



# Effects of Teachers' Emotions in Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase

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ABSTRACT A conducive environment coupled with positive emotions create a good platform for teaching and learning. This paper sought to describe the effects of teachers' emotions in learning and teaching in the Foundation Phase. This paper adopted a qualitative approach with a population of two primary schools and a purposive sample of six teachers. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire. Data were analysed and coded according to themes. It was found out that positive emotions made teaching effective. Negative emotions made teachers to lose control, shout, and become careless when talking. Teachers' negative emotions made learners humiliated, scared and ultimately withdrew from talking during learning. It was also found out that negative feelings, thoughts and actions encourage negative behaviour. It is recommended that teachers be trained through workshops and short courses on anger management during class time. Teachers should be competent in training learners on anger management.

### INTRODUCTION

Emotions are fundamental part of education and of organizations in general. Emotions impact on teaching and learning positively and negatively (Glaser-Zikuda et al. 2013). Considering the influence that emotions have on education, there is a need for further research on the subject. This paper's purpose is to describe effects of teachers' emotions in teaching and learning in the foundation phase. Teachers, learners and leaders get anxious, worry, hope, enthuse, become bored, doubt, envy, brood, love, feel proud, are despondent, become angry, unfulfilled and so on at different times (Hargreaves 2000). When negative emotions capture a person continuously, the brain's structural design changes, leaving a person in a delicate stressresponse state where anger, fretfulness, frustration, fear, and unhappiness take over their thinking, logical brains (Desautels 2016).

Teaching and learning is the fundamental business of the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE). Like any other department, the Department of Basic Education has aims of how teaching and learning should be. Amongst others, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) aims to produce learners who have the ability to identify and solve problems and

make decisions based on creative and critical thinking skills; work effectively individually and as team members; organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively (Department of Basic Education 2011).

The ability to manage emotions is important, however, not all people have the skill to manage emotions. In order for people to remember, retrieve, transfer, and connect all new information to what they already know, emotional regulation is necessary (Desautels 2016). Learners have a strange ability to discover teachers' emotions. Teachers' emotions become a problem if and when they affect learners' performance. It is important for teachers to reflect and introspect on the effects of their emotions on learners and the learners' performance. Good teaching stimulate positive emotions. Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines; they are sensitive and passionate people who connect with their learners and fill their work and classes with creativity, challenge, joy and pleasure (Hargreaves 1998). In other words, good teachers create good classes conducive for learning and teaching. In order for the aims of the Department of Basic Education to become real, teachers should be able to execute their teaching without being negatively influenced by emotions like anger, worry, hopelessness and others. Teachers should be able to manage and control their emotions which may provoke anger and hopelessness and impede the process of teaching and learning.

Mismanagement of emotions counters and defeats productivity of teaching and learning and is unhealthy. Emotions like anger result in poor decision-making and problem-solving, create problems with relationships at work and home; and affect a person's health. These effects of anger defeat the aims of the Department of Basic Education. Anger is the strong feeling that a person has when something has happened that he/she thinks is bad and unfair (Hornby 2010). According to Sutton and Wheatley (2003), frustration and anger arise from a number of sources related to goal incongruence. Anger and frustration usually consume a person when his/her expectations are not met. In order to manage emotions, teachers should teach learners that in life, things will not always go their way, and therefore, should have room to accommodate disappointments.

Teachers as emotional specialists can make classrooms exciting or boring. Teaching, learning and leading are always irreversibly emotional in character, in a good way or a bad way, by design or default although they may not be simply emotional practices (Hargreaves 2000). Children are very careful to take notice of how mom or dad feels and they take that to school. This means that they then carry the anger or sadness with them to school, depending on how mom or dad feels. This further means that the more the chaos at home, the more the anger and impulsiveness learners bring with to school (Chandra et al. 2009). This means that learners can also notice how the teacher is feeling on a particular day. This indicates that anger affects the home, teaching and learning environment because whatever anger children pick from home, they take it to school, particularly the classroom. No wonder schools experience a lot of bullying cases, as confirmed by Rigby (2003) who opines that greater levels of bullying in schools are associated with anger.

