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## Enriching the Experience of Teaching through Understanding and Using Countertransference Feelings

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The authors recount limitations of their early experiences as teachers without the benefits of the modern analytic group understanding of countertransference and without the applications of the concept of the class as a group. They describe how developments in the fields of education and modern psychoanalysis stimulated developments in their own awareness of the significance and usefulness of countertransference experiences for the teacher-educator as for the modern analytic group leader, and enriched their experience of teaching. A review of the literature in education and modern psychoanalysis on the subject of countertransference is summarized and anecdotes are given.

In reflecting on over a quarter of a century of experience as educators, we were both struck by how our views of teaching have changed. Where we started out feeling we were in wasteland where the sole objective in academia was the freedom to think, we now find ourselves in modern analysis and in modern analytic group process has added depth and new dimensions, not only to our work with patients and groups but to our encounters with students and classes.

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Over the past 25 years, modern analysis and modern analytic group process have demonstrated that when we are out of touch with our feelings, or frightened of them, or aware but controlled by them, the feelings will dictate our performance and our group members will feel misunderstood, leave, remain aloof from their own feelings, and feel to blame for impasses in the emotional life of the group.

Likewise, when a teacher fails to heed the emotional information latent in the feelings that arise in the process of learning and teaching, a host of negative consequences ensues. Teachers may resort to quick and forceful means of classroom management that may be effective in the short run but are often detrimental to their own and their students' intellectual, social, and emotional development. They may shut themselves off from their students' suffering or become worried and despairing and overly involved; act out their feelings with students, parents, or peers; or overidentify with their students. Given the high dropout rate of both students and teachers in public education, we believe people leave rather than bear the intense feelings generated in the teaching-learning relationship.

Teaching is a complex task, not only because of the complexity of the subject matter but because of the emotions aroused by the learning situation itself and the emotional impact on the teacher of individual students and of the class as a group. Feelings of omnipotence and omniscience quickly turn to feeling useless, fraudulent, inadequate, and stupid. Fears of ignorance may be blanketed by dazzling displays of theoretical knowledge, fears of impotence by exerting power, fears of chaos by rigid control, fear of inadequacy and humiliation by claims of superiority and making students feel small.

What can enrich the experience of teaching is similar to what enriches the experience of leading groups: having the knowledge and experience of observing behavior, deciphering feelings, and thinking about how the emotional impact others have on us can be clues to understanding the nature of classroom and group relationships. What is deposited in teachers, as in group leaders, are the feelings the other person cannot bear or bear to feel on his own, the helplessness, confusion, panic, guilt, despair, depression etc. Recognizing that as

teachers we are the recipients of these unexpressed but deeply felt emotions can enrich our contacts with our students and help us know them on a deeper level.

The foremost principle in our work as analysts, group leaders, and teachers is not only to be aware of our feelings and to accept them, but to understand their origin and use them constructively, instead of acting on them or trying to control them.

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## Toby: Anecdote One Beginnings

When I began teaching 25 years ago in the New York City public schools, I had not yet entered analysis and had never heard the word "countertransference." It was the Dark Ages of my emotional development. I had little awareness of my own feelings and little concern about the feelings of others-other than to try to control what people felt.

My first semester teaching biology to 14- to 17-year-olds. I felt like a terrible person. I had many disturbing feelings and didn't know that it was good for me to have them. Working at that time with adolescents (30 to 35 pre- and post-high school dropouts per class), my feelings ranged from helplessness to hostility; sexual urges ran rampant and murderous feelings were powerful. There were moments of joy, warmth, and accomplishment, and these were the glue that held me and my relationships with my students together. I realized I wanted to be a dictator, an executioner, and when these fantasies were uncomfortable for me, I wanted to quit and open a restaurant where I fantasized my students coming to be fed and leaving feeling satiated and appreciative, two feelings that were rare to my experience with them as teacher.

