

Teachers' emotions related to students: a critical review

Minor Thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</p> <p>Opettajien tunteita on tutkittu yhä enemmän muutaman kuluneen vuosikymmenen aikana. Tämän kirjallisuuskatsauksen tarkoituksena on esitellä ja arvioida viimeaikaisia tutkimuksia, jotka koskevat opettajien oppilaisiin liittyviä tunteita. Lisäksi tarkastelussa ovat englanninopettajien oppilaisiin liittyvät tunteet. Tämä katsaus on osa pro gradu -tutkielmaani Opettajankoulutuslaitoksella.</p> <p>Tutkimus lähestyy tunteita relationaalisesta näkökulmasta. Sen mukaan tunteet ovat pääosin sosiaalisia ja syntyvät vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristön ja muiden ihmisten kanssa. Tunne on reaktio sosiaaliseen, ihmisen tärkeäksi kokemaan tapahtumaan ja tunne myös vaikuttaa ihmisen toimintaan. Relationaalinen lähestymistapa tunteisiin sopii koulumaailmaan, kun pohditaan opettajien ja oppilaiden välisiä suhteita. Kirjallisuuden rajaamisessa on käytetty apuna kolmea kriteeriä: 1) tutkimukset ovat pääosin kuluvalta ja menneeltä vuosikymmeneltä 2) tutkimukset liittyvät nimenomaan oppilaisiin kohdistuviin tunteisiin 3) tutkimukset edustavat relationaalista lähestymistapaa.</p> <p>Kirjallisuuden perusteella selvisi, että opettajien suhteet oppilaisiin ovat yksi merkittävimmistä opettajien tunteiden lähteistä. Nämä tunteet puolestaan vaikuttavat opettajan työhön, mm. päätöksen tekoon ja työtyytyväisyyteen. Englanninopettajien oppilaisiin liittyviä tunteita on tutkittu vasta vähän, ja tähänastisten tulosten perusteella voidaan todeta, että tunteiden kirjo vaihtelee. Kattavia johtopäätöksiä ei kuitenkaan voi vielä tehdä.</p> <p>Monenlaiselle jatkotutkimukselle opettajien oppilaisiin liittyvistä tunteista olisi tarvetta. Esimerkiksi negatiivisiin tunteisiin perehtyminen voisi auttaa tulevia opettajia kohtaamaan vastaavia tunteita työelämässä. Englanninopettajien tunteista oppilaita kohtaan tiedetään toistaiseksi niukasti. Aloittelevia ja kokeneempia englanninopettajia on tutkittu, mutta myös pitkittäistutkimus olisi tarpeen. Se voisi selvittää englanninopettajien tunteiden mahdollista kehittymistä uran varrella. Tuleva pro gradu -tutkielmani pyrkii vastaamaan tähän tarpeeseen.</p>	
Asiasanat - Keywords emotions, relational approach, teaching, EFL teacher	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers experience a variety of positive and negative emotions daily during their careers. Teaching is indeed an emotional profession; it is a form of emotional labor requiring emotional understanding (Hargreaves 1998). I am currently working on my master's thesis in the Department of Education. The thesis is a part of a longitudinal research project, originally started by professor Pauli Kaikkonen. It investigates newly qualified language teachers and their development. The project has been later continued by Tarja Nyman and Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty as they have studied the language teachers' early years in the profession. The focus in my thesis will be on the emotional side of teaching: what kind of emotions teachers experience related to their students and if these emotions change over the years.

This review is my minor thesis in English. It will be included in the master's thesis to some extent as a literature review. One aim of this study is to shed light on the recent research on teachers' emotions related to students. Another aim is to examine the emerging research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' emotions regarding students. Since the language teacher context usually concentrates on secondary or higher levels, I have selected literature that focuses mainly on secondary school teachers. In addition, I have chosen studies from the current and past decade to further narrow the vast selection of literature related to teachers' emotions.

It is challenging to get a grasp of emotions scientifically due to their subjective and multifaceted nature, not to mention the various approaches one can choose from. The possible approaches to emotions range all the way from biological to cultural. I have selected a relational approach as a framework for this review. The relational approach means that emotions are considered social, as they occur in interaction with the environment and other people (Campos et al.

2011). Teachers are almost constantly in touch with other people: pupils, colleagues, parents. It is therefore logical to use the relational approach as a starting point in this study. The term itself will be looked at in detail in the next chapter.

The structure of this review will be the following. Chapter 2 discusses the relational approach further. It also introduces a definition of emotions and addresses the concepts of positive and negative emotions. Chapter 3 examines recent research related to emotions in teaching with a focus on teacher-student relationships. Emotions of EFL teachers related to students are discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 4 brings the highlights of previous literature together and concludes the review with implications for further research.

