in Kalimpong), or it could the sense of anguish and loss at losing someone important (the many departures and deaths within the novel). How did you feel when similar incidents happened to you? Were you scared, excited, threatened? What was your mental state? How did you act—brave, scared? What was your facial expression? Your body posture (i.e., were you standing erect or bent in pain)? What was the state of your clothes—were they disheveled? What were you saying? What words were you using in that situation? Did they convey your feelings?

Part 2: How do you feel now reading about this situation in the novel? Does it bring the same emotions as when you went through the experience? What are the cues and details that make the scene in the text similar to your experience—the emotions, the facial expressions, the mental state, the words used? What do you feel for the character going through the similar experience in the text? Do you feel compassion? Explain why you feel what you feel.
Class discussion:

Why do you think that you feel compassion for a character thousands of miles away with whom you probably have no similarity other than going through a comparable situation? Would you help that character feel better if he/she were present here now? What would steps would you take to help the person?

Explanation:

The first set of questions asks the students to identify an occasion within the novel that reminds them of a past experience and evokes some basic emotions in them. It should be an incident where the student reacts emotionally every time he or she reads about it. For instance, every time Megan reads about Sai’s experiences in Kalimpong, she might be reminded of feeling lost and alienated when she moved to a new town and did not know anyone. The questions are structured so that they engage all the affective-physiological, imagistic, and linguistic registers in the students. This allows the students not only to be more fully engaged in the process, since all their identity codes are being activated, but also to focus on minute details in the experience that will allow her to find similarities with the Other. As Ekman pointed out, most people are structurally similar and react in a comparable way to certain situations. This focus on the exact affective, material, and linguistic states is crucial in the process of connecting with Others.

By asking the students to think of their own experiences and connect it to situations within the novel, this exercise invites them to put themselves in the place of the characters and take on their experiences. Megan, who identifies with Sai’s experiences, might be very conscious of the fact that the locations and contexts are very different in
the two situations; however, she may be feeling the exact same emotions of alienation and homesickness as Sai. It is through this identification between the student and the character that the possibility of connectivity arises. When Megan observes the distress cue in Sai, she attends to it by matching it to the emotional node in her memory—i.e., she connects the feeling of Sai’s loss with pain and unhappiness. At this point, her own emotion node is activated and she remembers the despair that she felt when she had to leave and move to an unfamiliar town. Megan goes back to her own past and draws from the experiences and the matching emotions from her repertoire of life-events. This activation of her distress mode can automatically elicit the expressive components of the emotion—i.e., Megan might begin to cry and feel distress. In matching Sai’s emotional state, Megan was feeling empathic distress and it was activating all the signs of her involvement with this situation.

This retrieval of information from the past, however, has the danger of being tinged with past prejudices. It is especially important to be aware of this in the multiethnic literature classroom where the students are feeling empathy toward a previously othered individual. Moreover, while the situation reminds them of their own experiences, the rest of the conditions are non-prototypical. Gap filling and the ghost effect of past biases can change the student’s interpretation of the present situation. If there is not enough information in the text to complete their interpretation of the situation, the students will depend on their collected knowledge to fill the gaps. This is, however, reduced by the exercise’s attempts to give the student as much information as
possible. It engages all the registers and focuses their attention on even the minutest changes in verbal and non-verbal cues.

The emotions that are aroused in this recounting of past memories are connected in the second set of questions to the student’s emotions while reading the novel and then extended to the character. This part of the exercise asks the students to separate their feelings of the past from those of the present so that they are more able to connect their present distress to the situation of the character rather than their own remembered anguish from the past. It also asks them to identify the character in the situation whom they feel the most concern for. This allows the students to focus on a particular person for their empathic feeling and not be distracted by feeling empathic distress for multiple claimants. The analysis of why they themselves are feeling the way they are will hopefully lead the students to see the connection between the Self and the Other that they are consciously or unconsciously drawing. This is a crucial step in extending the empathic distress for a character in the novel to a person in real life as it involves an analysis and reflection of their own cognitive process which leads to decisions about helping another. If the students can become aware of the processes that lead to prosocial action instead of prejudice and bias, then they can be encouraged to activate them in the future more frequently. This is especially so if the students are secure in their sense of Self and are thus willing to see similarities with the Other. Indeed, the inclusion of prosocial elements into one’s identity leads to greater recognition from Others as well as affirmation.
This is what the final part of the exercise attempts to do. It discusses the nature of the connection between the Self and the empathized Other. Its motivation is to lead the students to the realization that their intrinsic connection to someone in the text who they would never have identified with in real life is an unconscious realization of the similarity of human experiences. People from all groups feel the same basic emotions in response to similar experiences of loss, birth, separation, and so on. Finally, the discussion attempts to help the students translate their empathic distress into action that would help an diverse group of ethnic Others.

However, the students must take think of the actual steps that they have to take to relieve the claimant’s distress. The class discussion encourages students to think of the actual steps that they would have to take to help others and also to feel empathic relief themselves. If the instructor stresses how good one would feel if they helped someone and it resulted in a change in the situation for the claimant, students might be encouraged to take more prosocial action themselves in real life. Such action would further reaffirm their sense of Self and contribute to their replacing their negative, anti-social identity contents with prosocial elements. The fact that an ethnic Other is feeling and reacting to a situation in a similar manner as the Self should reiterate to the students the flexibility of identity-contents. Indeed, the “othering” process is based on the understanding that groups of people have essentialized and fixed qualities and beliefs that only people in their in-group share. Different groups have separate master signifiers and systems of beliefs and knowledges. However, if the students accept that identity-contents are metaphorical in nature then there would be no essential affects or scripts that cannot be
replicated by another. Obviously, socio-cultural stimuli affect a person’s identity and create some differences. However, the basic affects and responses are same for all people.

The instructor can play an instrumental role here in pointing out the structural similarity of the basic human emotions and experiences. Indeed, the very fact that students are able to feel empathic distress for a person who is not only very different from them but also physically distant in itself points to the possibility of identification. If the students accept the connectedness and are willing to help the claimant, then it is probable that they will be more open to Others in life as well.

Direct association, therefore, has a broader scope for arousing empathic distress in students and motivating them to take action to help someone in pain. It does not require the actual cueing of a previous experience of distress with cues of distress in others. Therefore, people do not have to have a memory of a specific affective experience for direct association to work. Instead, this arousal mode can provide the basis for a variety of experiences where the students can feel compassion for different groups of people. Moreover, it provides opportunities for addressing biases in the retrieval process that a student has to undertake in making connections between the Self and the other’s situation. It is even more effective if the novel is accompanied by visual texts. The actual seeing of a victim’s anguished facial expressions and bodily gestures may (through feedback) lead to a certain degree of pairing between the student’s and the claimant’s emotions. However, even the reading of a situation can remind students of past events where they felt in a similar fashion. By imagining the experiences of a variety of people,
literary works encourage the readers to focus on the possibility that, given a different set of circumstances, the alien characters might be themselves or a member of their in-group.

*Mimicry*

Mimicry is the third automatic, primitive, and involuntary mode of empathy arousal. It can be used very effectively within the classroom with visual texts. It is the observer’s instinctive imitation of another’s nonverbal expressions of affect which results in a matching of the observer’s and claimants emotional states. Hoffman refers back to Lipps in formulating his definition of mimicry as an empathy arousing mode consisting of two consecutive rapid steps. The first step is when “the observer first automatically imitates and synchronizes changes in his facial expression, voice, or postural expressions of feelings” (Hoffman *Empathy* 37). This step of “imitation” is followed by “feedback” where changes in the observer’s facial, bodily, and vocal expressions trigger corresponding affective states to match the victim’s. Thus if students watch another in pain and note the change in the claimant’s expressions, they will imitate it themselves and feel a similar distress. As there are unique expressive and subjective states for several basic emotions, seeing someone crying or laughing can lead a person to mimic those actions and feel sad or happy.

Observing a person’s distress and imagining oneself in it and reacting in response is probably the most explicit mode of empathic arousal. This automatic imitation of another’s expression of feeling and matching that emotion with a similar affective state is obviously empathic at the affective-physiological level. It is evident in the automatic gasps of people when watching something that is unexpectedly painful or the smile of
delight at something that is happy. However, this is an involuntary response, and if instructors want to utilize this arousal mode within the classroom, they will have to structure the exercises to engage the appropriate identity contents and registers so that only the desired prosocial emotions are activated. For instance, the mimicry aroused through the exercise must attempt to alter all the negative identity-components (affects, scripts, schemas) and not just affect a change in one or the other. To be complete, the transformation must involve the alteration of as many negative components as possible.

The two-step sequence of the arousal process can provide a structure for the exercises that evokes empathic distress in students and motivates prosocial action. If instructors observe and shape multiple exercises toward the arousal of certain beneficial emotions, then it is probable that students (over a period of time) will become habituated to the cueing of certain emotions and responses. Indeed, empathic distress and prosocial action to relieve that distress can become the habituated response. Prosocial action would not only make the student feel good about their sense of Self but also result in alleviating the pain of the claimant.

Students can, moreover, be encouraged to continue learning to utilize this mode to a greater effectiveness by studying and analyzing their own pairing of emotive expressions-affect arousal along with developing the cues and emotions that reduce familiarity and here-and-now bias. By becoming conscious of this empathy-arousing process, they can more fully analyze their previous automatic reactions and repeat them to greater positive effect with more and more diverse Others. Therefore, the exercises are most effective when both the steps are evoked fully in a student. While there are different
modes within mimicry for the two steps, the exercise presented here will incorporate both of them. Students will be encouraged to analyze their prosodic or motor response mirroring (imitation) as well as their afferent feedback (feedback) within this exercise.

*Prosodic or Motor Response Mirroring - Imitation*

This explanation of the mimicry mode of affective empathy asserts that either vocal cues (such as intonation, pitch, pauses, rhythm, and so on) or emotive expressions (facial, gestural, or postural) in the claimant are mirrored by the observer. People mimic each other’s laughter, affection, pain, disgust, yawn, and the like in a variety of different situations. Meltzoff and Reissland, in different studies, found that infants soon after birth try to imitate other people’s facial gestures—i.e., they stick their tongues out, open their mouths, and purse their lips. By 10 weeks they imitate the rudimentary facial expressions of their mother’s anger or happiness (Haviland and Lelwica). However, it is not just infants who imitate adults but the other way around as well—adults have a natural tendency to imitate the expression and postures of infants and other adults without much awareness. This holds true for speech patterns as well. Infants and adults mimic the speed, pitch, duration of utterances, tone, and such of another person. The important difference according to Hoffman between the two types of mimicry is that, unlike facial expression, vocal responses are very difficult to control.

For activating prosocial action this is an important difference. It is very hard for people to alter their prosodic mirroring to deceive others into believing that they do or do not care for the pain of another person. If one feels empathic distress, then the prosodic mirroring will make it quite apparent. Alternatively, if one does not really empathize with
a person, then the vocal cues will be very different from those of one who does. This is especially important within the classroom, where students might be tempted to voice concern for an ethnic Other from whom they actually feel distant in an attempt to fit in with the accepted viewpoints or be politically correct. These efforts at deception are often seen in a class dominated by a single race, where the single member of another race might change his/her tone to be more accommodating of the views being presented in the class. Outside of class this same person might not be that accepting of the perspective. However, an instructor who is alert and observant can distinguish between those students who really accept what is being said and those who are just paying lip-service. This awareness in an instructor can make the difference between a successful classroom experience where students learn to become more empathic and prosocial by reducing their prejudice against the Other versus one where they are just passing the time.

**Afferent Feedback**

Afferent feedback postulates that the way people know how they feel is by sensing it from their muscular, glandular, and visceral responses. People feel a certain emotion in concurrence with the facial expressions and bodily postures that they adopt. Indeed, research by Laird shows that people have a very hard time experiencing an emotion that is different from their emotive poses. Therefore, if a student is crying, it will be very difficult for him/her to feel happy and remember cheerful experiences. This is important in “reading” the cues from the Other and interpreting them correctly.

The facial feedback hypothesis in fact goes further to assert that elevation in the intensity of a facial expression of an emotion results in the heightening of that person’s
subjective experience of that emotion (Izard). A person will experience more happiness if
the facial expression that he/she is mimicking changes from a smile to laughter. Omdahl
explains this process as such:

In the case of emotional empathy, when a person mimics the muscular
configuration of another’s face, messages are sent to the sensory cortex,
and the feedback produces the emotion associated with that facial
expression. In this manner the facial expression generates a subjective
response of the same emotion that is being experienced by the other
person. (26)

Within the classroom, therefore, the more intense the facial expression being imitated, the
more heightened an emotional experience the student will have. A situation that elicits
obvious displays of happiness, sadness, despair, and like will affect the level of emotion
evoked in the observer. Instructors can increase their students’ involvement with the texts
by choosing those that evoke a heightened level of the students’ prosocial emotions by
imitating similar qualities in the characters instead of texts that only elicit minimal
reaction from the audience. Texts with issues that concern the students at a basic level
(for instance, those dealing with identity components such as gender, sexuality, race, and
so on) will have a higher degree of student involvement than works that deal with
subjects that they have no apparent interest in. While the contexts of these subjects can be
different, if the students can ideas at a very basic level. Therefore, while *Osama* is about
the struggle of women in Afghanistan, students identify with the theme of maintaining
one’s identity and the right to follow one’s dreams. The context and location is
completely alien but the underlying theme is something that anyone in the world can identify with.

Moreover, after a connection has been made with the Other’s emotions, the students might be more open to accept novel identity-components, especially affective-states, that were not a part of the Self’s previous repertoire. If the students realize the multiplicity of identity-components and see them as non-threatening to their sense of Self, then it is possible that they would be more willing to integrate newer and more diverse elements to create a more complex identity.

Afferent feedback can thus produce the same emotions in the student as those being felt by a character through an imitation of the character’s facial, vocal, postural changes. Since most people have similar distress (and happiness) experiences in common and process the information in a comparable manner, it is possible to use this arousal mode within the classroom to encourage students to expand their empathy to the Other. The more inclusive the student’s identity becomes, the more motivated he/she will be to help those people and relieve their distress. Thus afferent feedback can contribute to students’ moral development by pairing their and the Other’s feelings and motivating prosocial action.