Three things happened that first year that changed my professional life. The first was finding a colleague in the school, Dr. Rochelle Shatzman, who had just begun modern analytic training and was working with Dr. William Kirman at Long Island University on a master's degree in guidance and counseling. As my teaching supervisor she understood the emotional shock I was experiencing, encouraged me to voice all my feelings in supervision, and inspired me to pursue modern psychoanalysis and modern psychoanalytic training. She would interrupt my rantings in supervision about students who arrived late to class and pointedly ask me if I wanted to help my students arrive on time to class or not arrive at all. My superego and id at that time were split, yet in agreement. The answer was "yes" to both questions. She enabled me to recognize how "Where have you been?" communicated my irritation rather than a calm welcoming "Glad to see you. There's an empty seat next to Paul. We're on page..." when students did arrive to class.

The second was discovering a book by **Arthur Jersild (1955)**. Jersild felt that teachers' understanding and acceptance of themselves were the most important elements in any effort they made to help students grow. Lack of awareness and misunderstanding of feelings could manifest in a variety of destructive ways, limiting the teachers' lives and

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their relationship with their students. Among the feelings he found teachers most needed to face, understand, and accept were: anxiety, anger, contempt, abuse, despondency, despair, annihilation, distrust, competition, envy, fear, hate, jealousy, isolation, helplessness, meaninglessness, rage, spite, and being alternately turned on hand off sexually. In this chapter "Hostility" I found an invitation to be at home with myself as an angry person, whether foolishly, unjustifiably, or maliciously angry.

Jersild pointed to the many destructive ways in which unexamined feelings could be acted out in educational settings: snobbishly scoring those who have learned less than ourselves, giving exams and setting requirements that students will fail, competitiveness and withholding with colleagues, avoiding writing about or discussing subjects that stir up feelings we do not want to face, being verbally abusive, needing to be right, needing to impress others, etc. Jersild did not take on the question of how the teachers' feelings, once understood, could be used to enrich the teacher's experience of teaching, shape maturational interventions, and resolve class resistances to learning and cooperation with teachers and peers.

It was in Jersild's chapter on "Compassion" that I was introduced to the idea of countertransference. I remember the relief I felt when I read:

*We often think of compassion as something soft, perhaps touched with sentimentality. Compassion sometimes has this connotation, but it also has a more profound psychological meaning. There is something soft and tender in*

*compassion, but also something rugged and very hard. To be compassionate one must be able to accept the impact of any emotion—love or hate, joy, fear, or grief—tolerate it and harbor it long enough and with sufficient absorption to accept its meaning and to enter into a fellowship of feeling with the one who is moved by the emotion. This is the heroic feature of compassion in its fullest development; to be able to face the ravage of rage, the shattering impact of terror, the tenderest promptings of love, and then to embrace these in a larger context, which involves an acceptance of these feelings and an appreciation of what they mean to the one who experiences them....It is a way of entering into emotional fellowship.... A compassionate person...loves, but he also hates.... The range of compassion is the range of human emotion. (pp. 125-126)*

Slowly began the transition in perception of myself from terrible teacher to compassionate teacher. I learned that there were no bad feelings, only destructive behaviors. I learned that a bad teacher was

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someone who could not tolerate his own ambivalence and his students' ambivalent feelings toward him.

The third was my recognition of “ghosts” in the classroom. Each classroom is full of ghosts. Each student brings in a contingent, and we bring in our own. A ghost is a shadow of a person who has become emotionally meaningful for each of us prior to our stepping into the classroom and meeting for each of us prior to our stepping into the classroom and meeting as students and teacher. Each ghost plays a part in the meaning we give to our encounters in the classroom. I soon realized that my disappointed father and my explosive mother went with me to school each day accounting for many of the distancing responses I would give to my students' behaviors. Fortunately my benign paternal grandmother came along and made each day tolerable.

