

# 16 Concluding Thoughts on the Emotional Rollercoaster of Language Teaching

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This book has presented studies from a variety of scholars whose interest in teacher emotions encompasses a very diverse array of language teaching and teacher training contexts. Taken together, the findings from investigations focusing on language teachers working in or training to teach in elementary, secondary, state and private schools, colleges and universities in countries such as Japan, Austria, the United States, Australia, Nepal and the United Kingdom illustrate the crucial role that emotions play in teachers' professional lives and help contribute to the ongoing quest to enhance teacher effectiveness and well-being. Building upon a very recent surge of interest in the emotional aspects of language teaching (see Martínez Agudo, 2018; Rawal *et al.*, 2018), the state-of-the-art investigations reported on here draw attention to the fluctuating and shifting range of emotions that educators experience on a daily basis in their work. Mercer and Kostoulas (2018) issued a plea in their recent book on language teacher psychology for more educator-focused research, arguing that although teachers are key stakeholders in the learning process, they are relatively neglected in favour of projects which put learners at their centre. The current volume responds to this call, thus building upon the idea that by gaining a better understanding of teacher psychology, we can learn much about learner psychology and ultimately improve classroom life. From joy to frustration, enthusiasm to boredom, fear to anger, teachers' emotional experiences shape not only their professional identities and classroom practices, but also ultimately help to determine their length of service, being as they are intimately linked to teacher stress, burnout and attrition.

Researching language teacher emotions is a far from straightforward proposition. Firstly, individual emotions can be difficult to define and tease apart because their components may overlap or seem similar, hence making the language used to describe them indistinct, or as Scherer (2005) terms it, 'fuzzy'. Another challenge is that emotions are simultaneously intrapersonal (occurring subjectively within the individual's mind) and interpersonal (socio-dynamically constrained and afforded by context) (for a language teacher-related model of this, see King & Ng, 2018: 145). Indeed, as Schutz and DeCuir rightly state, 'emotional experiences and their meaning to the individuals involved do not occur in a vacuum' (2002: 130). To meet the challenge of investigating phenomena which are hard to pin down, difficult to observe and have both intra- and interpersonal aspects, researchers need to be methodologically fleet of foot and innovative in how they collect and analyse data. This book provides examples of a diverse range of approaches for investigating language teacher emotions and illustrates research designs made up of quantitative (Acheson & Nelson, Chapter 3; Dewaele, Chapter 15), qualitative (Hofstadler *et al.*, Chapter 2; Benesch, Chapter 4; Edwards & Burns, Chapter 5; Gkonou & Miller, Chapter 8) and, most notably, mixed methodologies (Kostoulas & Lämmerer, Chapter 6; Humphries, Chapter 9; Ikeda *et al.*, Chapter 10; Morris & King, Chapter 11; Gregersen *et al.*, Chapter 13). Our contributors have employed methods such as classroom observations, structured and semi-structured interviews, stimulated recalls, questionnaires, materials analyses, narrative research and written self-reflections to generate rich and contextually valid accounts of language teachers' emotional experiences. Research into language teacher emotions is still very much in its infancy in applied linguistics but we hope the diverse range of studies presented in this volume provides a stimulus for further, novel investigations encompassing a range of emotionally related constructs. One of the key challenges for future inquiries will be the creation of innovative research designs which reflect emotion as a dynamic state consisting of both cognitive and physical events, whilst at the same time acknowledging the social dimension of teacher emotions. For example, situated, contextually valid investigations looking at the relationship between emotions and physiological responses, such as changes in heart rate, facial expressions, nonverbal cues and so on, could prove fruitful in gaining a better understanding of the emotional implications of specific classroom scenarios which language teachers encounter. Certainly, if we are to link teacher emotions to the issues of workplace stress and well-being, more research is needed which takes into account the ways in which teachers' thoughts, behaviours, bodily sensations and emotions dynamically interact either in the moment during classroom interactions or over much longer periods of time. Findings on the emotion-specific experiences of teachers during and after particular classroom scenarios

could then usefully feed into pre- and in-service training programmes and help in the ongoing battle against teacher attrition.