Exercise:

Written Exercise- While watching the movie *Osama*, most of you gasped when Osama’s elderly husband finds her hiding and forces her into the room to consummate their marriage. Why did you gasp? What was so horrifying in that situation? What were the physical and expressive cues that made the scene so horrifying? What was going on in
your mind as you watched Osama being pulled out the hole? How were you feeling? Why were you feeling like that? What was your mental state? How would you perceive yourself if you were in her place? How would you describe your condition? What are the images that you would use? What would you do in that situation?

Class Discussion:

Do you think Osama deserves the life that the movie seems to indicate that she will have? Why or why not? Who is to blame for her situation? Does Osama have those choices that you have to react in a similar fashion as you? What steps would you take to help Osama? Describe them in detail.

Explanation:

The exercise attempts to focus the students’ attention on the personal aspect of the narrative rather than the political so that the students can feel empathic distress for Osama rather than anger or distancing from a society that allows such events to take place. While the politics is just as essential in the shaping of the character’s lives and beliefs, the personal focus encourages the students to think of the characters as human beings with similar hopes, dreams, and emotions as their own. It directs the students away from a cultural analysis of the movie and toward a more personal response to the presentation of a girl’s experience that they can identify with at a certain level. Women as well as men can understand the need to maintain bodily autonomy and the complete helplessness one would feel if the basic rights that one was used to were forcibly taken away.

The physical reaction of most of the students when watching Osama being dragged out of the hole and into the room mimics Osama’s own cringing away from her
aged husband. While women do imagine this scene more vividly, men as well flinch from
the horror of the whole act. They cannot accept the unjustifiable snatching away of
Osama’s bodily rights. As a part of the survival instinct people have an internal
communication system that provides ongoing observation not only of their own and
other’s actions but also of the expectations that they place on themselves and others. Part
of the expectation that human beings have of another is that they will treat them fairly
and justly. In the movie, the rape of Osama is the penultimate taking away of her right
over her own body. The violation of this right and the unjust, violent actions against her
make Osama the “victim.” Therefore, even though Osama is a distant Other, the students’
basic identity-maintaining motive activates and they feel a personal affront at the
husband’s actions. They mimic not only Osama’s facial expressions but also match her
emotions with their own.

The ability to see strands of similarity between their own affects, responses, and
belief-systems and those of the Other is the crucial first step by the students toward
expanding their core signifiers and scripts so that they are more able to empathize with
more diverse people. Indeed, while this exercise points to the universality of some human
states, it also shows the possibility of flexibility in identity-contents. For instance, when
students are exposed to a different culture that have completely different definitions of
the same basic concepts (like “right,” “wrong,” “justice”), then it would become
impossible for them to assert the essentiality or universality of their own systems of
beliefs and knowledges. While they might not agree with the definition of the concept of
“justice” as presented in the movie, still they will be unable to pretend that it does not
exist. This is a crucial requirement for the process of developing a more complex identity to begin. Without the understanding of the flexibility of identity-contents, students will be unable to alter or replace their existing negative components with a multiplicity of elements.

The written part of the exercise therefore attempts to connect the prosodic mirroring of the students to the character’s reaction and help them analyze their instinctual emotive responses. Why do they react the way they do? How do their facial expression and bodily posture reflect Osama’s? What would their image of themselves be if they were in this situation? What verbal codes would they use to describe their emotive, psychological, and physical state? What are the reasons behind this automatic connection? Moreover, the last question in the written prompt asks them to imagine themselves in the place of Osama and react as a “human being.”

The class discussion focuses on developing the connection between the students and Osama. After it has been established through the mirroring of expressions that the students do identify with Osama’s plight at some basic level, this section tries to expand the discussion to include the larger questions of why she is in the plight. This would make them analyze the reason behind the actions of the different characters in the scene and understand the motive behind them. The obvious reaction of students is to hate the husband or (after some thought) Osama for taking no action to change her situation. However, the discussion attempts to encourage the students to think beyond these apparent perpetrators and analyze the hidden reasons for Osama’s situation. This would encourage them to see the multiplicity of possible perspectives and interpretations for the
same situation. While they see Osama’s fate as dire, people from her own culture may not think that she is in an unusual or overtly bad situation. Nonetheless, this awareness of a multiplicity of scripts and narratives would make the essentiality of the students’ own identity-components questionable.

The exercise further asks the students to put themselves in the place of Osama and imagine what they would have done in the situation. This is an opportunity for the students to analyze the cognitive processes behind Osama’s action and then their own. Since most people tend to think of themselves as active agents, it is quite probable that most students would think of alternative actions that they would have taken that would lead to a different outcome. They most probably would not visualize themselves as victims at the end of the narrative. However, this reasoning is the result of an egocentric monitoring of events where the students are trying to distance themselves from the victim state and maintain an autonomous sense of Self. By distancing themselves from Osama’s actions and decisions, students aim to preserve their identity and relieve their empathic distress.

The prompt, however, asks them to analyze their own responses and reason how they reached those decisions. The prompt forces them to think of their own judgments in terms of the choices they have versus the ones that Osama has. For instance, did she have any choice in the decision to disguise herself as a boy when she knew that it was the only way to get food for her mother and grandmother? Did she have any choice in the decision to return to the Taliban training camp?
Thinking about these questions in terms of basic choices present to humans would hopefully allow the students to see the root of Osama’s problem in the social system rather than placing the blame on individual people. If the students understand that people make decisions according to the options present for them, then they will be able to identify more with individual human beings, despite what group they belong to. Osama will then become a “helpless human being,” not “an Afghani girl in distress.” The initial response of the students to Osama’s expressions was automatic. However, by focusing on the reasons underneath an action and reiterating the flexibility of the perspectives and interpretation, it is possible to develop this arousal mode in the students so that they respond in a similar empathic manner to more and more people. Indeed, by presenting a situation of choice, the movie forces the students to realize that the decision-making process that leads to action can be complex and culturally implicated. This would further stress the impossibility of holding on to essential systems of belief and knowledge which creates difference between the Self and Other and leads to prejudiced acts.

*Mediated Association*

Verbal mediation arouses empathic distress through language and is therefore an important empathy arousing mode in a multiethnic literature classroom. While there are some obvious distinctions (for instance, in names, names of places, food, and so on) arising from language within the Self and Other in the multiethnic literature classroom, it is still possible to “read” the suffering in another person’s condition. Mediated association is based on a person’s past experiences like classical conditioning and direct association and requires the retrieval of information from each of the three registers. In
this mode a claimant’s emotional suffering is communicated through language to the observer. The claimant does not have to be physically present at the moment to arouse empathy. Any verbal cue from the claimant (which can take the form of either talking over the phone or a letter) can influence a person’s affective state, leading to a match between the two individuals’ emotional states. For instance, if Jeanne, who has gone through a painful divorce, gets an email describing her friend’s divorce, she will probably experience sadness or anger as a result of her own remembered experience. This is an especially effective mode for reducing the here-and-now bias. If students become habitually conditioned to help a person based on empathic distress aroused from the victim’s verbal cues and not just by their emotive expressions, then they will be able to feel empathic distress for more and more distant people. This not only reduces their bias but also allows them to engage in novel forms of experiences.

In fact, Hoffman points out that “Language might produce an empathic response because of the physical properties of the words which have become conditioned stimuli” (Empathy 49). Thus the use of the phrase “ethnic cleansing” might arouse a sense of loss in a person who has lost someone close as a result of ethnic cleansing. This is important for prosocial pedagogy, since it means that students can read or talk about a certain event and respond emotionally to it without any visual cues. For a class on ethnic Others, this is a crucial connection. Since differences in the physical body and image are usually the first step of distinction between the Self and Other, instructors can begin the process of empathizing with the Other through this mode. Then students might respond to the character’s situation rather than react in panic to the imagistic-physical differences.
Moreover, most of the texts in the ethnic literature class reflect cultures and values that are alien to the students. If the students read about people living in these cultures and responding to situations in a manner similar to their own, then it is possible that they will realize that there are strands of commonality between people from all over the world. The socio-cultural contexts might be different, but people have the same basic emotions and respond with joy or sadness to universal events like birth or death. The arousal of these empathic emotions through language thus provides instructors with a crucial tool for promoting prosocial action by students.

However, hearing or reading a word and responding accordingly requires the verbal messages from the claimant to be semantically processed and decoded. It is only when this decoding happens that language acts as a mediator between a person’s emotions and the claimant’s situation. The message from the claimant could express his/her situation (“I’m in line to get a job”) or emotional state (“I’m afraid and sad”). On receiving this message, an individual refers back to their past experiences and responds according to their own conditioned situation-emotion cueing. Hoffman explains that “empathic affect may be aroused in observers who decode the victim’s message and relate it to their own experience” (Empathy 49-50). However, people’s responses to these verbal cues are not that simple and clear cut. As Hoffman points out, “the decoded message enables the observer to conjure up visual (facial expression, posture) or auditory images of the victim (cries, moans) and the observer then responds empathically to these images through direct association or mimicry” (Empathy 50).
Indeed, this mode is especially effective when empathy has been triggered already by mimicry, conditioning, or association. Since verbal association requires more mental effort and time for processing it semantically as the cues must match a person’s experiences, verbal association is more effective when accompanied by the other modes. For instance, if the student’s empathy is first aroused by the claimant’s expressive cues through conditioning, association, or mimicry, then mediated association can take its time in processing the verbal information and deepen that emotional state. Indeed, Hoffman points out that semantic processing puts psychological distance between observers and victims due to the decoding and the encoding processes that intervene. That is, the victim encodes his feelings into words (sad, afraid). But words are general categories that can only approximate the victim’s feeling at that time, and words are the total input available to the observer. In decoding the message the observer must reverse the sequence, going from the general category of feeling represented by the word to his own specific feeling and the associated past events in which he had that feeling. As a result, the observer’s feelings have much in common with the victim’s feelings, owing to the normative, shared meaning of the victim’s words, but there is always some slippage due to encoding and decoding “errors” (and memory lapses for associated past events). *(Empathy 50)*

It is possible to reduce the errors in decoding the messages when the claimant is efficient in getting across the message or when the receiver knows the claimant. Knowing the
claimant is part of belonging to the individual’s primary group and identifying at some basic level.

Indeed, the classroom can become a space for students to practice not only reading and decoding the verbal messages but also communicating their own distress efficiently and effectively. While the class should not become a therapy session for the students, if one is to achieve the goal of helping students develop into more empathic individuals, then they have to be secure in their sense of Self. A part of the process of maintaining one’s identity is being an articulate communicator of one’s thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to another. If others do not understand what one is saying, the creation of intimate interpersonal relationships is hindered. The multiethnic literature classroom, with its engagements with varied languages, can encourage the students to practice decoding the claimant’s messages as well as communicating their own empathic distress.

Exercise:

Written Exercise - Describe the scene in Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss* that you can most vividly picture in your head and that arouses distress in you. What in the scene arouses distress? Whom do you feel bad for? What verbal cues does the character you feel bad for use to allow you to imagine the scene? What words are being used that makes you feel distressed? What images used by the character intensify your emotions? Can you imagine the victim’s facial expression, body posture, and tone of voice from the verbal cues? What is the victim’s sense of self—i.e., does the victim feel secure or insecure? Why do you feel distress when you read this scene? Does it remind you of something in your own
life? What are the verbal cues that you identify with and connect to your own past situation? Do you feel a certain emotion when you read a particular word?

Class Discussion:

How is the use of specific words able to arouse certain emotions in you—i.e., “birth” arousing happiness, “death” arousing sadness, and so on. Do these cues always arouse the same emotions in you? The character whom you feel bad for in the scene is a distant Other. You read his/her verbal cues and that aroused certain emotions in you. Now, would you be willing to help alleviate the distress that this character is feeling?

Explanation:

The multiethnic literature classroom is a prefect setting for arousing verbally mediated empathic distress in students for more and more diverse people. Since the physical distinctions can become a point of differentiation between the Self and the ethnic Other, the focus on linguistic codes can encourage students to identify first with the Other’s suffering and find strands of similarity based on their own similar responses to a similar situation. Instructors must fashion their exercises to encourage students in developing their skills in decoding verbal messages from a claimant and in effectively communicating their own emotional states. This ability to be articulate and competent interpreters of Other’s cues would not only make their sense of Self more secure but also expand their empathic distress to include the ethnic Other without a threat to the Self. The written part of the exercise attempts to do that by asking the students to focus on an event described in the book that they can visualize and that arouses their distress.
The ability to imagine the situation of another and simulate their identity state through verbal cues is essential to arousing empathy and reducing prejudice. A developed imagination is especially needed in the mediated association mode, since the decoding and encoding process creates psychological distance due to the lengthy time required for the decoding process between the observer and the claimant. However, if a person is able to imagine the intricate details of the claimant’s situation, their facial expressions and behavior, then it reduces the affect of the lengthy and complex interpretation process. For instance, if Brad reads about the chaos when Air France looses the baggage of Biju and the other passengers, he might be reminded of his own frustrating experiences of dealing with the airlines when they lost his baggage. The words “lost-luggage form” activate painful memories and trigger empathic distress. This past experience allows Brad to imagine the emotive expression on the face of the passengers who are stranded and left scrambling to figure out an unfair airline policy. Asking the students to focus on the minute affective, imagistic, and linguistic state of the victim encourages them to connect the information that they are getting from the literary work to their experiences in the past.

However, the process of retrieval of information from past experiences, as has already been discussed, can be fraught with the dangers of perseverence effect, gap-filling, and ghost effect. Just as in the cases of direct association and classical conditioning, instructors have to be aware of the possibility of the existence of these biases in the students’ memory of past events and the clinging to anti-social scripts and schemas that have been a part of their identity for a long time. However, gap-filling and
the “ghost effect” also point to the existence of possible gaps and deviations from the generic scripts which allow a person to encounter and respond to variations in the expected sequence in occurrences. This is especially crucial in the multiethnic literature classroom, since the students are encountering non-prototypical cases frequently. Indeed, the texts themselves present different perspectives and readings on a topic and let the students see that it is possible to read a situation from standpoints, depending on one’s socio-cultural background. Moreover, the awareness of the metaphorical nature of identity components, which is apparent in the existence of gap-filling and ghost effect in people’s retrieval process, is very important in the decision to help someone. The perception of someone as an “offender” can change with a different perception of the situation. Since a person’s perception is based on their identity-components, the awareness that there are multiple possible interpretations of a given situation based on the “reader’s” personal systems of beliefs, knowledges and signifiers might make students reconsider their own identity-contents and perceptions. Indeed, having a diversity of contents also reinforces a person’s identity by making it less vulnerable to threats from any one identity. The more complex an identity, the more “prepared” a student would be while engaging with novel situations and information. Thus, if a student’s identity-component included openness to different people, it is unlikely that the Self would feel threatened if he/she meets new people. The confrontation with a new or unexpected scene becomes smoother and less threatening if there are schemas and scripts in memory that can be retrieved to predict the sequence that the present situation might take and lead to a cueing between the Self and the ethnic Other’s experiences or affects.
Indeed, mediated association arouses empathy by matching the student’s and the Other’s emotional states. Brad identifies with the passengers because they are having the same lost-luggage experience he had and are reacting in a manner that is familiar to him. However, what is interesting in this identification is that Brad is connecting and automatically responding to people whom he had earlier probably seen as distant. The words used by Desai evoke a distressed state in Brad and arouse empathy for the people whom he sees as being treated unfairly. Just as his own survival instinct activates in situations of danger, the identification with the Other makes him feel their distress. Analyzing this identification process might make the students realize that most people react to situations in a similar manner and create a sense of fellowship leading to prosocial action. Thus, mediated association arouses a greater level of empathic distress when a person recalls having a similar experience themselves and can imagine themselves in the claimant’s place.