## Susan: Anecdote Two

My first experience teaching was about 30 years ago, as a Yoga instructor at the Integral Yoga Institute. My own need to be perfect and to know everything was perfectly matched by my students' needs for me to be perfect and all knowing. When I was practicing yoga for my personal needs, there wasn't any interaction with other people. It was an isolated experience, and I was not exposed to anyone else's “energy field.” After completing my yoga teacher training, I was looking forward to teaching my first yoga class and expected to have the same tranquility with that experience that I had when I practiced alone. It was a surprise to me that I did not have only peaceful positive feelings I now had to experience a whole room full of feelings: one which came from the students and ones which originated inside myself. I was later to learn these were countertransference reactions, both objective and subjective. While I was teaching a philosophy that maintained that everyone was wonderful, I was feeling guilty because I was having a wide range of feelings and not always feeling wonderfully about everyone. My first class was a great lesson that I could not do everything perfectly. You can only imagine how I felt when I was walking around a silent room, with everyone in deep relaxation, checking on them, when I stepped on someone's glasses and a loud cracking sound filled the peaceful room. Intense feelings of guilt, humiliation, and self-attack only some of those I experienced. After these classes students would come up to me to ask questions and tell me their personal problems, expecting me to “heal” them. I was wondering what was wrong with me because I was not feeling loving and giving

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all the time, and I certainly did not feel smart and all knowing! Around this time I had my first experience with modern psychoanalysis. I began to learn that if I didn't fight these feelings, teaching and life would be easier and fuller. I was relieved to learn about positive and negative feelings being all right and even normal and began to work on accepting them, both toward others and myself. This helped me to have more energy, as I stopped fighting what was natural. The process also gave me more understanding about myself, others, and teaching. I was able to use myself in fuller and more creative ways and embarked on a new emotional journey.

## Enlightenment

Our early explorations of the literature in education and psychoanalysis enabled us to understand the role of feelings in the life of a teacher and the emotional experience of teaching. We were encouraged to find that many pioneers in psychoanalysis, including, A. Freud, D. Burlingham, A. Aichorn, E. Erikson, M. Klein, E. Kris, and E. Clevans, had been trained both as educators and analysts. Freud (1925) in the preface to Aichorn's *Wayward Youth* commented that “none of the applications of psychoanalysis has excited so much interest and aroused so

many hopes, and none consequently has attracted so many capable workers as its use in the theory and practice of education" (p. 273). It interested us that the series "The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child" began in Europe with a focus on the study of education and child development. A **Freud (1935)** believed it desirable for all classroom teachers to have undergone personal analysis, and we embarked on ours, both individual and group.

We found in the literature parallel developments in the fields of education and psychoanalysis. As analysts were discovering the therapeutic value of countertransference, educators were recognizing the importance for teachers to acknowledge and use the feelings generated in them as a by-product of their relationships with individual students, classes, and groups of students, and their membership in the larger system called "school."

Since the 1950s, writers in both fields have spoken boldly about the importance of the feelings of the analyst and educator in their work. **Redl and Wineman (1952)** cautioned that teachers must learn to handle their feelings before their effects reach their students. They sensed danger when educators failed to hear the turmoil of emotions within

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themselves, their students, and colleagues. **Jersild (1955)** felt that the teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself was the most important requirement in any effort to help students know and accept themselves. He maintained that a significant restriction in the lives of many educators was the limited freedom to allow feelings to surge within themselves without being compelled to snuff them out or deny them.

In the psychoanalytic literature, we found Jersild's writing on compassion echoed in **Winnicott (1949)**, **Heimann (1950)**, **Little (1951)**, **Racker (1953, 1957)**, and **Kernberg (1964)**. These analysts, and many modern analysts to follow, added another dimension to the value of being free to feel, and that was the use of the analyst's and teacher's feelings as bridge to the unconscious of the other. **Heimann (1950)** used the term "countertransference" to cover all the feelings which the analyst experiences toward his patient..." (p. 81). She believed that the "analyst's emotional response to his patient within the analytic situation represents one of the most important tools for his work. The analyst's countertransference is an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious" (p. 81).

We recognized the evolution of concurrent and intense emotional experiences for us and our students in **Spotnitz's (1952)** observation that "the therapist is exposed to the instinctual forces at work collectively in several individuals at the same time.... [U]nder these conditions, the group therapist finds that his induced neurosis is much more intense and requires more thorough and more prolonged self-analysis" (p. 9). We soon caught on that classes were, as **Slavson (1950)** described a "network of transferences" (p. 42).

