
Title	Understanding teachers' emotions through reflections in narrative inquiry
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Understanding Teachers' Emotions Through Reflections in Narrative Inquiry

By Aristotle Motii Nandy

“Understanding the emotions that are often an unacknowledged part of people's outer cognitive or professional selves, may occur through embracing and managing voices in constructed inner and outer dialogues.”

(Day & Leitch, 2001, p.412)

Understanding Emotions

- Two main ways of knowing and understanding: rational mind and emotional mind
 - Rational mind: logical, deductive mode of comprehension, careful, analytic, reflective and frequently deliberate
 - Emotional mind: powerful, impulsive, intuitive, holistic and fast, and often illogical
- Usually harmony between the two

Understanding Emotions

- Dissonance takes place when emotional swamps rational mind - upset, distressed, in touch with our passions

Understanding Emotions

- Importance of re-experiencing emotions and talking or writing about trauma by normally functioning individuals in a structured, controlled way (Littrell, 1998)
- Need to attend to the underlying emotional repertoire required by teachers to sustain high quality, enthusiastic teaching on a daily basis over a career (Day & Leitch, 2001)

Emotional Health

- Emotional health is crucial to elective teaching over a career;
- Emotional and cognitive health are affected by personal biography, social context (of work and home) and external (policy) factors;

Understanding Emotions for Professional Development

- Use of narrative autobiographical accounts of teachers' experiences
- Narrative Inquiry as a Mediation Space: Cognitive and Emotional Dissonance (Golombek & Johnson, 2004); Reflection important role in personal professional growth of teachers
- Reflection - a cognitive process that addresses resolving problems by systematically ordering thoughts and ideas in a linked and sustained way

Nature of Teachers' NIs

- Reflections of interactions with students
- Reflections of interactions with colleagues
- Reflections of career trajectory

Nature of Reflections

- Dimensions of reflection - technical, practical, critical
- Levels of reflection - identity, belief, mission, environment, competencies, behaviour

(Values implicit in reflection - e.g. empathy, openness, search for meaning and purpose)

Technical Reflection

“Being in NIE made me realise two things. Firstly, my critical thinking skills needed serious development... To plug that gap in critical thought, I spent a lot of time reading and photocopying articles from journals... I just felt the need to know more even if I felt that I’ve had enough. I had to ask myself serious questions. How could I invoke strong feelings in my students, let them take different perspectives or hear their voices if I do not have the ability to do likewise?” (Nasrun)

Technical Reflection

“I was also not prepared to be faced with a class of 40 boys. I’ve never had that experience but since there was no mention of it during my NIE classes, I assumed I had to teach them the same way I teach a co-educational class. Sadly, within my first 3 months, nothing I learnt in NIE was applied. I went back to my untrained teacher mode. It seemed the safest way to go. Teacher-centred lessons were the order of the day.” (Nasrun)

Expressing Emotions in NI

“All the while, the other students were silent. Some looked surprised at his open proclamation and a few were eagerly awaiting my response. I was stunned by what I perceived was his audacity. In stunned response, I retreated into my lesson plan and let slip a teachable moment. On an emotional level, I was nervous and was trying to mask it.” (Nur S)

“After exploring my options, I decided to allow for a contestation of ideas. I developed a lesson plan. I went to class with a stubbornness and refusal to bow down to the stereotype.”
(Nur S)

Practical Reflection

“In terms of my cognitive development, this incident and a few other similar incidents in my later subsequent teaching years informed by understanding of multiculturalism and its negotiated place in our education system. For every student like KW who voiced his thoughts, there are many others who will not. For every student who voices his thoughts and silenced by teachers as politically incorrect, the culture of silence will “nurture” apathetic students.” (Nur S)

Practical Reflection

“In storying these events, I realised a common theme that runs through all three events - listening. In the three stories, I moved from a hesitation to listen, failure to listen, and a realisation that I need to listen rather than talk. In my various interactions, I have come to see the value of listening and to connect to colleagues as people with personal, social and cultural identities beyond their professional selves.”
(Nur S)

Expressing Emotions in NI

“As much as I tried, I could not resolve the sense of indignant brewing within me. Justice had to be done. The wrong had to be put right. She, not I, had to pay the price of her incompetence.” (SP)

“To make matters worse, she had left for her maternity leave when I returned from my course... While I appeared fine on the outside, however on the inside, I knew my dissatisfaction and vexation was growing ... (SP)