The higher level of empathy aroused from imagining another is especially useful in reducing the here-and-now bias, since the victim does not have to be present to be empathized with. While people are more willing to help a victim who is present, the developed ability to respond to verbal cues can increase the empathic circle to include more and more people. This is essential in the multiethnic literature classroom, where the Other is usually distant and not present. If the students become capable of feeling empathy through the decoding of linguistic cues, they will be able to see more similarities with the ethnic Other and empathize with them.
The class discussion attempts to develop the students’ capabilities of decoding the verbal cues and understand the importance of language in the cognitive processes by asking them to analyze the connection of words with the arousal of certain emotions. The students focus on the particular examples provided by the character they empathize with and their own emotion-word pairings. It asks the students to understand why certain words evoke certain emotions—i.e., connect the verbal cues-emotive response pairings to their own Selves and the past experiences that shape their sense of the world. This exercise allows the students to understand the particular properties of words which have become conditioned stimuli. In other words, students will recognize how certain words like “birth” are connected to feelings of happiness, renewal, and excitement. This is crucial especially for understanding the connection of words like “obstruction of rights” to anger or “doing one’s duty” to appreciation. Usually people react automatically when they hear or read these words, and while this expedites the decoding-response process, there is also a danger that people will react without analyzing all the information. This is usually the reason for prejudiced action. Practice in critically processing words that have become conditioned stimuli would also re-emphasize the possibility of a multiplicity of possible interpretations. While there are some emotion-word pairings that are basic to most people, there are others that are unique to a person and his/her experiences. By re-thinking this connection and being aware of the metaphoricity of language systems, students will be more open to the possibility of accepting new readings that are separate from their own. The acceptance of new readings would give the students a bigger
repertoire for future retrieval and make them more capable of reading the emotion-word pairings that are unconditioned for them.

Finally, the exercise encourages the students to take actual steps in helping the Other. While feeling empathic distress is the first step toward finding commonalities with another, students must alleviate the suffering of the Other in order to reduce their own suffering. This might also lead to a recognition for their efforts from the victim, other people, or themselves. Indeed, the feeling of well-being that accompanies recognition is a prime motivator to act prosocially in the future.

Mediated association therefore not only arouses empathy through verbal cues in the students by matching their affective states with the Others, it also reduces the here-and-now bias. If the students develop their capacity to decode the linguistic codes that they receive from diverse Others, they will be able to identify with more and more people. This process will also help the students to articulate their own affective states effectively and maintain a secure sense of Self. However, mediated association is most effective in the multiethnic literature classroom, since it reduces the bias arising from different physical bodies and features by focusing first on the linguistic codes which are more universal. Students react first to the verbal codes before the differences in physicality reiterate their difference from the ethnic Other.

*Role-Taking*

Role-taking arouses empathy by taking the perspective of the other. A person can imagine how another individual feels by putting themselves in their place. Since people are constituted similarly and have comparable life experiences, it is possible for a person
to imagine another’s situation and thereby produce mental images that evoke the same feelings as those of the claimant. The multiethnic literature classroom is especially suited to engage this mode, as the very act of reading allows the students to imagine themselves in distant and different roles and situations.

By providing minute details of the character’s behavioral and physical features along with extensive information about the context of the events, literary works create an opportunity for students to visualize a person’s experiences in full detail. Omdahl explains the requirements for this mode:

- an ability to understand the other’s situation;
- an understanding of the target’s abilities, knowledge, values, goals, and reactions;
- mental transposition of self to a different self that possesses the other’s abilities, knowledge, values, goals, and reactions;
- and consideration of the other’s situation in the transposed mode. (33)

Stotland’s research concluded that imagining oneself in the claimant’s place arouses a higher level of empathy than focusing either on emotive expressions or directly on the victim’s feelings. It is because of this that instructors in the multiethnic literature classroom which deals with one of the most distant Others, the ethnic Other, must repeat this mode frequently. Students will feel more empathy for an ethnic Other if they put themselves in their place and imagine their situation, connecting it to their own past experiences, rather than if they only mimicked facial, bodily, or postural movements or visualized how the claimant felt while in a particular painful situation. Adam Smith pointed to this in 1759 when he said,
By the imagination we place ourselves in the other’s situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter, as it were, into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. ("Empathy" 261)

This process requires the Self to control the egocentric impulses which can impose on the judgments about the event. Prosocial pedagogy helps students to do this by encouraging them to develop their capabilities of imagination. For the more developed their capacity to imagine the minutest detail in the victim’s affective, physiological, and verbal states of distress, the harder it will be to focus only on the Self.

This is especially important as the cognitive demands of role-taking can result in a delay in empathic responses. A person might take on another’s experience and cue it with his/her past experiences and emotional responses. However, because of the complexity of the role-taking process, it is possible that in recalling the past events one will become detached from the claimant’s situation and feelings and focus instead on one’s own experience. This meditation on the past can lead to more personal distress than empathic distress for the Other. Hoffman describes this “egoistic drift” as follows:

The observer is overwhelmed by the empathic connection with the victim, and the empathic connection is severed, ironically, because the empathic affects resonates so effectively with the observer’s own needs; and his focus, which was initially on the victim, shifts toward himself. Ruminating about his painful past, he becomes lost in egoistic concerns and the image
of the victim that initiated the role-taking process slips out of focus and fades away, aborting or temporarily aborting the empathic process.

(Empathy 56)

This transformation of the empathic distress for the Other (“I can imagine your situation and I feel very bad for what has happened to you”) into distress about oneself (“I can imagine your situation and I feel bad”) can obstruct the prosocial motive. Instructors can see this when students start reminiscing about their own problems while discussing a character’s situation. For instance, discussions about race usually result in students describing their own experiences as White or Black or Asian and focusing on the problems that they face because of their group identification. This usually transfers the attention of the student from the character’s problems to their own struggles. The focus then becomes alleviating the personal distress rather than helping another person in distress.

Egoistic drift is a result of the direct and complete connection between a claimant’s affective state and the person’s own needs. Prosocial pedagogy attempts to reduce the risk of higher sympathetic distress arousal for the Self than the claimant in the students by a combination of two different role-takings—one that focuses more on the Self and another that is more other centered.

**Self-focused Role-taking**

Students respond with higher intensity if they are engaged in self-focused role-taking, since it centers on the Self rather than the Other. In this role-taking people imagine themselves in the place of another, and this arouses empathic distress. Within the
classroom, if Megan reads about a person who has lost his/her parent, she might imagine how she would feel in the same situation. If she can visualize this event clearly, then she might experience some of the emotions felt by the character in the book. Moreover, if she is reminded of a similar loss in her past, or remember being anxious about the occurrence of such an event, then, as Hoffman points out, her “empathic response to the victim may be enhanced through association with the emotionality charged memory of those actual or worried-about events” (*Empathy* 54).

The cueing of affect-response pairings from memory with the claimant’s affective situation, therefore, creates the most empathic distress in a person. As Hoffman points out,

> Imagining oneself in the other’s place reflects processes generated from within the observer . . . in which connections are made between the stimuli impinging on the other person and similar stimulus events in the observer’s own past. That is, imagining oneself in the other’s place produces an empathic response because it has the power to evoke associations with real events in one’s own past in which one actually experienced the affect in question. (*Empathy* 180)

Imagining oneself in another’s place and connecting that event either as a past experience or a future worry, however, makes a person vulnerable to egoistic drift. The role-taking can bring in very charged emotional memories with the result that the person starts focusing on relieving the Self by distancing from the Other’s suffering. Instead of resulting in prosocial action, the empathic distress that had been aroused from role-taking
would re-focus on the ego-centered monitoring of events and maintenance of identity.
Self-focused role-taking thus produces intense empathic distress in a person but the
dangers of egoistic drift are more than compared to other modes.

*Other-focused Role-taking*

In this mode of empathy arousal a person focuses directly on another’s feeling
without any empathic bias for the Self. This process requires the person to take the place
of the Other by focusing directly on the claimant and imagining how he or she is feeling.
Students in this mode concentrate on imagining how the Other is feeling without
connecting the Other’s feelings to their own affective states. Thus there is no attempt to
cue one’s own past memories and correlate how one felt in similar situations with the
claimant’s feelings.

This can result in a weaker arousal of empathy than self-focused role-taking,
where a person’s own need system gets activated. Therefore, if Josh is reading about a
caracter’s loss of a parent and does not connect it to his own experiences or future
worries, the level of empathic distress will be lesser than if his personal experiences and
affective states were involved in the process.

This weak response can be enhanced by bringing in normative knowledge the
student might have about how other people feel in a certain situation. Thus although Josh
might not have any memories about loosing a parent, he can utilize his knowledge about
such events from other sources (like books, movies, and past observations). This is a
place where the instructor in the multiethnic literature classroom can bring in empathy-
arousing information. If students do not have a point of reference in their own past life
experiences, an instructor can provide examples through the texts of possible alternatives. This is especially pertinent in the multiethnic literature classroom where the students might not have a past point of reference in connection to the ethnic Other. Moreover, empathy may also be enhanced if there is any personal information about the claimant. For instance, a victim’s life-condition or character could arouse a sense of identification with the victim that can lead to an empathic response. Seeing the claimant’s non-verbal cues (facial, vocal, or postural expressions) especially affects a person’s response. People respond to these cues even when the claimant is not present as the more primitive modes (conditioning, association, and mimicry) are enlisted in this process. This can make it very effective in the multiethnic literature classroom where the Other is distant. Nevertheless, other-focused role-taking does not produce as intense an empathic distress because of the complexity of the mode and the voluntary nature of a person’s involvement. Since the Self does not need to be involved, a person might think distracting thoughts and avoid getting engaged in the empathizing process.

Combination

Given the weaknesses and strengths of self-focused role-taking and other-focused role-taking, the most effective empathy-arousing mode is a combination of both. Prosocial pedagogy attempts to develop students’ capacity to either go from one mode to the other or experience them in parallel processes through its exercises. Hoffman explains that

... fully mature role-taking might be defined as imagining oneself in the other’s place and integrating the resulting empathic effect with one’s
personal information about the other and one’s general knowledge of how people feel in his or her situation. It could go either way: other-focused role-taking in the service of self-focused role-taking or self-focused role-taking in the service of other-focused role-taking. (*Empathy* 58)

This combination thus integrates the emotional intensity of the self-focused role-taking with the more complex attention to the victim of other-focused role-taking.

The multiethnic literature classroom can especially enhance the student’s empathic distress by providing not only an opportunity for imagining the ethnic Other but also providing important information to imagine the Other better. Reading about the different characters from diverse realities, the students can imagine what the Other is feeling in a situation that they have undergone in their own past or worry about going through in their future. Moreover, the information that they get from the texts (either novels, web-pages, or movies; primary, or secondary sources) can increase their knowledge of the Other. This can result in a greater sense of identification with the claimant, leading to arousal of empathic distress and attempts to relieve it through prosocial action. The combined modes of role-taking, therefore, not only engage a person’s personal need system but also, in focusing on the claimant, create a larger base of identification between the Self and the Other by introducing multi-layered identity-contents and reducing the Self’s prejudices.

Exercise:

*Written exercise:* Describe the scene in *Osama* that negatively affected you the most. Why did this scene distress you the most? What in this scene distressed you? Was it the
victim’s facial expression, body posture, trembling of voice? Or, was it the situation in itself? What was the nature of the action that caused suffering? Now, imagine yourself in the place of the person that you felt the most empathic distress for in that scene. How would you feel in that situation? Imagine what your expression would be, your eyes, your brows. What would your posture be like? What would your voice sound like? What would the tone be like? How would you describe your emotions? Would you verbally articulate them? What words and images would you use? If not, how would you act? How would you feel about yourself? What would your mental state be? How would you act in that situation, i.e., would you respond the same way as the victim or differently? What would you do differently? How will that be translated into action? What change would you expect to see? Explain the reasons for your actions in as much detail as possible.

Class Discussion:

Who is the victim and who is the offender in the scene? Now imagine yourself as the offender in that scene. As the offender, why did you act the way that you did? What were the motivations? What was the cause? How were you feeling before the action and after? What mental state did you have before and after the action? What were your expressions, body posture, tone of voice? What does it reflect about your state of mind? How? Did the action have the desired effect? Do you feel happy now? Or, do you feel unfulfilled still? What do you need to do to reestablish your sense of Self and happiness? Discuss the rationalization behind the judgments you made based on the information that you have about the offender. Do you see any justification for this character’s actions? Why or why
not? Would you act in the same manner given the same situation? How would you act? How would that make you feel better?

Explanation:

This exercise attempts to arouse empathy in the students through a combination of both self-focused role-taking and other-focused role-taking. As a part of the preparation of understanding the movie more fully, the student will already researched the socio-political context in which the movie is based before attempting to do this exercise. Therefore, they will have at least some information about the life that the characters are leading and what social movements led to that particular moment of the movie. Further, the instructor’s introduction to the movie should give information that is aimed toward raising empathy in the students. For instance, it should include information such as the fact that the story of the movie is based on a true event and that the actors are people whom the director picked from the streets for their fit for the story. This information will enhance the students’ empathy by providing knowledge about the characters in the movie and their life-experiences.