We better understood emotional induction as secret efforts our students and classes were making to become known to us. They were messages from the class members' shared unconscious emotions, and we could sense a total class feeling or attitude by listening to our own feelings and understanding their meaning in the life of the class and in the lives of each member of the class. We were learning that what we felt toward them were often feelings their early objects felt toward them.

Meanwhile in the field of modern psychoanalysis, many writers were reaching toward the field of education and expanding their understanding of interpersonal dynamics to illuminate life in the classroom. These articles all took a positive view of the classroom teacher's feelings and use of these feelings to resolve resistances to learning and cooperation. **Friedman (1977)**, **Kirman (1977a)**, **Welber (1977)**, **Sackler (1979)**, **Chusid (1982)**, **Kirman (1982)**, **Meadow (1982, 1988)**,

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**Zaretsky (1982, 1991)**, **Clevans (1983)**, and **McAloon (1991)** all suggest that teachers, in experiencing their classes as groups, need to analyze and manage the powerful feelings evoked by the teacher-student-class-subject interrelationship.

**Kirman (1982)** pointed out that the student-teacher team engaged in creative teaching and learning must meet in a group setting called the classroom. He advocated that teachers understand the basic principles of group functioning and be able to "apply them to the ongoing learning situation" (p. 90). He cautioned teachers to focus on the unconscious meaning of students' communications and induced feelings, and resist deciding what to say and do before understanding the situation clearly.

It is interesting that a parallel search of the literature in the field of education from the 1950s through the

1980s turns up writings by a number of educators-analysts recognizing that learning is an emotionally charged process and that overwhelming emotions in teachers and students, when not recognized, understood, and contained, interfere with both teaching and learning, i.e., **Bettelheim (1950)**, **Jones (1968)**, **Ekstein and Motto (1969)**, **Field (1989)**, **Wolf (1989)**, and **Cozzarelli and Silin (1989)**.

We eventually realized that the problems of classroom life parallel the problems of group life. When students walked into our classes, an emotional transformation took place. They were suddenly beset by needs, desires, and fears, all accompanied by a myriad of feeling toward teachers and peers. Activated mere conflicts around dependency, obedience, sadism, perfectionism, and inevitably much uncertainty. In this needy frame of mind, they came into a classroom where they had to share time, space, attention, oxygen, and materials. At times they were ignored, neglected, isolated, censured, and falsely accused. They were exposed and forced to be close to students of both genders. We found they expected us and their peers to be either generous or withholding, supportive or burdensome, trustworthy or deceitful, depending on their view of prior experiences with significant adults and siblings. They came with suspicious about asking for what they wanted and needed and suspicious about the consequences of expressing their feelings. Many students were out of touch with their feelings, and even when they were able to feel their feelings, they lacked the vocabulary for putting them into words. Because the meaning of their feelings was unconscious and because so much went unsaid, it was inevitable that the messages would be conveyed through induced feelings, which swept through us regularly.

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### Toby: Anecdote Three

Paying attention to induced feelings was not an easy task. Sometimes there was merriment in class, and I felt sad. I checked myself out and realized that sadness was not a part of the feelings I came into class with that day. What was the sadness telling me? What feeling was being blocked by my students? Was it fear? Uncertainty? I asked them, "Am I the only one feeling sad here today?" The answers indicated that they were whooping it up because they were going off to different colleges. Were they going to miss each other? Yes, and they then talked about their fear of the unknown, leaving the safety of their class and high school. Another time I found myself having a recurrent fantasy of wanting to choke a student, John. I realized he was covertly expressing contempt toward me by constantly and gleefully pointing out my mistakes. After meeting John together with his father at a school event and observing the father's belittling attitude toward John, I realized that John felt choked by his father's impatience and humiliation of him for just being a normal impatient child.