2 EMOTIONS

As humans we all know what emotions feel like, unless we are unable to experience them, say, due to brain damage. We *know* what emotions are – yet we can find them challenging to define. Since Darwin, researchers have tried to come up with a proper definition for emotions. While attempting to define emotions, research has focused on investigating what happens in the human body when emotions occur. Emotions have been examined from various points of view and the psychological and biological ones have been particularly interested in the human body and brain (Keltner, Oatley and Jenkins 2014). Currently, the definition of emotions depends on the approach and the field of study. In order to be able to define what an emotion is one must first choose a suitable approach. Therefore my understanding of emotions is explained towards the end of this chapter, but first the relational approach to emotions is introduced. This is a rather modern approach, differing from the previous ones by being interpersonal instead of intrapersonal. This approach explains what causes emotions and why they occur, whereas the intrapersonal focuses more on the affect emotions have on us. Both approaches to emotions are needed, yet the relational one is more useful for this study.

2.1 The relational approach to emotions

A good deal of research has focused on the intrapersonal side of emotions, investigating the individual emotional experience: facial expressions, bodily feelings and brain activity (Campos et al. 2011; Keltner et al. 2014). However, there has been a growing interest in a more social approach: the relational approach. It has its roots in the functionalist approach, which emphasizes the

connection between emotions and what a person is trying to do (Campos et al. 1994). According to the relational approach, the person and the environment are essential in the emotional process. The term 'relational' can vary depending on the context. Still, the terminology suggests that there is a social foundation for emotions, whether emotions are referred to as *sociocultural constructions* (Lupton 1998: 15) or *social movements* (Fischer and Van Kleef 2010). Many definitions have emphasized the social nature of emotions and it is impossible to introduce each notion concerning the relational approach. Nevertheless, the following paragraph offers some insights into the topic.

One definition considers emotions a sense similar to hearing or sight, through which we make sense of the world (Hochschild 1983: 17). Another definition describes emotions as reactions to relationships with the (typically social) environment (Lazarus 1991). One of the most recent definitions of emotions states that emotions are related to action and are for the most part social (Keltner et al. 2014). By describing emotions as social, it is suggested that besides being experienced individually, emotions occur between people. Furthermore, emotions have been described as registrations of important events, which generate an effect in the person. (Campos et al. 2011). The different definitions introduced above have a similar basis; emotions are mostly social.

2.2 Defining and understanding emotions from the relational point of view

My current understanding of emotions follows the ideas of Campos et al. (2011). According to them, emotions are our responses to events of importance to us. These events are usually social; they are encounters with the environment. The responses (emotions) the events create do also influence our

actions. This definition is suitable when investigating teachers, since social events take place non-stop in the school environment. Furthermore, not only occurring in settings with other people, emotions are often shown to others and regulated because of them (Fischer and Van Kleef 2010). To clarify how emotions work according to the relational approach, here are two personal examples from classroom situations:

Example no. 1

A student says something nice to the teacher (social event).

The teacher smiles and feels happy (response=emotion).

The teacher talks to the whole class in a nice manner (action).

In this example a social event takes place as the student says something nice. The teacher registers this as an important event and a response, an emotion, arises and makes her smile. Experiencing the emotion, happiness, affects the teacher and causes her to talk nicely to the whole class. It is worth noting, that if the teacher had not appreciated the students words, no particular emotion would have occurred.

Example no. 2

The teacher gives corrective feedback to a student (social event).

The student gets mad and upset (response=emotion).

The student violently pushes a desk and threatens the teacher (action).

The second example begins with the teacher giving corrective feedback to a student. The student finds this feedback important and therefore registers the event. This event raises a negative response and the student starts to feel upset. The anger affects the student's behavior and he begins to act violently. Once again, if the student had not cared about the teacher's feedback, he might have

just sat still. After all, according to Campos et al. (2011), emotions occur if the social events matter to us.

2.3 Positive and negative emotions

Other concepts related to emotions that will appear later in this review are positive and negative emotions. This division is often the case. It is worth mentioning, however, that emotions usually serve a purpose – even the negative ones. Kokkonen (2010: 11-14) gives examples of the various possible purposes of both positive and negative emotions. Love makes us want to spend time with people dear to us, shame can help to restrict socially undesirable behavior and jealousy can fuel ambition. When addressing emotions as positive or negative, the established, understandable terminology is being used. Calling emotions positive or negative does not imply that some emotions are better or more useful than others. All emotions matter in some way.