The exercise begins by asking the students to describe the situation in the movie that affected them negatively the most and analyzing why it was so distressing to them personally. This will encourage the students to think of a particular situation that affected them in very personal terms. The question forces them to think in terms of their own affect-responses to situations. Further, imagining themselves in the place of the character whom they felt the most distress for will allow them to experience some of the same emotions as that character. Indeed, the connection of their own distress to the victim’s
situation in the earlier part of the exercise creates an opportune space for an empathic imagining of the other’s distress by putting the Self in the claimant’s place. The detailed imagining of the victim will intensify the student’s empathy, since it involves all three registers of experience and cues their own past in response to the present situation. The exercise engages the students further with the narrative by asking them how they would react in that situation. Thinking of themselves as active agents, most students will have a behavioral and action plan of how to act in such situations as presented in the movie. Indeed, if they do not, then they might expand their scripts to create a new script or alter a previous one to fit the new situation. This is a crucial consequence of this exercise, as it allows the students to imagine what it would be like to be in that situation as an Other. This is an important step which can result in the student’s expanding their identity-components to include more and more diverse scripts and narratives. This would allow them to deal more easily with novel scenes and information as they would come with a more “prepared” mind and a wider repertoire of narratives and scripts. Further, it would prepare them for the non-prototypical cases and make them more open to new information. Obviously, the basic advantage of this exercise is that it allows the student to find similarities with the ethnic Other.

Indeed, since the exercise asks the students to focus on a scene that arouses empathic distress, the victim is most likely the character that they feel was most unjustly treated. However, it is possible that to alleviate their own distress the students might start reasoning that the claimant is a coward and a passive subject who deserved what he/she got, leading to an egocentric drift. This rationalization would distance the active Self
from the cowardly Other and thereby decrease the empathic distress. On the other hand, 
the student might agree with the actions of the character and see him/her as a victim of an 
unjust act. Either way, the analysis of the cognitive processes of interpretation-judgment- 
action response that the students will be expected to do in this part of the exercise will 
encourage them to see the causes of each action.

The class discussion expands the students’ empathy base and attempts to make 
them aware of the metaphoricity of identity-contents and the multiplicity of scripts and 
narratives which affect the decision-making process. This part of the exercise is more 
other-focused, as it asks the students to focus on the feelings of the real Other in the scene 
(the offender) and imagine themselves in his/her place. The discussion opens by requiring 
the students to place blame on a certain character or institution. This is a primary 
requirement for deciding to take prosocial action. In order to act prosocially one must feel 
that the victim needs help. Based on the information that they have gathered about the 
socio-political context of the text, the students will be able to make an informed decision 
concerning who is the victim and who is the offender. Further, the attention that they pay 
to the different characters’ facial expression, bodily posture, and vocal tones could 
influence their decision to act prosocially and provide information about the affective 
responses of the characters.

This imagining of oneself as the offender and focusing on the minute affective, 
physiological, and linguistic cues of the Other’s situation is crucial in the process of 
identification with a character. The character that the students view as being treated 
unfairly will arouse their empathy and the one that they perceive as the wrong-doer will
be distanced and hated. Most people will identify with the victim and want to help him/her in an attempt to alleviate their own distress. However, empathizing with the offender and understanding that he/she is a product of a process of socialization would lead to a more multifaceted form of empathy. Like the victim, the offender also responds according to his/her own egocentric needs and desires shaped over a lifetime of experiences. If people do not recognize that even the most hated Other is motivated by a similar desire to be recognized as an coherent, active Self, then there will be a continued process of exposing, criticizing, and punishing a section of the populace that does not belong to one’s primary group. By imagining oneself in the place of the Other and rationalizing objectively the reasons and causes of why a character acted in a certain manner, the student may become more accessible to the motivations and actions of a hated or alien other. Indeed, the very process of putting oneself in the place of the Other makes the students more in touch with their own processes and motivations of identity maintenance, which they can see reflected in the actions of the Other. Bracher points out:

Only to the extent that we are in touch with our own deepest and most obscure desires (identity needs) and their frustrations can we eschew our more accessible and socially sanctioned impulses to respond to people who are violent and prejudice by exposing, denouncing, and punishing them, and address instead the particular frustrations and gratifications of their identity needs that are producing their destructive acts—frustrations and gratifications that we understand through the echoes of them that we find in ourselves. (152)
The other-centered role-taking might encourage the students to become aware of the similarity of the identity needs and desires of all people, despite their different behaviors and group memberships. If students understand that all human beings are motivated by identity maintenance, then it will become much more difficult for them to hate anyone for their actions and punish them.

Further, the understanding of the ego-centric motive of human beings might encourage the students rethink the motives behind their own actions. If they are able to successfully take the place of the Other and understand their cause-effect reasoning behind their actions, then this understanding would provide an alternative to their own cognitive processes and the core signifiers, scripts, and schemas that structure all perception and judgment. The multiplicity of these elements reiterates the possible flexibility and multiplicity in the components of human cognition (perception, judgment, motivation, action, change) which lead to action and makes it impossible for the students to cling to inflexible elements in their identity. Indeed, incorporating the possibility of diverse elements into their own identities would not only make students’ engagement with novel information and people easier but also enhance their sense of Self. This would also allow them to replace the negative, harmful contents with beneficial, prosocial elements. Since a complex identity is more readily supportable, the students will get more chances to enact their identity-contents and get recognition. Moreover, for prosocial pedagogy the essential result of this transformation would be that they would be able to separate the individual person from the act of hatred or prejudice and focus on changing the actual crux of the problem, which might be poverty, ignorance, or bias. People are
products of their environment and upbringing and not just evil beings who are motivated toward destructive acts.

Role-taking thus not only allows the students an opportunity to take the place of the Other but also gives them a better understanding of identity maintenance as the motivator behind almost all actions, productive and destructive. If the students are able to understand that the evil wrong-doer is also acting out of similar needs and desires as the Self, then it will be much more difficult for them to criticize and punish wrong-doers. Instead, they will have to find alternate reasons and dig deeper to see why the other is acting in that way. Usually, the basis of most destructive behavior is an attempt to reconstitute one’s sense of Self. Removing the reasons that create vulnerability in a person (like poverty, violence, prejudice, and such) will lead to real change in society. Further, role-taking shows the flexibility of identity-contents and makes it possible to alter and replace the negative with prosocial elements. The opportunities of enacting and receiving recognition for these readily-supportable identity-components within and outside of the classroom will maintain and secure the student’s sense of Self and make them more open reducing their prejudices and acting empathically toward the ethnic Other.

**Multiple Modes of Arousal**

Prosocial pedagogy aims to encourage students to become a multilayered and complex individuals who are open to a variety of novel ideas and people. A complex person is also sensitive to all the different cues that are available and responds empathically to even the feeblest expressions of distress. These people usually have highly developed and multiple modes of empathy arousal which enables them to respond
empathically to whatever distress cues are presented. Instructors should construct their class based on multiple arousal mechanisms and aim toward encouraging the students to become more aware of the different cues and develop their decoding capabilities for each empathy-arousal mode. For instance, if a claimant only expresses his/her distress through facial expressions then mimicry will be the primary empathic mode. Alternately, if the cues are verbal or written, empathic distress will be aroused through verbal mediation or role-taking. Moreover, since each mode focuses on a different affective cue, multiple modes can not only enable a person to respond to various cues but also compel them to act prosocially.

The three primitive, pre-verbal modes—conditioning, association, and mimicry—provide an important involuntary dimension to the student’s empathy arousal. This is especially true for face-to-face situations where the visual and verbal cues create a match between the Self and the Other’s feelings even when the student has not had a similar experience in the past. Within the multiethnic literature classroom, where the students experience many alien situations and cultures, these three modes can help arouse empathy for the Other automatically. The instantaneous nature of these mechanisms can create a connection between the student and the Other that can become the first step toward identification and arousal of a more thorough empathy.

Verbal mediation and role-taking are very important in the multiethnic literature classroom because they can be focused on absentee victims. However, since they are the two cognitively advanced modes, they require a certain amount of time and ability to process the information. The danger in this is that because of the time-lapse people can
choose to opt out of the empathy arousing process. In role-taking, for instance, a person can start thinking thoughts that would distract attention from the claimant’s distress cues. This voluntary component of the two modes, however, can be transformed into a fast-working mode that always encourages helping a person in distress. If the students develop the capacity to pay attention to the Other’s distress cues, then these two modes can become involuntary as well, triggering immediately on witnessing a person’s anguish. As Hoffman points out, “What these two cognitively advanced modes contribute is that they add scope to one’s empathic capability and enable one to empathize with others who are not present” (Empathy 61). The repeated practice of paying attention to distress cues from the ethnic Other can thus enhance a person’s abilities to feel empathic distress not only in face-to-face contacts but also in those situations where the claimant is not present.

The ability to arouse distress for a claimant who is not present by verbal mediation and role-taking is especially useful in the multiethnic literature classroom. The students, feeling no initial identification with the characters and the socio-cultural contexts, values, and beliefs of the literary works, tend to automatically respond with empathic avoidance. Moreover, they usually lack the practice to read the subtle distress cues provided in the texts that would lead them imagine the other’s pain and match it with their own past experiences. This leads to a further distancing where the students perceive the characters’ situations and responses as culturally specific and distant from their own experiences and life conditions. There seems to be no point where the students can connect to the Other. However, if the class stresses the repeated practice in reading
the distress cues, then not only will these modes become involuntary, they will also lead to attempts by the students to relieve the distress by helping the claimant. This would make the cueing of empathic distress-posocial action-relief from helping another a conditioned feature in the student’s identity.

Most of the situations involving prosocial action that a person faces provide multiple verbal and non-verbal cues. Therefore, it makes sense to include all the mechanisms in the classroom to create empathic distress based on the ability to decode a diversity of cues. Since most of the modes involve imagining the distress of the Other and matching it to one’s own past experiences and emotions, the primary requirement of empathy is a secure identity that is able to see strands of similarity with the ethnic Other. Since most people react in similar ways to basic situations of joy or sadness, the students would be unable to cling to the distinctions between the Self-Other. The fundamental similarities between themselves and the ethnic Other would encourage the tendency in students to empathize with another and attempt to relieve the pain of the claimant.

Multiple modes of empathy-arousal, therefore, not only result in a higher degree of empathic distress but also create opportunities for the students to develop complex identities that are more readily supportable.

Conclusion

Empathic distress is a prosocial motive and can lead to social change. People react to another’s pain by imagining themselves in a similar situation and matching their affective state with the claimant’s. If the empathic distress is intense, people take steps to alleviate the suffering of the claimant. Such action also produces empathic relief in the
helper. Indeed, research has shown that people learn from experience that helping others makes them feel good, so when they experience empathic distress they anticipate feeling good and help for that reason.

However, people also empathize more with people who share the same culture and believe in the same values, beliefs, and goals. These people share the same life conditions and interact frequently with the Self. Thus the challenge for the instructor in this multicultural and global world is to encourage students to identify with more and more diverse people. The cognitive and physiological synchrony in humans makes it almost impossible to identify and empathize with people from different groups with whom one rarely or never interacts.

Prosocial pedagogy believes that the answer to this problem lies in the Self’s ability to imagine the Other’s situation and find strands of commonality in that process of matching affective states. If students are able to read the different distress cues and imagine the pain of the claimant and connect it to their own past experiences, they will become more aware of the fundamental sameness of all people. Similar events evoke similar emotions in most people, despite their different socio-cultural identifications. This understanding can encourage the students to find commonalities with more diverse groups of people and revise their basic signifiers and scripts of the Self and ethnic Other. By the use of empathy arousing devices like conditioning, direct and mediated associations, mimicry, and role-taking, the students can become aware of the flexibility of their identity-contents and the existence of multiple scripts and narratives so that they are willing to redefine their basic terms like “offender-victim,” “Black-White,” and “just-
unjust” and substitute their negative identity-contents with more beneficial elements. By facilitating the reformulation of the sense of Self, prosocial pedagogy promotes increasingly complex empathic structures and the recognition of structural similarities between the Self and ethnic Other that will motivate prosocial action.
Notes

1 Klein’s study is an unpublished dissertation quoted in Hoffman (Empathy 207-208).

2 For more on the research on the development of empathic modes in children, consult Meltzoff; Reissland; Haviland and Lelwica; Termine and Izard.
Chapter IV

Prosocial Pedagogy and the Decision to Help the Ethnic Other

A secure, empathic identity can habitually lead toward alleviating the ethnic Other’s suffering and engage in social action by bringing certain prosocial changes in the basic cognitive process (perception, judgment, motivation, (prosocial) action, social change). As has been discussed in the earlier chapters, the desire to help another is only possible if the students have a secure, empathic identity. The question then becomes: how does a secure identity and arousal of empathy within the multiethnic literature classroom lead to changes in the specific cognitive processes to lead to prosocial action and social change?

Components of the Cognitive Process Toward Social Change

Recognizing the importance of a secure, empathic identity is important for developing effective prosocial pedagogical practices. Instead of haphazardly introducing material and exercises, prosocial pedagogy focuses on all the elements in the cognitive process contributing to prosocial action. By introducing material and exercises focused on every step of the sequential process leading to the decision to engage in social change, it becomes possible to encourage the students to alter and replace components in the cognitive processes which negatively influence a person’s judgment toward biased action with beneficial, prosocial elements.
Indeed, since prosocial pedagogy conceptualizes learning as the ability in the students to embrace the pursuit of social justice and prosocial action as a life-long goal which is facilitated by a secure, empathic sense of Self connected by strands of similarities to an ethnic Other, the need to focus on how this conception of an identity influences the cognitive processes becomes essential. It is possible to bring certain changes in the students’ sequential process of perception, judgment, motivation, (prosocial) action, and social change within the multiethnic literature classroom so that they will more readily empathize with and help the Other.

Perception

Perception is the basis of any decision-making process. It influences the reasoning behind a conclusion, the motivation to take action, and the actual taking of practical steps to change a situation or a person’s life-state. Therefore, it is closely connected to the processes which either facilitate or hinder prosocial thinking and action. Secure, empathic people are less likely to perceive an ethnic Other as a threat to their sense of Self. They are more able to engage with new information because of their broad repertoire of identity-components and the “prepared” mind they bring to non-prototypical situations. Indeed, people with a secure identity are more willing to see similarities with the Other, empathize, and engage in activities resulting in social change. On the other hand, people with vulnerable identities will probably feel threatened by new knowledges and be more focused on reestablishing their identity or attempting to alleviate their suffering rather than empathizing with the Other. Prosocial pedagogy, therefore, by attempting to develop
a secure, empathic identity in the students affects their abilities to perceive the ethnic Other more compassionately and engage in actions that would lead to social change.