The recommendations to analysts of Ormont (1970, 1980) and **Spotnitz (1976)** apply to teachers. They both suggest that we accept what is engendered in us without trying to temper or change it. Without respect for induced feelings, the road to understanding a group's and individual's unconscious messages is barred. Ormont's (1970) view of induced feelings as aids in reconstructing the shared stories of members' lives and as keys to imprisoned affect in group members had relevance to us as teachers confronting resistance to learning in the classroom, whether it was resistance to cognitive learning, emotional learning, or social learning. **Ernsberger 1990**) has agreed and observed that objective countertransference provides "the emotional authenticity for the analyst's interventions to be effective in resolving resistance" (p. 12). So too for the teacher! By developing a contract in our classes, as we do in our groups, we create a structure around which to identify resistance. A classroom contract might include attendance; punctuality; completion of written work; expression of thoughts, feelings, and ideas; sharing talking time; mastering course material; and moving on to the next class. And in our development as teachers and group leaders we have found that when we have feelings in response to students and group members who resist the contract, and when we find that our feelings are a function of our unique personal histories and unresolved conflicts, we are provided with a unique opportunity to expand our emotional repertoire and enrich our experience of teaching (**Morrel, 1992**).

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**Kirman (1977b)** urged teachers, like modern analysts, to regard countertransference as an important form of communication. He recognized that the group resistance of the class often mobilizes powerful countertransference in the teacher, and just as the group leader can use objective countertransference as an indicator of what is going on in group treatment, the teacher can use his feelings to understand what is going on in the transference situation in the classroom. Kirman identified subjective countertransference as the teacher's feelings which are a function of something in the teacher's past aroused by a student's or a class transference.

Objective countertransference are the feelings induced in the teacher and are indicative of feelings felt toward the student by other significant people in the student's past of feelings the student has for himself (p. 74-75). In short, if subjective countertransference is emotional vision with cataracts, objective countertransference is normal emotional vision.

**Slavin (1996)** pointed out that difficulties in teaching arise not because teachers have feelings but because they repress, distort, or disguise their feelings, or distort, deny, or dismiss the feelings of their students. The literature in the field of education well documents the need for teachers to process their feelings and use them constructively in the classroom, i.e., **Biber (1961)**, **Moustakas (1966)**, **Iscoe et al. (1967)**, **Ojemann (1967)**, **Aspy and Roebuck (1970)**, and **Lawrence (1971)**.

## Toby: Anecdote Four

This story is titled "The Stepmother Countertransference." One semester I inherited almost a full class that had just completed a satisfying semester with another instructor. I had heard the previous semester both from a student in the class it had been and how the students and the instructor wanted to stay together the following semester rather than move on to a new and unknown faculty member. Given school policy encouraging classes to work through the termination process, the class ended, and I was asked to teach the next course, "Transference and Resistance." The class began and after the first two sessions I found myself not looking forward to the class. There was little affect in the room and a general feeling of deadness. I controlled my desire for excitement and my wish to stimulate the class, wanting to study the feelings further. When some students reported in their logs that they

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felt "stuck" and "dead," I recognized that my feelings of deadness were shared and induced. What was not being said? Was I contributing to the silence in any way? I wondered whether the class was in mourning and still attached to and favoring their last instructor. I wondered if I could tolerate hearing and feeling that they loved someone more than me, and I then recognized my anger at their not realizing that they now had "the best." My rivalry and transference in control, I was ready to address the deadness in the room and explore the feelings that were killed off. When I asked if anyone else felt dead and where the feelings might be coming from, they recognized that they had not had the chance to mourn the loss of a positive experience with the other instructor. Then came complaints about me—too much to xerox, too much to read and prepare, etc. I wondered what they could recommend to me based on their wonderful, cohesive experience with their former instructor on how to have a positive experience here. At moments when the class seemed stuck, I wondered with them what Mars. Y (their previous teacher) would do right now. These interventions enabled them to process their feelings of loss and anger at me for being an inferior step-parent. The entire experience was finally discussed as a wonderful illustration of transference and resistance in groups and helped to clarify the cognitive material they had read. A number of students in the class related the process to experiences they had had growing up where one parent's jealousy of the other had prevented them from fully mourning a death when their perceived "more favorite" parent had died.