Poor anger management is an emotional and behavioural problem. Anger hinders development of mental health and negatively affects learners' achievement. Although teachers may often try to disguise their feelings in classes, learners are still able to pick-up teachers' emotions. According to Sutton and Wheatley (2003), emotions can be communicated involuntarily and

voluntarily in a variety of ways. Vocal variations in volume (loudness), pitch or tone and speed accompany the emotional process (Johnson and Scherer 2000), whereas some particular facial expressions are linked with emotions such as anger, joy sadness and surprise (Keltner and Ekman 2000). Learners are often aware of and are affected by teachers' expressions of negative emotions. Teachers' shouting make learners feel unimportant, miserable, humiliated, guilty, hurt and embarrassed (Sutton and Wheatley 2003). This makes learners to feel uncomfortable in a class where they should be comfortably learning.

The process of learning and teaching is too complex because it is linked with feelings of discomfort, nervousness, confusion and self-doubt to mention a few. Teachers have to deal with this complex state of emotions starting with their own and then addressing that of the learners. Emotion is vital in education as it drives attention, which in turn, drives learning and memory (Sylvester 1994). In the process of becoming, emotions play an important role to inform and define identity (Zembylas 2003). Hargreaves (1998) posits that teaching and learning are socially situated practices that are deeply rooted in emotional experiences. Teaching comprises human nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love (Hargreaves 1998). This means that teaching in the presence of negative emotions like anger involves the opposite, hatred, "I do- notcare" attitude and instability, as such, teaching becomes unfruitful and learning will also become unproductive because of the environment which is not conducive to learning and teaching. Teachers are encouraged never to become defensive or lose control of their feelings (Sutton and Wheatley 2003), especially in the presence of learners.

According to Zembylas (2003), reason and emotions are interdependent because people's reasoning depends on emotional choices. Emotion is often a more powerful element of our behaviour than our brain's logical or rational processes. Emotions let people to side-step conscious consideration of an issue and thus, react quickly based on almost innate general categorizations of incoming information. This may lead to illogical fears and foolish behaviour (Sylwester 1994). Emotional inefficacy and worry effect on self-management and goal orientation in teaching and learning (Malpass et al. 1999).

Through emotions, teachers individually understand and interpret the demands of teaching and learning placed upon them. Teachers need the connection of emotion with self-knowledge in order to discuss their identity (Zembylas 2003). The act of teaching needs teachers to possess a genuine emotional understanding and empathy towards learners and other teachers (Hargreaves 2001). That is why according to (Hargreaves 1998), teachers should be passionate beings. This raises a question whether teachers have a genuine understanding of their own emotions and that of the learners. Teachers' emotions have an influence on learners' categorizing, thinking and problem-solving (Sutton and Wheatley 2003). Considering the significance of teachers' emotions in education, teachers should therefore, carefully look after their emotional well-being to safeguard learners in the process of learning.

Teachers' compassionate experiences are influenced by both their need to maintain positive professional relationships with their learners and other teachers and by their individual beliefs about their role as teachers (O' Connor 2006). Emotional health is a positive sense of wellbeing which enables an individual to be able to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life. The better the teacher is able to control his/her emotions, the better his /her chances or capacity to enjoy life, cope with stress and focus on important priorities of life.

Through positive emotions learners are influenced and motivated to learn and use of flexible learning strategies and self- management (Pekrun et al. 2002). This means that positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope and pride are essential in teaching and learning. Teachers whose emotions are positive have the potential to generate more and better teaching and learning ideas; they are also able to develop openminded coping skills which make them and their learners to solve problems (Frederickson 2001; Rastegar and Memarpour 2009). Teachers' expression of positive emotions, for example, caring, affect learners of various grades. Learners who are convinced that teachers cared about them get motivated, and refrain from getting involved in delinquency, they become helpful, cooperative and follow classroom rules and norms (Wong and Dornbusch 2000; Sutton and Wheatley 2003). These learners, therefore perform better and learn better.

Alternatively, negative emotions weaken learners' motivation to learn and cause them to use rigid and unfruitful strategies. This negatively affect the learners' performance. Learners susceptible to anger encounter more challenges regarding the development and maintenance of relationships in the classroom (Dougherty 2006; Rothbart and Bates 2006; Pianta et al. 2007). Anger, anxiety and boredom neutralise thinking and reasoning processes and self-regulation during learning; whereas other forms of negative emotions negatively influence the motivational and cognitive aspects of learners' learning (Villavicencio and Bernado 2013; Pekrun et al. 2002). Negative emotions often impact negatively on teachers' intrinsic motivation. In support of this statement Sutton and Wheatley (2003) indicate that teachers who feel sad or disgusted about their students' life circumstances may also be less intrinsically motivated.