A secure and empathic identity allows the students to perceive the ethnic Other with more caring by affecting their perception (of the Other) in two ways: developing their ability to focus more on the Other’s suffering, and enhancing their capabilities to engage with new information and seeing new perspectives. The basic requirement to empathize and attempt to alleviate another’s suffering is to perceive the ethnic Other’s situation, and his/her need for help by paying close attention to the verbal and non-verbal cues that one receives from the Other. A developed ability to efficiently read these cues through afferent feedback, prosodic mirroring, and other empathic devices is crucial to respond to the suffering of the Other. As is evident from the studies by Batson, Klein, Hightberger, and Shaw discussed earlier, subjects respond more to victims’ distress and circumstances if they can see, read, or hear the victim’s suffering and match it to their own emotive expressions and affective states from past experiences. The here-and-now bias is based on this intense response of the Self when the observer can see the distress of the Other in the present. However, students have to develop their abilities not only to pay close attention to the immediate cues and situation of the Other but also to imagine the Other’s sad or unfortunate life-condition and respond in an appropriate manner.

Instructors can develop students’ imaginative capacities by helping them focus on every minute aspect of the Other’s life that influences their situation. Extensive prompts to attend to the material, psychological, and emotional states of the Other as provided in the exercises in chapter three will help the students think about every external and
internal stimulus and response that goes into another’s decisions and actions. Such attention also helps students match their own affects and responses to those of the ethnic Other, by making evident the basic similarities in the responses of different people.

However, instructors must also be aware that in a secure, empathic person this attention to the Other’s state is supplemented by certain other information which affects their perception. Hoffman points out the basic understanding the Self must have of itself, of the Other, and of the situation to be willing to help another. The first is that one be aware of one’s own separateness from the ethnic Other, with independent affective states, identity-components, and a life outside of the present distressful situation. This awareness of the difference between what is happening to oneself and what is happening to another is necessary for preventing a panicked, egocentric response, which rarely results in actions to help another. Also important is having a sense of how the Self would feel and how most Others would feel in the distressful situation. And finally there is the understanding that people can control and manipulate their outward emotive expressions (like facial expression, tone of voice, body posture) and mask their true internal feelings. People generally know this, but instructors need to stress the importance of a certain amount of objectivity in interpreting the Other’s cues so that the “reading” of the Other’s situation is as close to the reality as possible. It is also possible to create an awareness of the first two components within the classroom. We have already discussed the creating of opportunities for students to enact and be recognized for their existing identity-components. This is especially important within the multiethnic literature classroom, where the students might frequently feel challenged by the novel information and
knowledges. Indeed, this distinction from the ethnic Other might be too developed in some of the students. The trick for the student is to create a balance between their identification with the Other and their sense of unique Self. This is closely related to the second condition where to help another, a person must have a general conception of how they and anyone else would feel and react in a situation that is distressful. Again, this is knowledge that students already have, but instructors can develop and connect it specifically to the ethnic Other by creating an atmosphere within the class through discussion where the students can learn from each others’ experiences and enlarge their knowledge about the Other. This not only increases the repertoire of information for the students for future retrieval but also can make the structural similarity of all people more apparent which would encourage them to be more willing to empathize with the Other and act prosocially.

Indeed, a secure, empathic identity has more flexible core identity-components which can make a person more capable of engaging with new information and seeing alternative perspectives to a given situation. The flexibility of schemas, scripts and systems of knowledge in a person means that they have a broad repertoire that consists of more rather than less prototypical cases which enables them to respond to new information without feeling a threat to their sense of Self. This affects not only the way a person frames a situation but also the way they conceive of themselves and Others as a collection of socio-cultural tokens. The awareness of multiple framings of a particular situation and the socialization of all people within a certain society could make a person perceive the ethnic Other’s actions less harshly.
Instructors, therefore, must encourage the students to see that the framing can change the understanding of the event, especially within the multiethnic literature classroom. Indeed, the way a person frames an event can affect the decision about their own response to that particular situation. In a situation where a person has a choice to act prosocially, the framing might determine whether a person might help another or not. For instance, an arrest can be framed as either racial profiling or justified action to elicit very different reactions in an observer toward the person taken into custody. If the arrest is seen as unfair, an observer would be more willing to help the person detained than if they thought he/she was a the offender. If Johnson explains this existence of different frames for an individual:

Cognitive linguists have discovered that our terms and concepts get their meaning relative to larger frames or schemas that we develop to understand the kinds of situations we encounter. For example, terms such as ‘bat,’ ‘home run,’ ‘steal,’ ‘balk,’ ‘strike,’ and so forth get their meanings by their role in a complex ‘baseball’ frame. These frames are not objectively in the situations they allow us to understand. Rather they are idealized models and frameworks that grow out of our experience and that we bring to our understanding of situations. (9)

Therefore, for every event or idea there are multiple possible frames through which a person can interpret and understand it.

The process of “reading” and interpreting an event through the selection of a particular frame is dependent on a person’s identity. The nature of its components,
therefore, affects the cognitive processes. The meanings people give to their experiences are influenced by their sense of self. If a student has had an unpleasant experience with a person of color, that occurrence can quite easily tint all their subsequent interactions with racially and ethnically different people. The feeling of insecurity that they felt in the first experience may be remembered and reiterated every time they come in contact with people who are different. However, since the identity-components are based on interconnected metaphorical mappings which connect one experiential domain to another, it is possible to transform the identity-components to include new and diverse ones.

This process of rethinking the essentiality of their own identity-contents would require the students to recognize and accept the relative indeterminacy of their core elements. What this would mean is that these concepts are then open to possible alternative interpretations. The perception of a situation would change depending on the context, and the purposes, and interests of the reader. To encourage students to see the possible alternate readings so that they are less inclined to judge the Others’s perspectives and actions more harshly than their own, instructors can introduce exercises where students practice taking perspectives and roles from various standpoints within the same event. For instance, if the aim is to expand the definition of the prototypical image of students who think that all Asian men are effeminate, instructors can introduce movies and books which present an alternative image. Such texts would contradict the students’ knowledge and force them to revise their image-system about Asian men. Also, exercises can require the students to take and justify the “offender’s” actions as well as the “victims.” This role-taking might give the students a better understanding of both sides of
the argument and judge the participants more objectively. Indeed, this might even make them more willing to accept new ideas and empathize with the Other.

However, instructors must be aware that though the students might see that there are multiple frames, it is possible that the understanding that they might accept as the most valid is the one that is most supportive of the Self’s identity. For some students maintaining key attributes like truth, objectivity, and accuracy of judgment might play an important role in their perception of an event or a person as well. Nonetheless in this, the human motive is similar to all other decision-making situations: sustenance of the Self. This is the reason why the new information has to be supplemented with exercises that focus the attention on the minutiae of the Other’s life-experience and responses. The exercises must help the students to focus on the Other’s facial expressions and the change in bodily postures when they feel different emotions, to take another’s perspective and reason why they came to certain conclusions, to imagine themselves in the Other’s place and experience as many of the different physical, social, and psychological conditions as possible. The exercise must be structured to affect all the three registers of experience and memory in order to have any lasting influence on the student. The students must experience as fully as possible the states of the Other, for only then will they be able to see similarities between their own life-experiences and affects and the Other’s. The formation of these connections with the life-conditions of the Other can lead to identification and elicit empathic feelings with a desire to help alleviate another’s suffering.
Moreover, along with the possibility of multiple framing, instructors also need to encourage the students’ awareness that the Self is a collection of socio-cultural tokens. This is especially important for developing an identification with the ethnic Other in the multiethnic literature classroom and perceiving them less harshly. Students have to be aware that depending on what culture one is from, the beliefs and values underlying one’s sense of self will be different. For instance, people in Japan will generally be more family-oriented than people from Sweden. Family values, traditions, and rituals will have more importance in his or her life than in a culture where individuality is the basic identity component. Different people have different frames of reference in building their identities. Consequently, as Bauman points out,

cultural difference at all times are neither ‘objectively given’ nor can be ‘objectively obliterated’ or leveled off. Cultural contents make a totality only in the form of a pool of tokens from which a volume of selections and combinations (in principle infinity) can be, and is, made. Most importantly, they serve as raw material from which self-made identities are assembled; the truly significant cultural differences (those made visible, noticed, serving as orientation points or labels for group integration, and jointly defended) are products of such identity-assembling processes. (‘Morality” 233)

People differ from each other and are similar to each other based on their selection of identity-bearing contents from the infinite possibilities. Prosocial pedagogy stresses the importance of this cultural formation of identity, since this can also contribute to the
possibilities of difference in framing of an event for different people. The way Inagaki, from Japan will see and interpret a situation will be quite different from the way Georg, from Sweden, will “read” the event.

This awareness of identity as a social construct is essential for the students in the multi-ethnic literature classroom as it explains to a certain extent the distinctions between people belonging to different socio-cultural groups. A person’s judgments and actions are influenced to a degree by the culture one is socialized into. If the students are able to accept this conceptualization of a person’s identity, then it would make them more open to changing their essentialized structure of placing blame on the Other. It would also enhance their understanding of the ethnic Other’s cognitive process so that do not instantly view a decision or action that is different from their own as “wrong” or “unjust.”

Again, instructors can present literature from different cultures that shows the processing of information by a person to reach a certain conclusion and supplement it by exercises that compare and contrast the cause-effect reasoning of the student and that of the ethnic Other. This exercise will have to be undertaken in three parts. First, the students have to analyze their own reasoning process and figure out the information they received, how they processed that information, why they processed it that way, how it led to the consequences that it did and the different socio-cultural stimuli that influenced the whole decision-making process. The second step involves asking the same questions as the first but as the Other. Students have place themselves in the role of the Other. This they can do by paying close attention to the information that they have been given in the text about the ethnic Other’s life-conditions, starting from their physical appearance and including
complex interpersonal relationships that they are involved in. They can further integrate this information with their common knowledge about that culture, being as careful as possible to not bring in their biases. The third step involves finding commonalities and differences between the two framings. For while it is important that students understand that people respond in similar ways to certain events, it is also equally essential to recognize their differences. This would make the students perceive the ethnic Other more empathically and act prosocially.

However, to be truly open to new concepts and knowledges, students also have to be aware that this sort of difference in frame-selection is seen not only within different societies but also in the hierarchies of values within their own culture. While some values, beliefs, and traditions are prominent in their culture, others are marginal. This can be seen in Ernest Gellner’s discussion of nationalism: “For every effective nationalism there are several that are feeble or dormant. Those that go down are ‘objectively’ as legitimate as the effective ones . . .” (260). Yet, they do not have the strength to be the main conceptualization of nationalism. This has been seen in the recent discussions about patriotism in America, where criticizing the Iraq war is seen as not supporting the troops and being unpatriotic. While there are multiple other frames for discussing the war, this seems to be one of the main conceptualizations. Usually the separation and centering of a concept or frame in relation to others is connected to the centrality or the power of the group internalizing the specific content or frame. However, the flexibility of the schemas and scripts of the Self and Other makes it possible to stress the indeterminacy of the core elements and move beyond them to embrace increasingly diverse models of knowledges,
beliefs, and interpretations. This movement beyond the prototypes would not only make the student more able to engage with new information but also to be more empathetic and act prosocially toward increasingly diverse Others.

Perception of an event or person is, therefore, the basis of any prosocial decision-making process. Based on the appraisal of the situation or the Other’s life-condition, people make a judgment-call to either distance themselves from the Other or take prosocial action. Thus, instructors have to encourage the student not only to focus more on the ethnic Other’s suffering but also to see the flexibility of identity-contents. The possibility of multiple frames of interpretation for an event along with the recognition of the social constructedness of identity might encourage the students to be more empathic toward the ethnic Other and help alleviate their suffering.

**Judgment**

Judgment is the appraisal of an event or the Other’s situation which leads toward a specific action. In the multiethnic literature classroom, students with secure identities are more willing to judge the ethnic Other empathically as they have complex, multiple associational networks. As has been discussed before, this makes them not only more open to novel information and people but can also encourage them to re-think their prototypical identity-contents which lead to biased actions. Indeed, prosocial pedagogy’s insistence on the metaphorical conceptions of identity as the space of social change presents a possibility of subversion of the fixed frameworks of signifiers and representations to result in a more complex identity which judges the Other less harshly.

People tend to appraise the Other’s action more severely compared to their own actions.
This distinction in the judgment is reflective of a person’s egocentric monitoring of events where self-preservation and self-promotion are the main goals. The more threatened a person feels from the Other, the more likely that he/she will judge the Other’s action unsympathetically. On the other hand, a person who is secure in his/her sense of Self will judge the Other more empathically as he/she is able to engage more capably with novel information because of the flexibility and multiplicity of their identity-components and associational networks.

Moreover, the imaginative flexibility of metaphoric identity-contents, not based on universal physical and experiential structures, stresses the fact that there are probably no conceptual absolutes. Thus by including texts and exercises within the classroom that attempt to increase the complexity of the students’ identities by focusing on the metaphorical creation of the Self, can make the students more willing to widen their structures of prosocial understanding and empathy. Texts that provide alternative readings to typical perspectives and situations, or texts read in comparison with each other to provide a unique understanding of a situation, can be very effective. For instance, if the class is discussing the affects of racial-allegiance on concepts of motherhood, they can read Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* in relation to Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and their Friends* and get two completely different perspectives on the subject. This would allow the students to discuss not only the different ways in which the same relation is manifested but also stress the flexibility of prototypical identity-contents. Prosocial pedagogy’s focus on supporting the students’ identity development and security along with enhancing their empathic capabilities, thus, can encourage the students’ to judge the
Johnson points out three crucial ways in which metaphoric conceptions of Self enter a person’s process of judgment and lead to prosocial learning and action. First, flexible identity-contents give rise to different ways of conceptualizing situations. Since the Self acts out its survival instinct, it is very aware of situations or events that could have a positive or detrimental effect on personal interests. Interpreting the situations in terms of an egocentric frame of reference, individuals form idealized models of their core systems of beliefs and knowledges that grow out of experience, which they bring to the understanding of any event. The “egocentric perspective” is the tendency to frame events according to personal interest. Beck points out how individuals are inclined to over-interpret the behavior and actions of others according to whether it sustains or interrupts one’s sense of Self. Indeed, it is human beings’ egocentricity that makes them assume that other people interpret a situation in the same way that they do. The metaphorical conception of identity, however, means that there are multiple possible framings of any given situation, and hence different judgments depending on which way the situation is framed. If a thief is understood as a “criminal” in one frame and a “product of society’s neglect” in another, then the resultant actions will be very different in the two situations.