## Susan: Anecdotes Five and Six

Two particular examples of countertransference experiences from last semester come to mind. One incident I did not catch in the moment, and had to think about it afterwards and bring it back the following class; the other experience I was able to be aware of what was going on in the moment and use the feeling that was induced. The first experience I was able to be aware of what was going on in the moment and use the feeling that was induced. The first experience was in a class at a university where I am teaching Group Work. There were 27 students in the class, and at the first session we were going over the course assignments. I have been teaching this course for several years, and I always require some written assignments in keeping with the academic standards of the university. Some of the students started to complain about the midterm and asked if I could do away with it. In the past, I have met such requests by exploring their feelings about it, but standing firm about the requirement. As

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they began to say they had too much to do, and would like to have one less paper to write, and that another

professor teaching the same course was not giving a midterm assignment, I found myself discussing this with them in a way that led them to believe that this could really be an option. In fact, the class ended with agreement that we would discuss it next time, and then decide! When I got home, I thought about what had happened, and proceeded to examine what was going on with me. I realized that I, to, had a lot do this semester and didn't want to grade 27 midterm papers; but the overriding feeling was that I wanted the class to like me. I thought they would hate me if I burdened them with this assignment. Once I was able to understand what was going on for me, I was free to do what I felt necessary. I went to the next class and announced that the midterm would remain as originally stated, they were required to do it, and that those students who were banking on not doing the midterm could feel free to hate me for the rest of the semester and the rest of my life if necessary! I had had the unrealistic expectation of wanting to please everyone, and my not wanting them to hate me got me stuck. Once this was clear to me, I was able to use the feelings to move the class forward.

The second example occurred when I was asked to teach a new course, "Basic Concepts," last semester. I had a wonderful time designing the course and putting the reading list together. The list is quite extensive and has many of the writings of Freud. I was very excited about the prospect of teaching this class, looking forward to it. The first day of class, as I was handing out the reading assignment and we were all looking over the list of readings, I began to have the feelings that I didn't want to teach the course. I was able to step back in that moment and realize that this feeling of dread was induced; I speculated that the students felt anxious about reading Freud. I was able to use this hypothesis by asking if anyone has the feeling that they wanted to drop the course after looking at the required readings. This led to a wonderful discussion. The following week, the students all talked about how much they enjoyed reading Freud.

Teachers are prone to the same countertransference resistances as delineated by **Spotnitz (1985)** for analysts and **Stallman (1992)** for teachers. Countertransference resistances for teachers, as for group leaders, are evident in deviations we make from the tasks of our profession. For teachers these are deviations from the task of helping resolve student's resistances to learning, cooperation with teacher and peers, and moving on to the next class.

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## Toby: Anecdote Seven

In my early years in teaching the two countertransference resistances that got me into the most trouble were the need to be right and the need not to feel hate or helplessness. My resistance was evident in using coercion and giving ultimatums while trying to keep classes of potential high school dropouts rigidly controlled—a sure prescription for failure with most adolescents. Through discussions in supervision, I came to understand that the intense hate I felt toward my students reflected feelings other had had toward them when their psyches were forming between birth and two years. I hypothesized that their unconscious goal was to prove they were as unlovable as they believed their parents found them to be and to provoke me to reject them and throw them out. I was then able to use my feelings to investigate with them their interest in getting kicked out of school. I told them I found them fascinating and asked them to help me understand more about why they wanted to be suspended.

A natural evolution of the understanding of the role of countertransference in teaching has led many modern analysts of modern group analysts into classrooms with students aged 5 to 21, into university classrooms instructing educators and mental health professionals on both undergraduate and graduate levels, to teaching in modern analytic institutes, to supervising educators and finally to the faculty at the Centre for the Advancement of Group Studies (CAGS) in New York. Our enjoyment of teaching at CAGS comes in part from the opportunity to directly teach the curriculum on group process through the natural dynamic interplay that occurs between teacher and students and between students, through the observation of the natural unfolding of transference, resistance, and countertransference as soon as students enter the classroom. The format of didactic and experiential teaching allows students to learn on both conscious and unconscious levels while integrating their cognitive, social and emotional experiences in the class.