The works presented in this volume illustrate well that emotions play a crucial and dynamic role in the professional daily lives of language teachers working across a variety of settings. The studies showcased reinforce arguments made in general education literature (see Hargreaves, 1998; Zembylas, 2005) that teaching is a fundamentally emotional endeavour in which effective teachers interact and emotionally connect with their students. With language teaching representing a unique social practice (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017) that relies more heavily on teacher–student interaction than perhaps many other subjects, there exists a strong case that language teachers in particular need to be emotionally competent within their classrooms if they are to achieve pedagogical goals and maintain their well-being. Echoing a number of contributors to this volume (see e.g. Hofstadler *et al.*, Chapter 2; Ikeda *et al.*, Chapter 10; Morris & King, Chapter 11 and De Costa *et al.*, Chapter 12), we believe that pre-service teacher training programmes and in-house professional development programmes need not only to raise greater awareness of the emotional dimensions of teaching foreign languages, but should also develop teachers' emotional skills to enable them to cope with or even thrive in emotionally challenging circumstances. It is critical that such training goes hand in hand with support at an institutional level (and, indeed, within the wider education system) which acknowledges the dynamic interplay between context in the form of working conditions, workload levels and so on, and teachers' emotional experiences. To help prepare individuals for the emotional rollercoaster involved in teaching languages, as a first step we suggest that training programmes focus on two concepts in particular which have been discussed at length in this book: namely, emotional intelligence and emotion regulation.

Emotional intelligence refers to a person's capacity to recognise and deal with one's own and others' emotions in an effective manner, to handle interpersonal relationships empathetically using emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour. In Chapter 15, Dewaele draws our attention to the fact that language teachers who possess high levels of emotional intelligence tend to be more positive and optimistic about their professional role, taking pleasure from interactions with students and enjoying a level of well-being that less emotionally aware teachers might struggle to reach (see also Dewaele, 2018; Dewaele *et al.*, 2018). This of course has implications for teachers' classroom practice and the learning outcomes of students. There has been some debate about whether emotional intelligence is a fixed personality trait or whether it can be developed with appropriate training but evidence from intervention studies in general education (e.g. Brackett & Katulak, 2006; Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014) does

suggest it is malleable and that positive shifts in emotional intelligence are indeed possible. Because early-career instructors are especially vulnerable to the multitude of stressors that accompany teaching, we recommend that training programmes for pre-service language teachers focus on theory-based practical training of emotional intelligence skills (see Kornacki & Caruso, 2007) in order to enhance novice teachers' professional performance, facilitate positive relationships with learners and promote well-being. Strong emotional intelligence skills appear to make language anxiety less likely (Dewaele *et al.*, 2008) and so these types of professional development activities could well go some way in helping highly anxious language teachers, such as those described by Ikeda and her colleagues in Chapter 10. Teacher education programmes which combine input on the technical aspects of teaching and focused instruction on emotional intelligence could lead to improved teaching performance but also to higher levels of teacher resilience. In Chapter 6, Kostoulas and Lämmerer discuss teacher resilience extensively and also introduce the concept of resilient adaptation, which can assist teachers with the regulation of their own emotions and encourage them to constantly look for additional emotion regulation strategies to continue to function effectively in their professional roles. Thus, looking at how teachers can flourish in their professional roles should be a goal of teacher education. As Dewaele cautions in Chapter 15, more research and the implementation of specific interventions are necessary before we embark on investing in emotional intelligence training for language teachers.

As Oxford points out in her discussion of the 'well of emotional well-being' in Chapter 14, intimately related to emotional intelligence is the concept of emotion regulation. At its most basic, emotion regulation is the ability to control how emotions are experienced and how they are displayed to others (Gross, 2002, 2015). Rather than being something specific only to professional settings, individuals constantly engage in emotion regulation either consciously or unconsciously as they move through their day (Koole, 2009). This pervasiveness means that through personal reflection activities and the like, the construct becomes easily relatable for language practitioners who may have had little or no previous psychological education. Emotion regulation presents the possibility for teachers to gain agency over their emotions, helping them to achieve instrumental and social goals within their professional contexts, in addition to hedonic goals related to psychological well-being. In Chapter 12, De Costa *et al.* clearly show that the inability to manage one's own emotions induces a lower sense and exercise of agency, especially within the focal context of their study where the recent trend of English as medium of instruction in Nepalese state schools caused frustration and insecurity amongst their teacher participants. From the surface and deep acting associated with

emotional labour through to the up-regulation of positive emotions and the down-regulation of negative ones, there is a dizzying array of processes available to teachers for regulating their emotions. As this book helps to illustrate, though, teachers are individuals whose subjective interpretations of and emotional responses to classroom events show great diversity. Hence, we agree with Gkonou and Mercer (2017) that training programmes which focus on emotional competence should be non-prescriptive, allowing teachers to try out a range of different strategies and affording them the opportunity to reflect upon which strategies are most suitable for both themselves personally and for the different learner groups they engage with. In Chapter 11, Morris and King suggest Gross's well-known *process model of emotion regulation* (Gross, 2015) as being one useful framework for getting teachers to think about how they can better modify the course of their emotions. Presented along a situation-attention-appraisal-response timeline, the model is useful for teacher trainers because it illustrates various ways that teachers can make changes to their external environments and redirect their own thought patterns in order to manage their emotions before, during and after in-class emotional episodes take place.