Emotions also play a major role in triggering different ways of information processing and problem-solving. They also affect the effectiveness of problem-solving and facilitate or impede learners' self-regulation of learning (Pekrun et al. 2002; Hoffman 2010). Expressions of emotions which undermine or weaken relationships at school, for example angrily shouting at a learner or co-worker, can be problematic because the quality of learner-teacher relationships is linked to positive teaching and learning outcomes (Jerome et al. 2009; Ladd et al. 2006). This means that good relationship between the teacher and the learners work towards good learner performance. Teachers should therefore try and maintain good relationship with the learners.

It is important for teachers to know how to express their emotions, manage their moods, empathize with the emotional states of learners other teachers, motivate themselves and others, and exercise variety of social skills for them to be highly effective as leaders particularly in the classrooms (Hargreaves 2000).

Hawkey (2006) posits the need to address emotion in education during teacher education. It is essential that teachers should be helped during teacher preparation programmes to raise awareness of negative emotions which affect both learners and teachers during teaching and learning. The acquired knowledge will enable teachers to help learners overcome feelings of uselessness in class and create better teaching and learning environment. Effective and efficient

teaching entails the creation of an atmosphere that upholds empathic understanding (Hargreaves 2001).

# Objectives of the Study

This paper proposed to describe the effects of teachers' emotions on teaching and learning in the foundation phase.

#### METHODOLOGY

# Design

The study used a qualitative, explorative and descriptive design to explore views of teachers on the effects of emotions on teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The study population comprised six teachers from two primary schools and purposive sampling was used.

### Sample

A sample is a small part or quantity intended to show what the population is like, it is a portion of population, serving as a basis or foundation for estimates of attributes of the whole population (Soanes and Stevenson 2004). In purposive sampling, researchers use their own judgment to choose relevant participants. They select only those who best meet the purpose of their studies (Swartz et al. 2008). A sample comprising six purposively selected teachers was drawn from the two primary schools under Mvudi Circuit in Limpopo Province. Three foundation phase teachers from each sampled school participated in this study. Purposive sampling was adopted because the study participants were the only teachers in the Foundation phase from the two schools.

#### Instrument

Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The respondents described their views on the effects of teachers' emotions in teaching and learning in the foundation phase. A questionnaire contains a number of written questions covering a number of issues related to the topic of interest (Mwamwenda 2004), effects of teachers' emotions in teaching and learning in the foundation phase.

#### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed and coded according to themes. From the collected data, three major themes emerged, namely: effects of teachers' positive emotions in teaching and learning, effects of teachers' negative emotions in teaching and learning and management of teachers' emotions, were identified where teachers expressed their understanding of the effects of teachers' emotions in teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase.

#### **Ethical Procedures**

Permission to conduct this study was sought and granted by the Department of Basic Education. The respondents were also informed about all procedures that they would be anonymous and confidential, and that their participation was voluntary. The respondents were also made aware of the fact that they were free to participate and to terminate their participation in the study without any fear of being victimized. In order to ensure trustworthiness of this study, credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability were applied.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emotions have an evaluative relation to learning, teaching and achievement. Emotions which activate positive actions are likely to yield positive influence on learning and learners' achievement, whereas emotions which activate negative actions yield negative influence (Glaser-Zikuda et al. 2013). The results of the study yielded three main themes, namely: Effects of teachers' positive emotions in teaching and learning, effects of teachers' negative emotions to teaching and learning and management of teachers' emotions. The study found out that teachers' emotions affect teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The participants' negative emotions affect teaching and learning negatively whereas their positive emotions affect learning and teaching positively. This means that it is essential for teachers to always stay emotionally positive. Previous researches state that teachers whose emotions were positive were able to generate more and better teaching and learning ideas; they were also able to develop openminded coping skills which helped them solve

problems (Frederickson 2001; Rastegar and Memarpour 2009).

# Theme 1: Effects of Teachers' Positive Emotions in Teaching and Learning

Teachers who are emotionally content do their best to motivate their learners to engage in active learning which in turn, improves learners' performance. As a result, learners are motivated to improve their learning and performance.