The second way in which metaphor enters a person’s prosocial deliberations is in the possible different understanding of the nature and the central concepts of social
behavior. If the definitions of terms such as “will,” “reason,” “right,” “good,” and “duty” are based on individual experiences and socialization into a socio-cultural group then people will have different understandings of these terms. The awareness of the indeterminacy of these concepts could make a person who is secure in their sense of Self question their own essential judgments of placing blame and responsibility on the Other for any harmful act. On the other hand, person with a vulnerable identity would be threatened by the indeterminacy of contents and focus on re-establishing their sense of Self.

However, linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists have found that even for the ordinary concepts (such as “mammal,” “table,” “father,” and so on) that people use, most categories are not actually definable through a list of properties. Instead, people tend to classify categories (e.g., “dog”) by identifying certain idealized members of that category (e.g., “Labrador”). Other non-prototypical members (e.g., “Alsatian,” “Bulldog,” or “Great Dane”) are identified in different ways from the idealized ones. There is rarely any set of adequate features possessed by all members in the category. Therefore, the ordinary concepts are not homogeneous or consistent for all people. Similarly, the concepts that lead to prosocial thinking (like, “duty,” “justice,” “right,” “good,” and “person”) have certain prototypes that people refer to when deciding the “victim” in the situation whom one will help. Indeed, Churchland suggests that certain prosocial and social schemas are actually complex prototypes that exist as “hidden” layers within people’s neural assemblies:
Children learn to recognize certain prototypical kinds of social situations, and they learn to produce or avoid the behaviors prototypically required or prohibited in each. Young children learn to recognize a distribution of scarce resources such as cookies or candies as a *fair or unfair* distribution. They learn to voice complaint in the latter case, and to withhold complaint in the former. They learn to recognize that a found object may be *someone’s property*, and that access is limited as a result. They learn to discriminate *unprovoked cruelty*, and to demand or expect punishment for the transgressor or comfort for the victim. They learn to recognize a *breach of promise*, and to howl in protest. They learn to recognize these and hundred other prototypical social/moral situations, and the ways in which the embedding society generally reacts to those situations and expects them to react. (299)

These social prototypes provide the underlying structure for prosocial development and action. Students must learn about the prosocial emotions (like justice, right, duty and so on) not as abstract concepts, but as prototypical situations that they have experienced as fair or unfair distribution. While the distributions can be resolved quantitatively or temporally, they must realize that the concepts are neither uniformly nor homogeneously formed. There is no universal definition of the term “justice” that every person accepts. Depending on the framing of the situation and the way the prototypes originate in a person’s experience, their concept of what constitutes “just/unjust” or “right/wrong” will
change. This is crucial information as it could make a person question their own definitions of these prototypes and the judgments that are based on them.

Thus, instructors within the multiethnic literature classroom should stress to their students that different narrative contexts will give rise to different activations of a particular prototype. For instance, Gina’s lying about her openness to multiethnic cuisine to a friend would be evaluated very differently from her lying about the sale of the house next door to an ethnically different couple. These situations, while embodying exemplifying the same abstract concept, lying, are embedded in different narrative contexts, which result in completely different assessments. In fact, as Johnson points out, “this accounts, in part, for the importance of parables, stories, and other narrative forms in our development and in our knowing how we ought to behave in particular kinds of situations” (191-192). The different narratives embedded in social lore structure people’s understandings of situations and give them alternative solutions to choose from.

Therefore, the texts that are read within the multiethnic literature classroom can expand or alter students’ prototypical models of prosocial concepts.

This leads to the third way in which a secure identity’s metaphorical conception of identity-components constitutes the basis for moving beyond the prototypical cases. Multiethnic texts can provide examples of non-prototypical situations to the students who have not been exposed to different experiences in their life. This not only makes them more “prepared” in dealing with new information but also, more importantly, can expand their definition of core categories to include more and more non-prototypical elements. Most of the texts within the multiethnic literature classroom are about cultures, people,
and situations that the students are distant from and unfamiliar with. Classical moral theory’s deliberation about the definition of moral concepts can be extended here to prosocial thinking. It theorizes that moral concepts are defined by the presence of specific sets of features which directly and perfectly fit into states of moral deliberation in the world. However, this classical understanding of prototypes cannot account for the cases that do not fit the idealized situation. In fact, as Johnson points out, “it is impossible to simply determine the features of a situation, find the relevant concepts under which it falls, and apply the relevant moral law to get one definite imperative for our actions” (9). This is true for prosocial thinking and action as well. The very fact that people have dilemmas concerning whom to help shows that situations are mostly novel or non-prototypical; otherwise, people would always have an answer.

The encounter with non-prototypical cases requires the ability to move beyond the prototypes. The childhood experiences of fair and unfair as seen in Churchland’s discussion of distribution give a basic sense of “justice” to a person. However, this cognition does not suffice in the complex social and political world that the students live in. The prosocial laws that a child has are formulated to fit the situations that they face, the prototypical central cases. For the novel situations, human beings make extensions from the central to the non-central members of the category. Prototypes of “victim,” “good,” “fair,” “unjust” and so on undergo a series of imaginative expansions via metaphors that slowly change the meaning of those prototypes over time.

This expansion of categories is essential for the development of students’ prosocial action. For instance, within the multiethnic literature classroom, students could
expand their prototypical instance of the category “person.” Often defined as a heterosexual white male, the prototype could be expanded to include more and more people typically not included in the definition (such as Blacks, homosexuals, homeless people, and so on), which would lead to greater empathy toward such individuals and groups.

Moreover, a people with secure identities have a diversity of contents which makes them less vulnerable to possible threats to any one content. Thus, if a student’s identity included friendliness toward different people, it is unlikely that the Self would feel threatened if he/she meets new people. Even the confrontation with novel or unpredicted scenes becomes smoother and more non-challenging if the person has a complex identity with a broad repertoire that consists of multiple prototypical cases. Such a person is more likely to judge the ethnic Other more empathically and act prosocially toward social change.

The willingness to judge the ethnic Other compassionately affects the Self’s appraisal of the situation by altering the level of responsibility felt by the Self, the appraisal of his/her own coping abilities, and the assessment of the degree of harm suffered by the Other. The decision to help another is dependent on the sense of responsibility that a person has toward the Other. Instructors must be aware that the more responsible the students feel, the more likely it is that they will take action to alleviate the suffering of the ethnic Other. Indeed, it is interesting that most ethical dilemmas involve potential or real victims of one’s own actions where the Self feels responsible for the situation that the Other is in. This feeling is further intensified if the victim is someone
the Self identifies with or frequently interact with. Part of the reason for this heightened responsibility for someone in the in-group has to do with causal attribution. According to Weiner most people make instantaneous attributions about the cause of an event, especially when they see some one in distress. Depending on the attribution, people either act prosocially or distance themselves from the suffering person. If the victim is seen as responsible for his/her own plight, then the Self is less likely to take steps to help change the situation. On the other hand, if the victim is seen as being treated unjustly, then the person will probably try to alleviate the Other’s pain and bring empathic relief to oneself.

However, the judgment that attributes responsibility to a person is dependent to a certain degree on the identification that the Self has toward the Other. If the victim is a part of the Self’s in-group then a person is usually more sympathetic to their condition. This is an extension of the empathic bias where the Self judges one’s own actions more empathically than another’s. Hoffman points out that in situations where the Self does not identify with the Other, “humans have a tendency… to attribute the cause of another’s actions (but not their own) to his own internal dispositions: the “fundamental attribution error” (Jones & Nisbet). They also have a tendency to blame the victim for his or her own misfortune in order to support their “belief in a just world” (I’ll be safe if I don’t act that way)” (“Conscience” 93). However, people will act prosocially if they have a secure identity and can empathize with the Other.

A secure identity allows a person to judge another as a part of their in-group because the Self is more able to see similarities with diverse people and engage prosocially with new information. Prosocial pedagogy, therefore, encourages the
student’s to see strands of connections with expanding groups of Others. When students are able to accept the Other as a part of their in-group, they will empathize with them and judge them less harshly. This will result in the increased willingness of the part of the Self to see the suffering Other as a “victim” and take steps to alleviate their suffering. People usually choose to take prosocial action when they feel responsible after judging the Other’s actions as they do their own.

However, the willingness to help another is also closely connected to the question of cost to the Self. The main reason for not helping is that the cost seems too high and the person does not know what helping might involve. For instance, Jane might not help an accident victim for fear of the paper-work and the legalities that it might embroil her in. The cost of the investment in terms of time spent and energy expended might be enough to prevent her from acting, even though she may feel empathic distress. She might further defer her distress by “diffusing her responsibility” (“Someone else will call the police”), especially when there are multiple observers at the accident. Indeed, the presence of other people in this situation might activate assumptions of “pluralistic ignorance,” where no one actually helps because they reason that “if others haven’t acted, then this must not be an emergency.” However, students who are secure in their sense of Self would be more willing to see the connections with the Other and appraise the cost to themselves in a manner similar to their appraisal if they or someone in their “in-group” was involved instead. The cost would seem less in relation to the relief from alleviating the suffering of the Other. On the other hand, there are students who feel threatened by the Other and thus see the cost to the Self for acting prosocially as massive compared to the insignificant
relief. Instructors can help these students to imagine the situation of the Other as vividly as possible through empathy-arousing exercises so that they feel that the cost of helping is negligible to the Self as compared to the affirmation of their identity from alleviating the Other’s pain.

People are also more willing to help someone if they feel that the Other’s degree of suffering is high rather than low. This response is entwined with the here-and-now bias, where people react more empathically to another if the victim is present and they can see the pain in the facial expressions, postures, and bodily responses of the claimant, and the familiarity bias where they are more likely to empathize with people who are members of their racial, ethnic, or other social group. Both these biases are based on a person’s egocentric monitoring of events. Psychology claims that an individual can empathize with many victims at the same time and feel empathic distress for all of them. However, the person one helps is the one who is present in the situation or closest to one’s sense of Self. Hoffman claims that a person is likely to empathize and help a person who “one knows and cares about, victims who are similar to oneself and share one’s values, and victims who are present and visible (except for absent victims who are kin)” (Empathy 266).

Empathic bias, thus, can be an important motivator in creating empathic distress and motivating prosocial action. Within the multiethnic literature classroom, empathic bias can be utilized to encourage students to judge others more empathically and respond more prosocially. If instructors are able to focus the students’ energy on creating a sense of identification with an increasing number of people, then it will be possible facilitate
prosocial learning. This is usually possible if the students have a secure identity. Students who feel challenged will probably employ their empathic bias more frequently than others who can see similarities with the ethnic Other. However, instructors can take steps to enhance the student’s identity and expand their empathic bias to diverse people.

This diversifying process would involve, first, the identification of the bias and the groups of people who are included and excluded from the “in-group.” This would allow the students to inquire into how they developed the bias. An explanation by the instructor that this bias is a regular response to a situation conditioned since childhood is crucial at this point to avoid a complete distancing by the student from the ethnic Other as a means of protecting his/her sense of self. However, instructors also need to point out that this response has become entrenched in their identity and is ill-suited in today’s global society where more and more people are embracing their difference from the norm. Indeed, human beings need to see similarities and accept diverse populations to make co-existence between the sub-groups of humanity possible.

One possible strategy, as mentioned before, is to introduce emotional commonalities that exist across groups. It is especially important for students with vulnerable identities to realize that despite differences in culture, social structures, and physical appearance, people have the same basic hopes, wishes, and fears. The basic goals and values that people hold as significant are largely universal. The components might be different, but the larger goals are the same. For instance, there is no culture in the world where the relationship between a parent and child doesn’t have importance. And most people want to succeed in life. The way success is defined (e.g., as material
affluence, large family network, or spiritual awareness) will differ across cultures, but the life goal and the emotional affects that it activates are the same everywhere. Similarly, people have the same basic emotional responses to being criticized, appreciated, and treated fairly or unfairly.

Creating this sense of oneness is crucial for judging the ethnic Other as a member of the “in-group.” People and information that students might normally see as completely alien to their sense of Self have to be identified and recognized as similar so that their empathic distress is aroused. For without empathic distress a person will probably not help a claimant. Hoffman points to . . . research showing that people empathize with and help others who they are led to believe share their preferences, attitudes, interests, life goals, and chronic concerns. It seems evident that this similarity bias can be turned against itself and “recruited” in the service of creating a pan human sense of oneness regarding emotional responses to important life events. 

(Empathy 294)

Exercises and texts (both visual and written) from different cultures can present the common human emotional responses and encourage students to think in terms of commonalities rather than difference. For instance, Columbus’s Letters, Bharati Mukherjee’s Holder of the World, and Octavia Butler’s Wildseed all present the shock and compromise required in dealing with a new culture from a completely different socio-cultural perspective. The basic emotions that all the characters express are very similar despite the dissimilarity of their experiences. If the students are able to see the
threads of connection between the three protagonist (from different times, places, and cultures), it is likely that they will be able to extend their understanding of the one character or emotion that they identify with to the others.

However, the instructors should be careful about not over-stressing the commonalities between the Self and Other. Brewer points out that complete identification with another may not work for developing empathy, since people want to belong to a group that is unique in certain ways. A stress on complete similarity with others negates the idea of distinction that most people need for their sense of a secure Self. Indeed, students might resist the idea of commonality without differences. Even the students who have secure, empathic identities may feel threatened by the notion of a complete identity-overlap. However, instructors can focus on basic emotional responses to separation, loss, success, birth, or aging while allowing students to keep their unique identity-markers (Emo, Cheerleader, Athlete, Dancer, single mother, and so on). The pedagogical strategies thus have to address the need for uniqueness along with threads of commonalities between the different ethnic groups of society to foster prosocial action.

Students who are secure in their identity and capable of empathizing with a diverse group of people, thus, are more willing to judge the ethnic Other more compassionately and as a part of their “in-group.” This not only results in the reduction of bias toward the Other but also the willingness to develop more complex identity-contents that enhance their capability to engage with new information and people and act more prosocially.