3 TEACHERS' EMOTIONS RELATED TO STUDENTS

The past few decades have witnessed an increased interest in teachers' emotions in general education. Research in the field has a number of directions, focusing for example on emotional labour, professional identity and educational reforms. In the 1990s and early 2000s the works of Hargreaves (1998, 2000) and Nias (1996) drew attention to teachers' emotions. Since then, the significance of emotions in teaching has been acknowledged progressively. Next, I shall discuss some studies focusing on teachers' emotions related to students. As mentioned in the introduction, I have selected literature from only the current and past decade due to the limited space of this review. The studies chosen represent the relational approach to emotions.

The emotions teachers experience related to their students have been studied recently by a number of scholars. At times the emotions regarding students have been examined indirectly, since they have not been the original main interest of these studies. For example, Zembylas (2004) conducted an ethnographic case study of one experienced primary school teacher in order to examine the emotional characteristics of teaching. The topic was to some extent open, set out to seek any emotional aspects of teaching. The data included field notes, video recordings, interviews, emotion diaries and teaching documents and it was gathered during three years. The vast data was then analysed using coding. Three themes regarding emotions were discovered, describing the teacher's emotions as evaluative, interpersonal and political. The interpersonal aspect concerned primarily students: the teacher's emotions were for the most part related to the relationships in the classroom. The relational aspect of emotions had an effect on the teacher's decision-making and planning, since emotions informed the teacher whether she should change something in her teaching. Although the study portrayed only one teacher, its strength is the

longitudinal aspect, which gives the reader an in-depth view of the different characteristics of emotions related to teaching.

Compared to focusing on only one participant, Hargreaves (2000) investigated a large group of teachers. He compared the emotional geographies of 53 primary and secondary school teachers. The approach to emotions in the study was relational, as emotions were explained to exist in interpersonal relationships. The data consisted of 1-1.5 hour interviews, which were then inductively analysed with the help of a computer program. After the coding the data was grouped into larger themes. The findings suggested that primary school teachers experienced both positive and negative emotions in classrooms, but the emotions were more intense than those of secondary school teachers. In the secondary level, the emotional connection in teacher-student relationships had a major influence on teachers' work, affecting almost everything the teachers did. In addition, the results acknowledged how difficult it can be for secondary school teachers to have close relationships with their students due to large groups and curriculum policies. The diverse sample of participants can be considered one of the strengths of this study. However, I would question the fruitfulness of comparing primary and secondary school teachers, since the teaching contexts are fairly different from one another. The nature of the relationships teachers have with children in primary school is inevitably more nurturing. On the other hand, contrasting the two can help to uncover the reasons behind the differences in teachers' emotions in primary and secondary levels.

Secondary school teachers' relationships with their students have been examined recently also in the light of job satisfaction (Veldman et al. 2013). Although the study examined job satisfaction, one could say that it studied emotions, since satisfaction can be regarded as a result of positive emotions. The four participants in this case study were all experienced secondary school

teachers with high job satisfaction. Data was gathered using a narrative-biographical method, as the teachers were interviewed once. The interviews were then combined with the data on students' perceptions of teacher interaction. The students' perceptions had been collected by means of a questionnaire beforehand. The findings suggested that good relationships the teachers had with their students were a significant source of their job satisfaction. Furthermore, teachers could obtain high job satisfaction even if students did not share their perception of a good teacher-student relationship. Similarly to the previously discussed literature, this study highlights the important role teacher-student relationships have on teachers' emotions. However, little is said about *how* exactly the teachers maintained the relationships that had such a positive effect on their emotions and professional well-being. Analysing how experienced teachers with high job satisfaction interact with students could offer valuable information for teacher education. Likewise, studying teacher-student relationships of teachers with low job satisfaction might be useful.

How teachers actually care for their students is a question that has been looked at recently by O'Connor (2008). In the study emotions were considered social in nature and the focus was on teachers' affective interactions with students. O'Connor examined three mid-career secondary school teachers and their emotional experiences using a series of two semi-structured phenomenological interviews. Limited information is given about the analysis, except the mention that the first interviews implied areas of focus for the second interviews. The results indicated that caring about students was an essential part of the teachers' work, being both motivating and demanding. Emotions involving kindness and caring were a necessity for work. Still, to be kind and to care was also a professional choice the teachers made. All in all the study gives a detailed look into the emotional, caring, professional lives of the participants, demonstrating the effect teacher-student relationships had on the teachers. The

study does not, however, explore questions about the possible lack of caring. Perhaps a larger sample would be needed in order to reveal a more varying scale of emotions related to caring for students.