The one key theme that emerges from all the book's chapters is that teaching is an emotional rollercoaster. The highs are euphoric, the lows can be dispiriting and they can occur within a very short time span. How teachers feel is linked to a combination of interacting micro-, meso- and macro-level factors. At the micro-level are individual students who can be difficult to deal with, at meso-level are issues on how to deal with the group of students or how to implement the curriculum within a particular institution, and finally at macro-level are systemic issues to do with how the teaching is organised, how teachers are trained and how much support they receive from their institution. The metaphorical flapping of the wings of a butterfly in New Mexico that causes a hurricane in China is to be replaced with the angry buzzing of a wasp in the classroom that can cause the teacher to collapse on the spot or months later. While a negative event at any level is unlikely to cause permanent negative emotions, it creates the conditions where the likelihood of something bad happening increases. If negative events at various levels align, it may have dangerous implications for the teacher. A trivial trigger could cause the dam of negative emotions to burst. Teachers thus need to be actively involved in socioemotional engineering of their own and their students' emotions (cf. Falout, Chapter 7). All authors in this volume agree that teachers can be trained to become more emotionally resilient by developing awareness of their own emotions and by developing short-term and long-term strategies to avoid burnout and stress. Regulating one's emotions is a central concept in mindfulness and martial arts. Holders of a black belt have been judged by their teachers to have gained sufficient control of body and mind, and sufficient

physical and mental resilience. The practice of martial arts instils physical and spiritual skills which allow practitioners to be confident in their ability to face challenges, to defend themselves if needed, and to remain humble about their skills and achievements. It means that in combat they will not feel anger because it would mean that they cannot control their emotions. The aim of training in potentially deadly fighting techniques is to cultivate a strong character that prevents any attack in the first place. Experienced teachers are linguistic artists that share some of the skill set of black belts. They need the knowledge about language and culture, the skills to teach it, the confidence in their abilities, the emotional thermostat to sense what their students are feeling while simultaneously keeping their own emotions in check. They will be on the rollercoaster but at least they will not be blindfolded. Their ability to see ahead will allow them to tense their core when it is necessary and deflect or absorb strikes without buckling.

### **Final Thoughts**

The chapters contributed by authors in this anthology highlight the ubiquitous nature of language teacher emotions and their impact on classroom practice and teacher professionalisation. This impact is not momentary or one-off; additionally, it does not concern just the teachers. The different chapters have shown that a range of emotions appear throughout teachers' career trajectories, most of which teachers can regulate through their own sets of strategies or even through emotional labour, thus helping towards cultivating resilience, experiencing emotional rewards and improving their professional performance. Yet others are likely to threaten their professional longevity, if teachers cannot manage them effectively and in a timely manner. Additionally, given that the emotions teachers experience influence their teaching, we can safely say that they also influence their students through processes of emotional contagion (Frenzel & Stephens, 2013).

It is therefore imperative to address teacher emotions in ways that work for individual teachers and which also take into account the specificities of their own settings, job roles and aspirations as well as their students' learning goals. We cannot confidently suggest a single way for dealing with the practical and emotional difficulties that teachers may face in their daily practice. But what we can confidently conclude is that the role of workplace emotions needs to be better understood by researchers, practitioners and teacher educators, if we are to offer a higher quality of teaching. Thus, to reach more nuanced understandings of language teacher emotions, future research could concentrate on the relationship between specific emotions and actual teaching performance. This would entail that researchers find ways to measure performance. Also, conversing with and observing the lessons of experienced language

teachers could offer useful insights into how emotions work in practice and how they could be potentially managed on the spot. A final note concerns teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, in which specific interventions could be trialled, again with a view to testing their effectiveness and the extent to which they are likely to inform classroom practice. Such interventions could include training on socioemotional skills, emotion regulation strategies, shifts into teacher identities and reflection which directly addresses felt emotions. Researchers may also consider exploring why emotions are not explicitly discussed in well-known teacher education programmes and why they are perceived as less important ‘soft skills’ despite their influential role, as attested in this volume.

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