Motivation
A secure, empathic sense of Self influences and alters the motivation of students to promote an increased engagement with the ethnic Other and take prosocial action. In this, like every other human action, the basic motivation is the maintenance of a sense of Self. People will not be willing to engage with novel information and people and act prosocially if it threatens their identity and makes them vulnerable. This egocentric desire to maintain one’s identity is conditioned by two clauses: first, every human being has to interpret situations according to its significance to the Self based on a core repertory of concepts or principles. For instance, the almost universal principle that “people should be treated justly: if they ‘do good’ then good should befall them and if they ‘do bad’ then they should be punished for their actions.” Secondly, a person’s motive for action is conditioned by their emotional attitude, i.e., the affective stances that one takes to face a situation and shape interpersonal relationships. This condition is especially important for the discussion on prosocial pedagogy as all decisions to act (empathize or help someone in pain) are based on a student’s general emotional states. Whether one is angry, guilty, hyper-vigilant, or caring has an impact on the process of interpreting an experience and reaching a decision to act in specific manner. Instructors should, thus, help students analyze and discuss not only the prosocial identity-concepts that they base their identity on but also the emotional states which color their interactions and judgments about the ethnic Other.

Indeed, human beings are on constant vigilance against any threat to the Self. The interpretation of any situation and the motivation to respond to it in a particular manner is also based on the egocentric monitoring of the Self. If the event seems threatening to the
person’s identity, then they will take action that is more focused on reestablishing their identity. However, if the situation seems favorable and maintains or enhances the Self, then a person is more willing to respond with a positive action. This is crucial information in the discussion about enhancing the students’ prosocial motivation. A student with a secure identity, which usually includes complex, and multiple core concepts and principles, would be more motivated to help the ethnic Other. On the other hand, a student with a vulnerable identity would feel threatened from new information and people and cling to their existing identity-contents and replay them constantly till they feel secure. Therefore, it is crucial for instructors to introduce multiple and conflicting schemas, and narratives to change the narrow identity-contents of the students so that they are able to accept new information more easily. This is especially so because elements of the identity are flexible structures which predict sequences of events that are magnified and change through life. Tomkins proposal about “nuclear scripts” which form the basis for people to mentally replay recent events and search for analogues in the past comes to play here. People judge present situations and people based on their scripts and other identity contents. This is problematic if the contents are anti-social and hinder finding similarities and empathizing with the Other as the students will continue to enact them to sustain their sense of Self. Not only will there be no attempts to identify with different Others but if the students’ group of identification is narrow, they will not be motivated to expand it to include different people. However, the metaphorical conception of identity makes it possible to alter and substitute the harmful elements with more complex and multiple prosocial identity-contents which make a person more open to new
ideas and people. Indeed, a person who is able capable of engaging and seeing similarities with Others is more motivated to take steps to help them. Therefore, prosocial pedagogy along with attempting to develop a secure identity in the students also introduces a multiplicity of identity concepts and principles which enables the students to engage efficiently with the ethnic Other and be motivated to act prosocially.

Along with a set of multiple and complex identity-concepts, the students also need to be able to engage with a variety of affective states which makes them more capable of dealing with new information. Indeed, a person with a secure identity is more able to integrate different emotional attitudes and be more “prepared” in interacting with the ethnic Other. Emotional attitudes consist of a complex set of passions that include not only positive emotions but also those that are generally seen as vices. Prosocial feelings and justice begin with compassion and caring but they involve emotions such as anger, guilt, envy, jealousy, and hypersensitivity as well. People have a sense of empathy for another based on their own experiences of being cheated, treated unfairly, or punished/rewarded for their actions. These are not abstract principles that people learn by just observing or thinking. People need to have a memory of experiencing these affective states and refer back to them when interacting with another who is experiencing the same emotions. This would make the Self understand and empathize with ethnic Others. The ability to imagine and occupy the affective states of the Other is a crucial step in the prosocial process which motivates a person to take steps to help another person.

Indeed, in situations of stress or adversity the egocentric motive is transformed into a motive to help the claimant once the person experiences empathic distress.
Empathic distress is connected to compassion and sympathy for the Other. To feel these emotions a person, however, must be able to imagine the suffering of the Other and occupy affective states that are more comparable to the victim’s situation than their own. Beginning with verbal and non-verbal cues like messages from the claimant, facial expressions, or tone of voice, people process the messages from the Other to empathize with their situation and take appropriate steps to alleviate their suffering. Within the classroom, students can take on different personas, introspecting, analyzing, and explaining the emotions that they feel and the actions that they take as a certain character in the book. This allows them to think and experience a situation like as the Other does. Thus, students would not only gain an understanding and respond affectively to another person’s conditions, feelings, and desires but also hopefully expand their repertoire of emotional attitudes.

The caring principle also counteracts the egocentric orientation. It assumes a connectedness to the Other’s needs and desires. Unlike the individualistic orientation, which is centered on the assumption that other people have competing claims and are in conflict with the Self for the existing resources or personal reinforcement, caring can lead a person with a vulnerable identity to an attempt to expand the sense of Self to include the Other. As Beck points out,

The moral precepts emanating from this orientation revolve around sensitivity to others’ needs, responsibility for their welfare, and sacrifice of one’s own needs for the needs of others. When confronted with a
complex situation, people have to decide whether to assert their rights, to express caring, or simply to pursue their self-interest. (240)

People tend to care and feel empathic distress when they feel a connection to the Other. People feel unhappy and help someone who has been treated unjustly, if they identify with them. A person with a secure identity is more likely to see the similarities required for caring about another. However, instructors should attempt to develop this emotion in the students who normally distance themselves from the Other by introducing the strands of similarities possible from the universal affective states and life-experiences that most people go through. If students are able to accept the structural similarity of people then they would be more caring about the ethnic Other and be willing to empathize with him/her. This might result in higher instances of helping others when they are in need.

However, the need to consider the Other is not the only motivating factor in acting prosocially. Hoffman points out that

An observer may feel empathically motivated to help someone in distress, but he may in addition feel obligated to help because he is a caring person who upholds the principle of caring. This activation of a caring principle and the addition of one’s “self” (the kind of person one is or one wishes to be) should add power to one’s situationally-induced empathic distress and strengthen one’s obligation to act on principle. (Empathy 225)

The inclusion of the caring principle in one’s self schema can thus motive one to act empathically. Indeed, a student who is secure in his/her sense of Self will probably be more willing to incorporate this principle into their identity. While this serves an
egocentric motive, the consequences are prosocial. Instructors need to stress the caring principle within the class as a positive schematic content so that more students are encouraged to include it in their definition of Self. This can be done either through example, where students are shown situations in texts which end by showing the feel-good moment in acting empathically, or through exercises where students reach the conclusion themselves. Since this principle is generally taught to all children at an early age, some students might just need a reinforcement of this principle in their self-schema. Direct rewards and punishment are generally effective in forming specific beliefs and values regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and actions. If students see that it is not “uncool” or “sissy” to care about others, they might be more motivated to control the self-serving impulses.

However, not all negative emotions are bad. A secure identity is usually an integration of these emotions which are generally seen as more harmful with positive affects. While anger is usually one of the main identity-components that hinder prosocial thinking and action, it can be altered for more beneficial consequences within the classroom. Generally anger is aroused by slights or harm to something or someone that is close to a person. It is closely connected to a sense of injustice to the Self. Indeed, the very core of anger is based on a negative causal attribution toward a person or an event. Aristotle states that anger takes as its occasion a significant offense to oneself or one’s friend. Usually, as with empathic distress, one’s friend includes the people one identifies or interacts with. Any unjust act toward a friend is seen as an offense toward the Self as well. To identify at some level with the offended person, a student must thus feel the
slight personally at some level. Therefore, instructors must encourage students to expand their conception of the people who belong to their “in-group” and include more and more diverse Others for anger to be transformed into empathic distress. It is only when a person is able to identify the claimant as a “friend” or at least to see some similarities that the Self will take steps to act empathically.

Moral indignation, on the other hand, is always about an issue that is bigger than personal self-interest. For instance, people feel moral indignation about the Darfur situation even though they have no connection to Darfur or know a single person from there. They feel that gross injustice has been committed against helpless people and that something must be done to help them. There is no obvious personal-interest for people to feel that way. There is no apparent personal gain that can come from a solution to the Darfur genocide that motivates people to think and act in support of the victims. Nonetheless, there is a constant people’s movement that is demanding that the world leaders do everything possible to bring about peace in this region. As Solomon points out, “one must take even the most impersonal principle personally if one is to get indignant about its breach” (254). People imagine what it is like to lose one’s home and run to save one’s life when there is no hope in the foreseeable future. They compare their own sense of self-preservation with the victims’ and feel the injustice of being deprived of the basic rights to life and property. They feel anger. And they feel compelled to help these victims in any way that they can which does not compromise their sense of Self.

Instructors can take a cue from these protestors and use anger as a strategy for generating empathy. Students who are secure in their Self are able to extend their own
feelings of being slighted to more and more people and it is very possible that they will be motivated to act prosocially. The extension of their familiarity bias to more diverse people by finding strands of connection between the Self and ethnic Other can direct the anger toward beneficial consequences.

This is true for emotions that reflect entitlement (possessiveness and deprivation) as well. Violation of basic rights prompts feelings of envy, jealousy, and resentment in people. Deprivation and loss are central to these emotions. However, they also reflect a sense of belonging or ownership. People only fear the loss of something if they have something to lose in the first place. Thus Jack can be envious of LaQuisha’s minority scholarship because he felt a sense of entitlement toward a scholarship for higher education. Jack feels that he was deprived of the chance for a good education by LaQuisha. The ability for these emotions to eclipse compassion and empathic feelings is obvious. In today’s capital-minded society, students tend to think of ownership in terms of rights. People feel they have the right to own property, or the right to life. This becomes complicated when the sense of ownership includes people. Homi Bhabha points out how the colonizer’s definitions of the colonized (like “effeminate,” “passive,” “untruthful”) reflect the colonizer’s sense of possessiveness where the colonized becomes an object. This language of rights expands from the family to all other social and interpersonal relationships. People refer to each other in the language of belonging, and this is connected to the causal attribution.

Injustice (or, the belief that one has been deprived of something that one deserves) is closely entwined to the question of responsibility. This is a crucial component in
prosocial development, since, depending on people’s perception and attribution of blame, they will either help someone or distance themselves from the situation. If people perceive the ethnic Other as depriving them of something, then it is highly unlikely that they will feel empathic toward that person or group and want to help. For instance, if Jill feels that all minorities are taking away the few available jobs, then she is less likely to see similarities and identify with them. Indeed for students to develop a complex set of emotional attitudes, they will have to include their feelings of envy, jealousy, and resentment toward the ethnic Other into their core emotive states and use them as positive motives to empathize with another. Envy according to Solomon is a “desirable good” as it leads “to hard work and productivity…envy as a good reason for eliminating competitiveness and differences in status” (255). Envy and resentment, thus, can be used to extend the student emotional attitudes and make them more willing to see similarities with Others and act prosocially toward them. The empathizing with the ethnic Other can lead to a less harsh judgment of the ethnic Other and an arousal of empathic distress in perceiving the Other’s situation. Thus, the envy and jealousy that one feels when one is deprived of something can be expanded to empathic distress for another person’s loss.

However, these emotions of envy and jealousy ascribe guilt to another person. There are also emotions that assign the guilt to the Self: guilt, shame, regret, and remorse. People often feel the greatest amount of empathic distress when they feel that they are the reason for depriving others of something that is rightfully theirs. The feeling of personal responsibility is very closely connected to the feeling that one is privileged. This feeling
is usually accompanied by guilt for the advantaged position in society. As Solomon explains,

We first of all feel uncomfortable about our comparative wealth, health, and opportunities; then we try to devise principles to give this discomfort some structure, to rationalize our privileges or at least allow us to live with them, to correct the inequalities in some systematic way that is not wholly self-destructive at the same time. A big part of justice, in other words, is being able to blame (as well as praise) oneself, to admit one’s responsibility for justice and not just delegate it to system or social structure in which one is at most a contingent party or perhaps just an observer. (256)

This is especially true for people who consider the justice principle integral to their sense of Self. The sense of distress that they feel when they perceive themselves to be victims of injustice usually motivates them to rectify the problem. And usually, people are not happy to be just observers in the process of correcting a wrong. As the research mentioned earlier shows, the empathic distress is only alleviated when they are active participants in the process. If students can be encouraged to include this principle of justice in their identity-schema, then the possibility that they will be prosocial actors is very high. Moreover, this sense of privilege reduces the desire-for-more that typifies a capitalist society.

The general belief is that justice and prosocial action are noble virtues that arise from equally righteous emotions. People care about each other. Therefore, they feel the
pain of deprivation for the other’s loss just as they feel it for their own losses. Feelings like compassion and care are seen as the heart of any moral judgment and action. Yet, prosocial pedagogy asserts that passions like anger, envy, and guilt have to be included into the student’s repertoire of complex emotional attitudes to make them more able to engage in new information and people as they come to the situation with a “prepared” mind. Moreover, the multiplicity of the concepts and principles that a secure, empathic Self bring to a situation enables them to increasingly view strands of similarities with the ethnic Other and be motivated to engage in acts that lead to social change.

(Prosocial) Action and Social Change

A secure, empathic identity is more willing to identify with the ethnic Other and take steps to alleviate their suffering and engage in actions that would lead to social change. Instructors must, therefore, focus on supporting the identity and security of the students and developing the capacity for empathizing with the ethnic Other within the classroom. But this sustenance of the Self must be accompanied with a desire to take practical steps which result in changing the life-condition of the Other and a reduction of prejudice and bias in the Self. Therefore, they have to encourage the students to connect their emotions to actions for any prosocial change to occur.

Prosocial sentiments usually arise from a combination of the practices of finding strands of similarities and identifying with the ethnic Other along with feelings of empathy. The ability to imagine the Other’s suffering, occupy their affective states, and see the structural similarities between the Self and Other affect all the components of the prosocial decision-making process which lead to social change. Indeed, a person with a
secure sense of Self is less likely to perceive and judge the actions of the ethnic Other harshly. Instead, the complexity and multiplicity of the identity-contents would encourage the Self to be more open to new ideas and people and appraise them as a part of the “in-group” rather than as a distant, alien Other. This empathic appraisal would arouse affective states that are more conducive to prosocial action and could motivate the person to engage in acts that result in social change. Instructors must, therefore, develop exercises within the classroom that lead the students toward a more complex identity that is more open to new people and knowledges. These can include exercises which attempt to develop identity-contents such as kindness, helpfulness, attention-paying in the students which can lead to enhanced impulses to sees act prosocially. Moreover, altering or replacing negative identity components with these beneficial actions will help students to enhance their sense of Self. For not only are these identity-components readily supportable, there are also more opportunities to enact them than negative elements. Students will be encouraged to act out prosocially as they begin experiencing the feeling of well-being associated with helping another.