Our early experiences as teaching faculty at CAGS included episodes with classes where there were subgroups who wanted only group process, others who wanted to be lectured to by the instructor, and yet others who wanted only edifying communications from their peers. Many discussions at faculty meetings pointed to the finding that no matter how democratically or reasonably we specified the contract, class format, and work load, there was resistance to it. We found many students putting much energy into defeating and disrupting classes by

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digressing, devaluing, and complaining. We were asked to know, without the student's input, what the perfect meal would be, the right ingredients, cooked to the right consistency and temperature, and fed in the right amounts at the right time. Rather than give in to our "Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe" countertransference (which tended to be both subjective and objective) and feed them some broth without any bread and whip them soundly and send them to bed, the faculty processed their feelings, and with Dr. Ormont's direction, came up with a structured format for each class. Students' were asked to present a reading each week for the first 15 to 20 minutes of the class, each reading reflecting a different aspect of the topic for the course. This would be followed by a process group that evolved naturally from the existing transferences and resistances to the instructor, peers, and the course material presented. The last 10 to 15 minutes of the class would be spent in a cooperative process of summarizing how the class process related to the topic discussed that week, making the unconscious learning conscious. We realized that however we structured the class, we would be most interested in our students' responses to the structure and in using unconscious information brought to the structure and in using unconscious information brought to us through our induced feelings to remove obstacles to learning. To accomplish this we needed to be particularly interested in how the class process stimulated counterresistances in us and in removing personal emotional obstacles to teaching in a way students could learn. WE did this by keeping in mind that almost everything said in the context of a transference relationship in the classroom is related to and determined by that transference and that our countertransference guides us in understanding ourselves and our students (Kirman, 1982, p. 92).

### **Susan: Anecdote Eight**

The teaching experience is intense. When strong countertransference feelings arise in me I step back and look at the feeling. I get involved in the process and start to look at what is going on. I ask myself: "What is the class inducing in me? What is not being expressed in the class?" Then I try to use the induced feeling by asking a question. For example, if I feel anxious, I might ask the class: "Is there something I am doing to cause anxiety in this class?" If I am dreading a class I might ask: "How did people feel on the way over here? Did you come with foreboding, expecting disappointment?"

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### **Susan: Anecdote Nine**

There was a student in one of my classes this semester who expressed to me that he wanted *me* to present the didactic material at the beginning of each class. I was interested in my initial reaction to this request. It felt like a demand, and in contrast to my liking to be invited to speak, this demand felt like pressure, and I felt unwilling to respond. The request came after several weeks of other students presenting an article for the first 15 minutes of each class. I asked him how his classmates might feel about his request. This started a lively discussion about how they felt wiped out, unappreciated, unwanted, and not seen or heard by him.

Upon exploration, the student revealed his history of being the youngest child in a large family. By the time he came along, his mother wasn't interested in taking care of another baby, and he was mothered by his siblings. He was left with a yearning to get nourishment directly from his mother, not from his sisters and brothers. The classroom format acted as a springboard and reactivated these early feelings. He was able to say that he wanted the "milk" directly from my breast and not a bottle from his classmates. After identifying these early feelings that prevented him from taking in what his classmates had to offer, he was able to resolve his resistance to the format of the class, which was to have each student take a turn in presenting the didactic material.

### **Susan: Anecdote Ten**

I was supervising someone who teaches in the CAGS mode: didactic material with a strong experiential component. She was telling me that she didn't know what to do with her class. Some of her students loved the way the class was being conducted and some of them hated it. She realized she was stuck in a subjective countertransference where the class had become her frustrating, forever dissatisfied mother and she had to do everything on her own. She also felt she had to please everyone and didn't like hearing that the entire class wasn't happy with the way things were going. Once understood she was able to heed my recommendation to step back from the process and consult with her class/group by asking them a question: "What do you do when you have a group and some of the members want to talk about feelings,



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and some of the members want to just talk from their intellect?" She was free to ask this question once she felt that she did not have to take care of everything without help. A discussion took place which enabled the students to put into words all their thoughts and feelings about this type of learning. This dialogue resolved their resistance to both parts of the process and also resolved the subjective countertransference resistance of my supervisee.

By using the class process to stimulate their thinking about their own groups she was able to orchestrate the group rather than do all the work herself, which was an impossible task. She was able to integrate the experiential learning with the didactic material on group transference and resistance, and demonstrated to the class what to do in such a situation.

