

Article summary:

From the ethic of hospitality to affective hospitality: Ethical, political and pedagogical implications of theorizing hospitality through the lens of affect theory

Article summary compiled by Carrie Chen and Anne Morrison

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Introduction

This article focuses on theories around hospitality and welcoming, particularly in educational contexts. In an era of increasing voluntary and forced migration, how do educators, and society more broadly, welcome ‘the Other’? Although the author does not refer in detail to specific educational contexts, his discussion nevertheless has ramifications for early childhood education, where immigrant children and their families often have their first experiences of hospitable or inhospitable schooling in a new country.

Discussion

Underpinning this article is the concept of affect: the forces and intensities – including (but not limited to) feelings, emotions and bodily sensations – that travel between and across humans and non-humans in particular spaces and contexts. The author draws on the work of other scholars, including Jacques Derrida, Claudia Ruitenberg and Sara Ahmed, to discuss several concepts that influence affect in educational settings. These concepts include:

- Ethic of hospitality: The creation of ethical relations between the host (i.e. educators) and ‘the Other’ (i.e. those who are marginalised due to race, socioeconomic circumstances, sexuality, etc.).
- Affective atmosphere: The mood, ambience, or tone of feeling associated with a space or place.
- Affective hospitality: The influence of emotions and affects on the experience of hospitality.

- Atmospheric walls: Subtle and invisible mechanisms that surreptitiously exclude something or someone (p. 44).

Zembylas critically examines the notion of 'inclusion' in educational spaces. He draws on earlier scholarship by Ruitenberg (2015) to distinguish between 'inclusion' and 'hospitality'. Inclusion incorporates 'the Other' into the pre-determined space of the host, without changing that space. Hospitality, on the other hand, does not attempt to fit the guest/stranger into the host's space, but accepts that the arrival of the Other can change that space (p. 40). Likewise, 'welcoming' students (and their families) in educational contexts can end up merely a polite humanitarian gesture unless relationships of power are addressed (p. 43). In many Western countries, educational policy and practice encourages educators to include and welcome 'the Other' into educational spaces. Yet these are predominantly white spaces that privilege whiteness. This taken-for-granted or 'normative' whiteness 'limits how hospitality takes place, especially if white educators fail to question these spaces' (p. 38). In practice, 'there are different ways of engaging with hospitality' (p. 43); some ways perpetuate existing relations and atmospheres; other ways have the potential to disrupt and transform.

Therefore, the author asks: 'How can pedagogy and curriculum in particular educational settings get organized so that teachers and students identify, interrogate and perhaps transform the conditions of affective hospitality?' (pp. 38-39). There is a need to resist affective atmospheres that build walls against 'the Other' in educational and other settings (p. 47). The author quotes the work of Sara Ahmed, who describes atmospheric walls in relation to race:

I think whiteness is often experienced as an atmosphere. You walk into a room and you encounter it like a wall that is at once palpable and tangible but also hard to grasp or to reach. It is something, it is quite something, but it is difficult to put your finger on it. When you walk into the room, it can be like a door slams in your face. The tightening of bodies: the sealing of space. The discomfort when you encounter something that does not receive you. (Ahmed, 2014, n.p., quoted in Zembylas 2022, p. 44)

Zembylas argues that '[a] greater awareness of the micro-politics of hospitality in its everyday enactment in various educational settings can show educators *how* specific practices of hospitality work to produce affective spaces in which the socio-historical context of privilege may be interrupted' (p. 46).

Conclusion

It is imperative that educators pay attention to the complexities of affective hospitality in order to create pedagogical spaces that not only recognise but also critically challenge the symmetries and asymmetries of hospitality (p. 48). Educators need to 'constantly interrogate their pedagogies of affective hospitality and whether they might (unwittingly) contribute to reinforcing existing atmospheric walls by attempting to "manipulate" the affective atmosphere in a classroom' (p. 47). Zembylas warns that this process inevitably generates emotional tensions and discomfort, especially for white teachers (p. 47). He concludes: 'Experimenting with concepts from affect theory such as the notion of affective atmospheres and atmospheric walls can be valuable in helping us – educational researchers, theorists, policymakers, practitioners – pay attention to hospitality as embodied ethical and political practice' (p. 48).

Key take-aways for educational practice

- In educational settings, inclusion is not the same as hospitality. Inclusion fits 'the Other' into the educators' space. Hospitality accepts that 'the Other' can change the educators' space.
- Australian educational settings are predominantly white and privilege whiteness.
- Some educational settings build atmospheric walls that include some people and exclude others.
- Educators need to constantly interrogate their practices to minimise atmospheric walls that exclude marginalised children and families.

Further reading

Ahmed, S. (2014). Atmospheric walls. <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/09/15/atmospheric-walls/>

Ruitenberg, C. (2018). Hospitality and embodied encounters in education spaces. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 37, 257–263.

Zembylas, M. (2018). Affect, race, and white discomfort in schooling: Decolonial strategies for 'pedagogies of discomfort'. *Ethics and Education*, 13(1), 86–104.