Thus, by developing the students’ prosocial identity-components instructors can enhance their sense of Self. This is crucial for transforming the feelings of empathic distress into actual steps to help the Other. It is this movement that is the hardest to accomplish: most people will feel sorry for another but take no steps to actually help the person. However, as discussed before, research has shown that empathic distress only really lessens if people take practical steps to help another and if these steps actually result in the alleviation of the Other’s suffering. Without such a result, there is no
lessening of the empathic distress. Instructors can use this knowledge to encourage students to take actual steps in alleviating their empathic distress. While this can be done by motivating students to become involved in movements and programs that reduce prejudice, discrimination, violence, and other harmful actions, students can also be encouraged to deepen their identification with the Other so that inaction results in extreme distress. The higher their degree of feeling responsibility for the Other’s welfare, the more motivated they will be to judge the other’s situation as requiring their involvement and less likely to think of their personal costs.

A translation of thought into action is obviously also affected by the here-and-now bias. To counteract this bias the instructor can encourage the students to imagine themselves in the place of the other. This allows the self to think and act empathically. Vetlesen explains that

the faculty of empathy sensitizes us to the vulnerability we as humans are endowed with, empathy also . . . helps us recognize the vulnerability of others when they are distant and unknown to us, rather than encountered in conditions of proximity . . . Empathy possesses a potential for transcending the narrow confines of proximity-based face-to-face interaction . . . , yet to accomplish this act of transcendence so as to reach the distant and unknown other(s), the faculty of empathy needs to be accompanied by the faculty of imagination.(333)

It is essential for people when they find themselves in novel situations to be able to decide how to act even if there are no prototypical cases that they can rely upon. This
requires the ability to imagine themselves in various situations and expand the categories from central to non-central members of a concept. A person whose identity constitutes a diversity of identity-components would be able to engage efficiently in situations that are non-prototypical. Therefore, the skill that instructors should focus on developing in their students for prosocial thinking and action is the ability to integrate increasingly diverse components into their identities. This would allow them to engage with new situations and people capably and efficiently. It is the fundamental requirement for finding strands of similarities with Others and empathizing with them.

It is a communal and transformative process that makes it possible for people to understand each other, inhabit a shared world, and reach out in a caring manner. Imagination is the main activity through which human beings are able to learn and live with groups of people, making connections through mutual gestures, perceptions, symbols, and narratives. Indeed, this process of learning is the primary means by which all interpersonal relations are constituted. For instance, in the relationship between a student and an ethnic Other, each has to be aware of the other’s acts and the reasons behind those acts. It is crucial for prosocial learning that students understand the motive and cause behind any causal attribution. Imagination allows for an understanding of the nature of this reciprocity between people. Each person shares in the experience of the other and understands that the Other’s actions are a response to the Self’s intentions as well. This understanding is crucial in prosocial pedagogy. If students understand the reciprocity of the relationship between the Self and the ethnic Other, then they might be
encouraged to appraise their own actions more objectively and substitute the harmful contents with more prosocial elements.

Conclusion

For prosocial pedagogy’s goals to be achieved, the student’s sense of Self must be secure and empathic enough to include more and more ethnic Others. The multiethnic literature classroom can play a crucial role in encouraging students to re-think and re-perceive situations and concepts by introducing a multiplicity of perspectives and informations. Indeed, the metaphoricity of the most important prosocial concepts (right, duty, action, and so on) and identity-components of the Self and ethnic Other allow for imagination to have a huge impact on prosocial reasoning and judgment. People understand events, especially dilemmas about helping another, through conventional metaphorical mappings which form hierarchies of cognition. Since there are usually multiple metaphors for even the most basic prosocial concept, people have to choose the one that best fits the situation and enhances their sense of Self. Johnson points out that there are two things required to be morally sensitive of the Other. This holds true for prosocial action as well:

1. We must have knowledge of the imaginative nature of human conceptual systems and reasoning. This means that we must know what those imaginative structures are, how they work, and what they entail about the nature of our moral understanding.
2. We must cultivate moral imagination by sharpening our powers of discrimination, exercising our
capacity for envisioning new possibilities, and imaginatively tracing out
the implications of our metaphors, prototypes, and narratives. (198)

Indeed, literary texts, by their very nature, provide alternative circumstances and stances
which allow a person to experience a situation as an ethnic Other does. They are able to
imagine themselves in different conditions and circumstances and empathize with the
Other.

This ability to empathize with the Other affects not only the Self’s perception but
also the appraisal of an event. A secure Self is more willing to judge the ethnic Other
compassionately as he/she is more capable of efficiently interacting with new
information. The multiplicity of associational networks and complexity of emotional
attitudes makes a person more open to the Other. This ability to engage and identify with
another, instead of retreating in panic from novel situations, is essential for motivating
prosocial action. A person must be willing to see similarities with the Other to help them
by taking actual steps for alleviating their suffering. Prosocial pedagogy, therefore,
attempts to develop a secure, empathic identity in the students which can affect all the
components of the prosocial decision-making process to habitually lead them toward a
reduction of prejudice in the Self and a willingness to engage in social change.
Chapter V

Conclusion

The aim of this project has been to formulate a pedagogy for the multiethnic literature classroom which enhances the students’ prosocial behavior by supporting their identity development and security and by increasing their capacity for empathy. The pedagogical strategies mentioned here facilitate this by supporting a secure sense of Self in the students and developing their empathic affects and motives within the classroom so that there is an alteration in their cognitive process (perception, judgment, motivation, action, change) to lead habitually toward prosocial action and social change.

Extending the debate about the requirement and function of the multiethnic literatures within the University, prosocial pedagogy focuses on the crucial role that these classes can play in promoting greater understanding between people while providing the students with strategies and capabilities to effectively engage with new information and people. The traditionalist approaches to teaching have tackled the student’s lack of interest in material and texts, which they see as distant and alien to their own socio-political interests or concerns, with a redoubled effort to instruct, or interest them. Within the ethnic program, this is usually accompanied with a belief that the greater the exposure to different cultures and texts, the deeper would be the understanding of the Other generally seen as alien. The consequence of this belief is reflected in the increasing inclusion of selective ethnic and other minority literatures within the curriculum and the
initiation of general courses that introduce the students to different groups. The pedagogical strategies used within the classroom aim to increase the student’s factual-knowledge about different cultures rather than in engaging the student’s own personal experiences and affects within the learning process about the ethnic Other. This distancing between the Self and the Other maintains the student’s sense of an inflexible identity, making it hard for them to identify with more and more diverse groups of people. Ethnic scholars have attempted to engage the students further in the learning process and deepen their understanding of the Other by focusing on the life-conditions of both the Self and the ethnic Other. However, these pedagogies stress on either intra-group similarities or intra-group differences as a defining principle which creates the danger of providing recognition to only the unique self. This narrow conception of Self can result in the student’s overinvestment in their existing identity components with no attempts at finding similarities with the ethnic Other. These ethnic pedagogies based on essentialized identities for the Self or Other, therefore, limits the student’s engagement with novel experiences and people, which could provide a better understanding of the Other. This, as we have seen, is crucial for creating empathic distress and the desire to act prosocially.

The important way in which this project departs from the impressive work done already by the ethnic scholars in expanding the canon and introducing innovative pedagogical theories and practices within the classroom is by promoting the belief that students are more willing to engage with the content of the classroom and be open to novel concepts, perspectives, and people if they can see both similarities and differences from the Other. Prosocial pedagogy presents a comprehensive theory that is based on
both similarities and differences between Self and Other to create a secure identity so that the danger of providing recognition to only the unique self and making the Self vulnerable is reduced.

The pedagogy instead attempts to develop and maintain a secure identity in the students which makes them more open to find similarities with the ethnic Other while maintaining a distinct core identity. If the students have an opportunity to enact their core identity components and be recognized, they are less threatened by the novel information and people they are introduced to in the ethnic literature classroom. Instead of focusing all their energy on the egocentric monitoring of events and people they are more willing to accept the metaphorical conception of identity-contents (affects, schemas, scripts) which are enacted in the three registers of experience and memory (imagistic-perceptual, affective-physiological, and linguistic-conceptual). Prosocial pedagogy focuses on this flexibility of the students’ prototypes to change, and substitute the harmful elements and integrate multiple narratives to introduce complex structures of identity-contents which are more conducive to finding similarities and empathizing with the ethnic Other while maintaining a sense of secure Self.

Indeed, the reduction of identity-vulnerability which happens by incorporating these psychological changes makes a student not only willing to be open to novel knowledges and people but also willing to care for another and take practical steps to help alleviate their suffering. A Self that recognizes that the Other is not threatening is more open to substituting their harmful identity elements with more prosocial contents.
The willingness to invest in the well-being of another person can be enhanced in the students by developing their abilities to focus on the Other, his/her situation and occupy affective states more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own. The pedagogical strategies and exercises presented here attempt to arouse the students’ empathic distress for the ethnic Other through the different empathy arousing modes (classical conditioning, direct association, mimicry, mediated-association, and role-taking). In order to relieve their distress, as Beck’s research has shown, people will take practical steps to alleviate the suffering of the Other. Indeed, students who see their Self’s quest for fulfillment as connected to the Other’s well-being will be more willing to act prosocially toward an increasingly diverse group of people. They might have realized that helping another can lead to not only a recognition of the Self for their acts but also the anticipation of feeling good is a powerful motivator in their desire to engage in prosocial acts in the future.

However, a secure, emphatic identity can habitually lead toward helping the ethnic Other and social action by bringing certain prosocial changes in a person’s basic cognitive processes. The manner in which the Self perceives and judges the Other motivates their decision to either take steps in alleviating their suffering and resulting in social change or retreating in empathic panic. Mostly, people tend to be biased in favor of their family and friends, their “in-group.” I want to stress here that there is nothing wrong in this. It is natural to empathize more with people one is similar to or interact with on a regular basis. This is a part of the human survival instinct. However, this empathic bias becomes dangerous when it results in the harsh and insensitive judgment of the Other
resulting in prejudiced and biased actions. Prosocial pedagogy proposes to use this bias and extend it to more and more diverse people so that the students’ tendency to make negative causal attributes to the ethnic Other is reduced along with their prejudices. The focus on the structural similarities based on the universal life-experiences and affects of people through the classroom exercises and discussions would stress the commonalities between the students and the ethnic Other. However, instructors have to accompany this process of identification with steps to maintain the student’s sense of a unique self which is different from the Other in certain ways. Only when students are secure in their sense of Self will they be willing to perceive similarities in their life-conditions or affects with the ethnic Other and empathize. As we have seen this allows them to perceive and judge the role of the ethnic Other in the situation in a manner similar to how they would judge themselves, without the negative affects of the familiarity or here-and-now bias. Indeed, the ability to perceive the Other as similar yet unique would also further increase their “in-group” to include more and more diverse groups of people. When people are able to see connections with varied ethnic Others and feel their suffering as their own, it can affect their whole cognitive process to habitually lead toward social action.

Multiple empathizing is especially important in today’s global society which is becoming increasingly multicultural and diverse. For a large number of students the world is becoming fluid, filled with people who have grown up with multiple cultures at once. Indeed, students are constantly engaging with new information and people. A vulnerable identity that is not able to imagine the Other’s situations and find strands of similarities is probably less willing or capable of interacting with the diversity of
knowledge and act prosocially. Indeed, this is true even when the vulnerable Self is exposed to diverse groups of people and given opportunities to interact with them. Robert D. Putnam’s study found that people living in highly diverse ethnic and racial communities seem to distrust both their in-group and out-group more than people living in low diversity communities. This lack of trust correlates to less civic and political involvement with diminishing confidence in local government, less belief in a personal ability to affect the political process, less registering to vote, reduction in charity and volunteering. While Putnam admits that in the long run successful immigrant communities create new forms of social solidarity and more encompassing identities, in the short run, “social capital” is declining with increasing immigration and racial diversity. This “hunkering down” to protect one’s own interest with very little willingness to engage in social action is reflective of the threat that the Self feels from the ethnic Other. The traditionalist approach of including selective classes and texts within the curriculum to increase the student’s interest and understanding of diverse culture results in similar consequences with students feeling more challenged and becoming vulnerable from the novel material and refocusing their energy to protecting their own sense of Self. It is crucial, therefore, at this stage of our human history to re-think the traditional approaches and goals of teaching.

Prosocial pedagogy attempts to create a new theory of learning to enhance the capabilities of students to empathize with diverse Others and act prosocially by supporting the student’s identity and capacity for occupying another’s situation and affective states in this world that is rapidly becoming multicultural. While this project
focuses on the multiethnic literature classroom, the basic pedagogical theory can be applied to other disciplines as well. This pedagogy would be especially useful in enhancing the students’ understanding of the subject and prosocial proclivities in the humanities classroom where the content is based on questions of identity. History, philosophy, and ethics come to mind right away. However, I believe that other disciplines would profit from focusing on the students’ identities and capacities of empathy as well. Studies needs to be done on the specific ways in which the transformation of the students’ empathic distress into prosocial action can be achieved within the different disciplines and re-think the traditional approaches to the process of learning within the disciplines itself. While the understanding and remembering of foundational knowledge (basic information and ideas like definition of capitalism, histories of a country, and so on) is fundamental to the learning process in any discipline, it must be accompanied with some sort of noticeable change in the student’s life which encourages them to interact with Others and different knowledges in more novel ways. Instructors need to be innovative in their teaching strategies, content of the classroom, and the structure of the exercises and assessment methodologies to promote an active engagement of the students with new material and people and reduce their egocentric monitoring of events.

Another possible direction this project can be developed is in studying the effectiveness of the pedagogical theory and strategies in developing a secure identity in students who are first generation Americans. The challenges for these students are different than the traditional students who are from the majority groups. Usually the struggle to create a secure identity for them involves questions of language, legal rights,
and quite possibly conflict in the home and school culture. Nonetheless, even for these students the basic motive is identity-maintenance and I believe this pedagogy can be applied, with some modification, to this situation as well. This will not only make them more comfortable and secure in their sense of Self but also encourage them to see their own Other (usually consisting of people from the majority group) empathically as well. After all, students who are secure in their sense of Self and able to empathize with the Other are the sort of prosocial citizenry that the world urgently needs today.
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