CHAPTER 40.

WE SHOULD SUSPECT OUR STUDENTS ARE USING AI ✨ *INSTEAD OF MISTRUSTING OUR STUDENTS, WE SHOULD EMBRACE A PEDAGOGY OF TRUST AND JOY*

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During a recent writing conference in my first-year writing course at Boston College, a student shared an email from an instructor of another class, announcing that due to the "increased use of ChatGPT," he would now be grading "harder" and holding students to "higher standards." While being a single anecdote, this story is not an isolated one. I've heard versions of this logic—that all students are using generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools whether we realize it or not, so we should raise academic standards and grade more harshly—echoed by colleagues across departments. Articles like the *Chronicle of Education's* "I'm a Student. You Have No Idea How Much We're Using ChatGPT: No Professor or Software Could Ever Pick up on It" (Terry, 2023) similarly point to the way that actual or imagined GenAI use by students is shaping an adversarial relationship between educators and learners. In what follows, I argue against a pedagogy of distrust and advocate a move towards a pedagogy of trust and joy inspired by Ignatian and critical pedagogies. This approach extends beyond "GenAI-proofing" assignments, which still center on the question of GenAI scope in the classroom. Instead, I suggest we ask, "To what extent does your learning in this assignment and this class bring you closer to your values, the person you wish to become, and the impact you wish to have on the world?"

DEFICIT-BASED BELIEFS AND THEIR HARM

The idea that "students are using GenAI tools whether we realize it or not" is problematic for several reasons. First, it assumes universal equity of access to GenAI tools and widespread deception by students (See Whitney Lew James's

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chapter in this volume for more on access and Section 8 of this volume for more on concerns with academic integrity). More fundamentally, for the way that suspicion about deception arises with some groups of students more than others, this bad idea entrenches deficit-based beliefs about students rooted in a legacy of white supremacy in the United States.

Deficit-based thinking in education is not new; it is a deeply entrenched perspective that views students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, as lacking skills and knowledge. This view is rooted in a legacy of white supremacy and colonialism that has historically marginalized students of color and positioned them as needing remedial education. Work by scholars such as Carmen Kynard demonstrates how the racial politics of the United States fundamentally shaped the formation of first-year composition courses and instructional models that position students of color in need of "prescriptive, skills-based instruction" (Kynard, 2014, p. 4). Tara Yosso further argues that "one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in United States schools is deficit thinking," citing Paulo Freire's "banking model of education," where schools "fill up supposedly passive students with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75) In this view, education is a means to an end, focusing on measurable outputs like grades, test scores, and post-graduation job placement rather than the holistic development of students as critical thinkers and engaged citizens.

We can clearly see manifestations of deficit-based thinking about our students in conversations about academic integrity. Scholarship on plagiarism repeatedly demonstrates how the "issue" at hand is more moralistic than anything else (Anson, 2011; Howard, 2007; Howard & Watson, 2010; Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007). Rebecca Moore Howard's 1992 claim about plagiarism, saying, "… we persecute students for crimes they did not commit," continues to hold today, particularly as so-called GenAI "detectors" proliferate the market (Howard, 1992, p. 233). Grammarly's "Authorship" tool, which claims to help students "build a case for your work as you write," is just one example of how tech companies capitalize on the distrust existing on both sides of the teacher-student relationship (*Grammarly Authorship*, n.d.).

Educators' suspicion and surveillance are not evenly distributed. Overwhelmingly, students from more marginalized backgrounds are more likely to be accused of submitting GenAI-produced writing. "Detectors" such as GPTZero are more likely to flag writing by non-native English students (Liang et al., 2023; Weber-Wulff et al., 2023). Additionally, a recent report by Common Sense Media (2004) found that Black teens, who already face the highest rates of school discipline, despite no differences in actual behavior, are about twice as likely to have their work be accused of GenAI authorship compared to white and Latine students. By

assuming the presence of GenAI tools means plagiarism and responding in punitive ways, educators risk reinforcing this modern manifestation of white supremacy. This approach fails to account for the diverse ways we engage with technologies and the various socio-economic factors influencing access and engagement. Most crucially, it sets up an adversarial relationship between teachers and students, where students are presumed guilty until proven innocent, and teachers are positioned as enforcers rather than facilitators of learning.

CENTERING JOY

Everyone loses when we focus on the extent to which a student has used GenAI in their work. Not only can we never be fully sure if a student has or has not used GenAI tools unless they disclose their use, but, more importantly, we close down opportunities to support our students in developing the skills and capacities to use GenAI tools ethically if we create classroom cultures of fear and distrust. As Steven Engel and Staci Shultz's chapter argues elsewhere in this collection, we shouldn't dismiss the impact of strong emotions in our classroom. While Engle and Shultz focus on negative emotions like fear and anger that many instructors are grappling with in response to GenAI, I highlight the power of positive emotions on learning. Drawing inspiration from Jesuit and culturally responsive pedagogies, I suggest we create classroom communities grounded in trust and joy.