In their review, Spilt, Koomen and Thjis (2011) summarized studies that recognise also the negative emotions of teachers. The review examined the significance of teacher-student relationships for teacher well-being, using the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus (1991) as a starting point. The review used empirical evidence to highlight the relevance of teacher-student relationships in understanding teachers' emotional experiences. Several theoretical approaches were introduced, ranging from the attachment theory to mental relationship models. Spilt et al. (2011) pointed out the fact that even though humans have a basic psychological need for relatedness, there are differences in the depth of this need. Not all teachers experience caring emotions related to their students in the same way. Furthermore, not all teachers develop caring relationships with every student. This aspect of variation in emotions seems to be occasionally neglected in the literature. Therefore, I shall take it into account in my master's thesis, acknowledging the extensive diversity of emotions and their varying nature.

Based on the literature reviewed, it is evident that teacher-student relationships are a considerable source of teachers' emotions. This, surely, applies to the language teacher context as well. Still, there is limited research on language teachers' emotions related to students. One study of this kind was conducted by the researchers responsible for the longitudinal project mentioned in the introduction. Nyman and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2008) investigated the emotions of eleven newly qualified language teachers in Finland. The approach in the study was phenomenological. Emotions were described as functional as well as relational. Data consisted of at least two interviews per teacher and the interviews were conducted during the first few years of the teachers' careers.

The analysis focused on those parts in the interviews in which the teachers referred to emotions. The purpose of the study was to discover what kind of emotions the teachers described and what topics these emotions concerned. Four major themes were found: the language teachers' emotions were related to teaching, students, parents and colleagues. The findings were consistent with those from general education, since a large variety of emotions was related to the teacher-student relationships. Some of these emotions were positive, including emotions related to caring for students and having empathy for them. Other emotions related to students were more negative consisting of, for example, disappointment, annoyance and fear. Often the negative emotions were, however, related to interactions with colleagues and parents. All in all, experiencing a variety of emotions was considered both empowering and draining for the teachers. The study gives a comprehensive overview of the emotional lives of novice language teachers, even though there were more data on some of the participants than there were on others. Nevertheless the minimum of two interviews per teacher gives an extensive amount of material for analysis.

The most recent study related to language teachers' emotions concerned language teacher development. Golombek and Doran (2014) conducted a study which examined the intern period journals of eleven teacher trainees, but the emotions towards students were not investigated directly. Therefore, in order to continue the examination of emotions in relation with students, the next chapter concentrates on EFL teachers' emotions regarding students.

4 EFL TEACHERS' EMOTIONS RELATED TO STUDENTS

Research on emotions in the EFL context has focused often on learners, investigating, for example, anxiety (Na 2007; Liu and Jackson 2008; Thompson and Lee 2013). Despite the little attention EFL teachers' emotions have had, some scholars have pioneered in the field. Recent studies on EFL teachers' emotions have focused for example on stress experienced by native vs. non-native teachers (Mousavi 2007) and emotional intelligence (Rastegar and Memarpour 2009). Two studies from the current decade (Cowie 2011; Xu 2013) address EFL teachers' emotions related to students. These studies are discussed in the following.

Cowie (2011) examined the role of emotions in the professional lives of nine experienced EFL teachers in Tokyo universities. The data consisted of a series of three phenomenological interviews, the last one of which concentrated on emotions. The interviews were analysed using content analysis with a categorical-content perspective. The content categories were defined, material was sorted into the categories, and conclusions were drawn from the results. The findings suggested that a considerable amount of the teachers' emotions were related to students, involving themes such as emotional warmth, student progress, anger, and teachers as moral guides. Emotions towards students were found more positive than emotions towards colleagues and institutions. According to Cowie, emotions are a significant part of EFL teaching. In addition, Cowie proposes that emotional warmth towards students and collaborative teacher talk ought to be encouraged. The study is limited to a higher education context with experienced participants. Furthermore, addressing and discussing a major key concept, emotion, is left out. Still, the analysis in the study has been carried out thoroughly and reliably adding knowledge to the field of EFL teachers' emotions.