### **Toby: Anecdote Eleven**

My first countertransference resistance story is of an experience I had as an Orientation Group leader at CAGS. Students would come into class and complain about one lecturer after another or about an instructor of a class they were enrolled in. There were moments of sadistic pleasure, and I had a strong desire to agree with the students, that X, Y, and Z were really terrible teachers, and to tell everyone I knew what horrible things were being said about X, Y, and Z. I studied my intense desire to blab and persecute and noted my own feelings of rivalry and competitiveness with my peers. I also noted my discomfort with my murderous feelings toward my "siblings" on the faculty, and once noted, I began to enjoy the feelings. But there was more to the story. I recognized that my feelings were also induced by the students' unconscious fantasies to murder and persecute disappointing parents and to instigate one parent against another and curry favor with me. This understanding enabled me to engage in a series of interventions that helped the students recognize and become comfortable with their murderous feelings. They moved from a complaining stance to a goal oriented stance where they helped each other recognize the historical elements in their experiences with each faculty member (including their transference to me) and define what they wanted and needed from each instructor and class and the most effective way to get it. I asked them if they would like to enlist my help in ruining Mr. X. I told them with tempered glee, "We could see to it that no one ever takes a class with him again." This brought relieved laughter. I also

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wondered how I might be disappointing them and if I was, would they or could they tell me directly, would they tell their friends, spouses, or would I hear it from the Director of the Center.

### **Toby: Anecdote Twelve**

This story is titled the "Jewish Mother Countertransference." This experience typically occurs for me at the end of a semester. I find myself seduced by the suggestions students make of how we can stay together as a class and have me again as their instructor. I recognize my own need to be needed parallels the student's need to be desired. Each class wants to know that they were the best in all the years I have taught (the bet in eternity). While my feelings is love me, never want to leave me, the students feel love *me*, never want to leave *me*—but let me leave. We seem to be locked in a mutual resistance to not feel the difficult feelings of loss, separation, abandonment, and death that comes with the ending of emotionally intense and intimate relationships. I also keep in mind the school's policy to encourage students to learn from a variety of instructors and to allow a semester to elapse before entering into a therapeutic relationship with one's students'. Being comfortable with my desires enables me to ask the class, "Am I the only one visualizing us as eight grey, old people sitting in a circle rocking back and forth on the porch together?" allowing the longing to be verbalized as well as the bittersweet feelings of separation. In classes where there has been as strong negative transference at points during the semester, I might ask, "I wonder what feelings there are here today given that this is the last class? Satisfaction? Disappointment? Relief?"

There has been much writing and discussion about when to use the induced feeling, when to contain it, and what to do with it. What has evolved from our experiences is to step back and look at what has happened. We silently ask what is going on within us and the class and, to a large measure, to respect and trust our intuition. In comparing notes, we have found that our supervisors have repeatedly told us that experiential learning is the best way to learn, because when we get into trouble, right thing to say will just pop out. This is similar to how we

“mothered” we tended to repeat what our mothers did with our own children until we became aware of what we were doing and why we were doing it. Being in good groups ourselves has been the best way to learn. In our own groups we have identified with the leader

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or supervisor and learned by identification, the same process that goes into mothering.

When we are under stress the true “learning” that is in our unconscious arises and helps us find a solution to our difficulty. Our awareness either leads us to do the “right” thing or to recognize when we don't. So, if we are in a good supervision group and a good treatment group, we will absorb what the analyst is doing and we will automatically have the right response when we need it! Experiential learning is powerful and equips us with the tools we need, and they become permanent resources in our unconscious.

The freer we are to allow ourselves to talk openly about our own process, the more comfortable we will be with our feelings in the classes we are teaching. This will enable us to use our countertransference feelings not only to make ourselves more comfortable, but to deepen and enrich our experiences of teaching, to resolve resistances to learning and cooperation in the classroom, and to deepen and enrich the experiences of our students. An enriched teaching experience comes from examining our experiences in two ways—searching for our own resistance and the resistances of the students. Without this two-way street, the traffic of ideas and emotional communication stops!

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