When I say "joy," I'm drawing from Jesuit and culturally responsive pedagogies that define joy as an alignment of our values and individual and communal purpose. At Boston College, we talk about valuing students' multiple identities and motivating them to integrate them into a whole self when we say *cura personalis* or formative education. My colleague, Cristiano Casalini, in his historicization of formative education, notes how the early Jesuits saw humanistic and scholarly education as "complementary" approaches (Casalini, 2021, p. 250). Across academic and student affairs divisions at Boston College, students are familiar with Fr. Michael Himes' "three key questions"—"What brings me joy? What am I good at? Who does the world need me to be?" This joy, Fr. Himes explains, paraphrasing Augustine, is "the delight one takes in being dissatisfied" in constantly "stretching oneself." True joy extends beyond the individual and serves "the needs of the community in which one finds oneself" (Jason, 2017). This language echoes Paulo Freire's description of a "humanizing education" as "the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world" (Freire & Betto, 1985, as cited in Darder, 2011). Similarly, Gholdy Muhammad's exploration of joy's role in culturally and historically responsive teaching draws from histories of "resistance" and knowing "how to love yourself and others" (2023,

p. 18). In this framing, joy is deeply agential, connected to our ability to make change(s) in our own lives and in our communities of belonging.

Joy, I contend, is a crucial, often missing component of discussions about motivation and learning. In the fields of rhetoric and composition, as well as education, many discussions about the intersection of structures of education and students' motivation to learn are found in conversations about alternative assessment practices (Blum & Kohn, 2020; Clark & Talbert, 2023; Feldman, 2023; Nilson, 2023; Stommel, 2023). These conversations might not explicitly use the term "joy," but that's the common thread underpinning these approaches. Ultimately, discussions about assessment and grading are about our core philosophies of the meaning of education itself. In this moment, with rising costs of attendance and inflation, the urgency to find the "value" of education is even more acute. Yet, I claim, like the Jesuits and many contemporary scholars wishing to unsettle some of the systems we take for granted, such as grading, this idea of needing to "prove your value" is an additional manifestation of what I've been calling a pedagogy of distrust. A pedagogy of distrust allows negative emotions like fear and suspicion to take center stage in the classroom. Instead, in this chapter, I advocate for using joy as the foundation of one's pedagogical approach.

DESIGNING FOR JOY IN THE CLASSROOM

For my Fall 2023 upper-division elective course, "Crafting Activism: Democracy, Composition, and D.I.Y. Rhetorics," I collaborated with Rachel Greenberg, Director of Boston College's Career Center, and Julianne Smith, Associate Director of Career Education, to think about how I might design for joy. The approach I outline below could have worked well before ChatGPT's launch, and I believe it is appropriate for classrooms that openly embrace or intentionally adopt "refusal" as a pedagogical approach to GenAI as well as those who intentionally focus on developing GenAI literacy (MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI, 2024; Sano-Franchini et al., 2024). Designing for joy, as I call it here, requires replacing the question of "How and to what extent is GenAI use permitted in this classroom?" with "To what extent does your learning in this assignment bring you in closer alignment with your values, the person you wish to become, and the impact you wish to have on the world?" Designing for joy in the classroom looks like prompting students to consider the rhetorical and affective implications of their discursive choices and encouraging them to make connections between their individual lives and community memberships both inside and outside of the classroom.

Boston College's Career Center uses the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment as part of their career coaching, encouraging students to think about how to plan for their lives post-graduation as rooted in their strengths (Gallup, n.d.). I

decided to adopt the StrengthsFinder for my class so that we could not only have a shared language to talk about strengths within my course but also so students could more easily bridge the work they are doing in my classroom with any engagement they might have with the Career Center. After having my students complete the Clifton StrengthsFinder, I had them complete a Google Form at the beginning of each project asking them to indicate:

- Their top three strengths
- How they anticipate using their strengths on the project
- One specific goal they have for the project, rooted in their strengths

At the end of each project, students submitted a metacognitive letter, also in the form of a Google Form, that asked them to review their original goal-setting document and complete a series of reflective questions, including:

- How have you changed since the end of the last project and the beginning of this one? Review your original goal-setting document and reference any previous metacognitive letters you've written for this class.
- Use emojis to represent how you feel about your work in class right now. Why did you choose the emojis that you did?
- Think about what you've learned about yourself and your strengths in this course so far. This could be something you've learned about yourself as a learner, about your interests, or something else. What is one thing you have learned about yourself? What do you plan to do in light of this knowledge?

The emoji question, inspired by work in Stephanie West-Puckett et al.'s *Failing Sideways: Queer Possibilities for Writing Assessment* is crucial because it helps students to make connections between how they feel when they use their strengths. Having students focus on their emotional responses while reflecting on their strengths helps to support them in learning how to recognize the presence of joy in their lives. The last question, which asks students to think about what they plan to do in light of their knowledge, pushes them to move beyond an individual conception of their joy and towards communal possibilities.

As the semester progressed, I saw students increasingly bridge our work in the classroom with their lives outside the classroom, drawing connections between their leadership roles on campus, their internships, and our course's content. I also saw joy when I heard students say, "My final project doesn't feel like work; I'd do all this reading anyways!" or talk about how their dreams for their future sharpened based on the work they completed in my class.

We have an opportunity right now to pause and deeply reflect on the types of classrooms we want to create and the kind of teachers we want to be. The

proliferation of GenAI tools may have been the impetus for me to develop the learning design I discuss in this chapter, but to think about this work as "GenAI-proofing" the classroom is a bad idea. We can succumb to fear and distrust, adopting a defensive approach to our teaching, or we can, using a pedagogy of trust and joy, partner with our students in pursuit of deep, meaningful learning aligned with students' strengths, community memberships, and reflective use of tools and technologies.

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