Instead of experienced teachers, Xu (2013) investigated the emotional experiences of three novice male TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) teachers. The participants were Chinese and came from the same middle school (senior high school). Xu adopted the framework of emotional geographies by Hargreaves (2001) including political, moral and physical aspects of emotions. The teachers were examined using narrative inquiry and the data consisted of two semi-structured interviews and self-reflection journals of the teachers. The transcribed interviews were sent back to the participants to be checked for any misunderstandings. After revisions, Xu used content analysis and found four major themes surrounding emotions: interaction with students, parents, colleagues and administrators. The relationships with students were sources of joy and satisfaction, particularly when involving care, love and friendship. Negative emotions related to students, such as anger and frustration, were also acknowledged as a part of the emotional lives of the teachers. Based on the results Xu suggests further research on teachers' emotions in other socio-cultural contexts. In addition, emotional preparation for teacher training is proposed. The study gives a voice to male teachers thus offering valuable insights into the emotions of a minority among EFL teachers. The findings contribute to the significance of emotional awareness of teachers and calls for attention for emotions in teacher education. However, the study is limited to a certain cultural context and one school. Also, it offers only a novice teacher point of view.

5 CONCLUSION

How we understand emotions always depends on our approach, whether it is psychological, biological, cultural, or something else. Research on emotions has multiple directions and approaches, but there has been a developing movement from the intrapersonal approach to a relational one. The relational approach focuses on the interpersonal aspects of emotions. This social approach has been the underlying idea behind many studies in teacher emotion research. It is underlying in the sense that occasionally one must read between the lines in order to find out what the emotional framework of a particular study is. Besides representing a relational approach, many teacher emotion studies are rely on interviews in order to investigate emotions.

One goal of this study was to review recent research related to teachers' emotions. Due to the narrowed selection of literature, this review has by no means been a thorough introduction to teacher emotion research. However, it has offered some insights into the field. Based on the literature it appears that teachers' emotions matter, since they affect many aspects of teachers' work (Hargreaves 2000). Teachers' emotions can, for example, influence their decision-making (Zembylas 2004) and job satisfaction (Veldman et al. 2013). A major source of teachers' emotions is relationships with students. It is no surprise, considering that emotions arise in social situations (Fischer and Van Kleef 2010; Campos et al. 2011; Keltner et al. 2014). Moreover, teachers spend most of their time with students and various possible emotions are likely to occur in these ongoing interactions.

Although much has been studied already, general education could benefit from further research on teachers' emotions. After all, emotions have a substantial

role in teaching. Teachers and future teachers need support in their work, and learning more about emotions in teaching would be an advantage. Investigating negative emotions could help teachers deal with these emotions if and when they encounter them at work. On the other hand, studying positive emotions might increase, for instance, our understanding of teachers' job satisfaction.

Another goal of this study was to examine EFL teachers' emotions related to students. Few studies concerning this issue have been conducted and they demonstrate partly similar results to the findings in general education. Relationships with students can be caring and sources of joy both in general education and EFL (O'Connor 2008; Veldman et al. 2013; Cowie 2011; Xu 2013). Furthermore, mixed emotions towards students have been identified by Xu (2013) and Nyman and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2008) whereas Cowie (2011) found the emotions towards students to be mainly positive. The university context with more mature students might have influenced Cowie's study and therefore explain the slight difference in the results.

Being an emerging field, it is clear that further research on EFL teachers' emotions is needed. In particular, a longitudinal perspective is lacking. Both novices and expert EFL teachers have been examined, but not their emotional development. One could ask, what happens in between? Do the emotions change as teachers gain more experience? My master's thesis sets out to answer these questions as I will continue Nyman and Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2008) work, investigating language teachers' emotions over a period of nearly ten years. Some of those teachers are EFL teachers.

In addition, the focus of this study was on emotions teachers experience related to their students. Being at the center of teaching, students have a great influence on teachers' emotions. Therefore examining further the emotions EFL teachers' experience related to students could benefit current and future EFL teachers.

After all, the EFL context differs from general education to some extent: the participants operate in a foreign language to a certain degree. This can affect the atmosphere of the class and the emotions of students and teachers. For that reason it is justified to examine particularly language teachers' emotions towards students. I have chosen emotions concerning interactions with students as the main focus of my master's thesis.

Methodologically my master's thesis will be partly similar to previous studies. As my data consists of interviews, content analysis will be used. However, inspired by the relational approach, I will use dialogical approach (Sullivan, 2012) to qualitative analysis. It allows arranging data to appear as a dialogue. This way quotes from different participants can be put in conversation with each other. The dialogical method has not been used before in teacher emotion research, but hopefully it will support the relational approach to emotions focusing on interaction between people, even though the dialogue will be imaginary. Using compact dialogues can also make the extensive amount of data more accessible for analysis.

Also, since research has looked at EFL teachers in the higher education context, including teachers from different levels of the school system could broaden the discussion. My master's thesis will take the different levels into account, since the participants work in primary, secondary and upper secondary levels. The purpose of the thesis is not to compare the different levels, but rather give a voice to a wide range of teachers and uncover possible changes in their emotions.

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