“Almost instantly, I regretted my actions of initiating the verbal fight. Unlike the rainbow that signals the end of an afternoon shower, there is no redemption offered at the end of this storm of mine.” (SP)

Practical Reflection

“If I had no confidante, it was expected as I had estranged many relationships with those junior in rank. As for my mentors, they had become my “peers” as I had risen through the ranks to earn my seat beside them in the school’s Executive Committee. More importantly, my fast-growing reputation as a goal-getter had meant that the Mathematics HOD was avoiding me like a plague while the Discipline Master saw me as upstart who was outshining him. I could no longer seek their counsel nor support... .Gradually, as I became mired in my own internal struggle, I became withdrawn from people.” (S P)

Critical Reflection

“When I left the school, we had reached a truce and maintained cordial relations but I did not attempt to rationalise Ann’s and my emotional responses. I had always been content not to bother about it by believing that professionalism had to take precedence and student interests must always be upheld over other competing interests. It is only during my graduate course... that I began to grasp the rationality of what I perceived as emotional episodes... What I simplistically reduced to an inability to cope and manage personal expectations was really far more complex - a divide between two teachers on different stages of the teacher life cycle.”
(Nur S)

Critical Reflection

“It was me who had unwittingly contributed to my students’ flawed conception about Chinese language. It was me who had been telling students how lousy and ugly and undesirable I was and how depressing the kind of life I had. I had meant all these in lightheartedness and humour to spice up my Chinese lessons. But.. What have I reduced myself to in the eyes of my students? .. I had been sabotaging my lessons by feeding students with confusing signals about my insignificance as a Chinese language teacher through my self-deprecating antics of belittling myself in the hope to engage them.” (Tan PG)

More Reflection Examples

- “As I reflected upon my prognosis of the two men, I realized my interpretation of their behavior and disposition were really reflections of myself. Behind the two qualities of people-orientedness and task-orientedness which I ascribed to the two gentlemen, laid a latent motive to avoid trouble and an even deeper sense of insecurity. I, not them, was the insecure person.”
- “As I was a rookie HOD, I was constantly insecure and needed people’s affirmation of my ability. Thinking back further, seeking the approval of people, especially those close to me, has always mattered a lot. Perhaps it had to do with my upbringing in a typical strict and traditional Asian family.”

More Reflection Examples

“Did I go “from the pan and into the fire”? Why did the women in my school seem to be so highly sensitized to my methods? As I reflect on it now, I had come to another realization that I was probably desensitized to general female insecurities as a result of working with a large group of men for the longest time. I had ignored my feminine side and wiles to get things done and approached my teaching in a very masculine way.”

Conceptual Framework

Nature of NI	Dimensions of reflection	Levels of reflection	Values in reflection process
Interactions with students	Technical	Identity Mission	Empathy
Interactions with colleagues	Practical	Beliefs Competence	Openness
Career trajectory	Critical	Behaviour Environment	Search for meaning and purpose

Reflections on Identity

- Question / affirm own identity as teachers
 - in the context of ethnicity, organisational culture, values and ideals of the profession, stage in career trajectory, work-home life balance
- Evokes emotions
- Drives mission, competency, behaviour, etc

Conclusion

Maintaining an awareness of the tensions in managing professional identity is part of the safeguard and joy of teaching. Often unacknowledged feelings of hurt, guilt, resentment, fear, injustice, and shame, for example, are common at the interface of the person of the teacher and his or her professional identity. (Day & Leitch, 2000)

Conclusion

“...to neglect the stories of teaching and the narratives of teachers' experiences may be to collude in oversimplification or distortion” (Day & Leitch, 2001)

Conclusion

- More emotion is not always better. It can act as an indulgence and a diversion.
- “...it is also important to do so critically and not sentimentally or self-indulgently” (Hargreaves, 2000)
- Just as emotional misunderstanding leads teachers to misread their students' learning, and thus seriously threatens learning standards, misunderstanding teachers' emotions threatens teaching standards - foundational to the standards agenda

“...[E]motional labor in teaching (and other occupations) can be pleasurable and rewarding when people are able to pursue their own purposes through it, and when they work in conditions that allow them to do their jobs well.” (Oatley, 1991; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) But, “emotional labor becomes negative and draining when people feel they are masking or manufacturing their emotions to suit the purposes of others (Stenross & Kleinman, 1989), or when poor working conditions make it impossible for them to perform their work well.” -(*Hargreaves, 2000*)