This study revealed that the effects of teachers' emotions is very important in teaching foundation phase. The participants indicated that their positive emotions make teaching and learning easier, the teacher's main focus is on teaching and the learner's on learning. Learners who are emotionally positive learn better with ease during teaching time. To them, learning becomes a pleasure; they enjoy the lessons, activities and their teacher. Positive emotions help to make learning interesting, learners look forward to learning and they enjoy learning. It was indicated that positive emotions made teaching effective. Teachers' emotions may also influence their categorizing, reasoning and problem-solving (Sutton and Wheatley 2003). The teacher's mind and focus are not divided, when focused, it becomes possible to achieve intended objectives, think positively and solve problems easily. When the teacher becomes negative, he/she loses focus. Emotional inefficacy and anxiety effect on self-regulation and goal orientation in teaching and learning (Malpass et al. 1999).

It was indicated that positive emotions make teaching effective because the teachers' mind and focus are not divided, when focused, it becomes possible to achieve intended objectives. The participants indicated that when teachers have negative emotions, they become difficult to deal with at colleague level, what more at the learners level? Teachers full of negative emotions lose control, they shout, and become reckless when talking. This makes learners to feel humiliated and fearful of the particular teacher and ultimately withdraw, talk less or do not talk at all.

The study also revealed that if the participant has emotional health problem, he/she shouts and harasses learners, to an extent of humiliating them in front of others, such a class environment is not conducive for teaching and learning. This study revealed that the effects of

teachers' emotions is very essential in teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The participants indicated that their positive emotions make teaching and learning easier. Learners who believed that their teachers cared about them were motivated to learn, less likely to be engaged in misbehaviour, more helpful, cooperative and follow classroom rules and norms (Wong and Dornbusch 2000; Sutton and Wheatley 2003).

Learners who are emotionally positive learn with ease. To them, learning becomes a pleasure; they enjoy the lessons, activities and their teacher. Positive emotions help to make learning interesting, learners to look forward to learning and enjoy learning.

One participant said: "When a teacher is angry it is learners who feel it. They are harassed and shouted at and it is not good. That is the reason why learners sometimes withdraw from participating in class activities. Some learners are afraid of their teachers."

Fredrickson (2001) opines that positive emotions encourage effective teaching and learning because they broaden the learners' cognitive awareness and consciousness of possible solutions to problems.

# Theme 2: Effects of Teachers' Negative Emotions to Teaching and Learning

An emotion like anger does not simply imply the act of throwing things around (pens or other objects), but refers to our verbal and non-verbal behaviour. This behaviour may range from using harsh de-motivating words and slapping one's forehead as a sign of defeat, all these are unacceptable expressions of behaviour within a classroom. These actions breach the confidence and trust of learners and give way to a class of non-committed learners.

An angry or discontent teacher becomes an instrument to the production of less enthusiastic passive learners. This leads to the decrease in learners' performance. The teacher may fail to address factors that might have been hampering the learners from performing well in their studies. The teacher spends time consumed by angry and harsh words. Blair (2002) and Pekrun et al. (2009) posit that negative emotions, for example, anger, reduce learners' performance because they negatively affect thinking and reasoning processes such as: problem-solving, memory and strategic thinking.

Negative emotions interfere with teaching and learning activities through the reduction of resources necessary for the integration and remembrance of important details. When a learner's experience of negative emotion leads to focusing on the cause of the emotion, cognitive resources are distracted away from teaching and learning materials to actions that distract him/her from learning (Valiente et al. 2012).

One of the participants indicated: "My emotions can affect learners' learning and teaching if I am forever angry, I will spill my anger onto the learners. Learners become victims of my hurt emotions. In the end learners will not learn well because of me."

The other participant: "Negative emotions affect learners' performance because learners will not enjoy my teaching, they will be afraid of my shouting and they will forever be waiting to be shouted at. I think this also affect their emotions, what I do when angry as a teacher also makes learners angry. Then it becomes an angry teacher and angry learners in class. Learning can never be effective in such an atmosphere."

Another participant: "Yes, my negative emotions affect teaching and learning negatively. In a classroom, the teacher must be a friend to the learners, the teacher needs to create a feeling of welcome, and learners must be free to share whatever with the teacher and among themselves. It is us teachers who should teach learners how to control their emotions."

According to Dougherty (2006) negative emotions affect levels of social competence, hence, the participants' indication that angry teachers shout and use vulgar language towards learners and sometimes towards colleagues. That scared learners and affected their learning negatively. It was also indicated that when an angry teacher shouted and harassed learners in front of the class, learners felt ashamed, uncomfortable and humiliated and withdrew from learning and also got angry towards the teacher. Teachers' screaming made learners feel unwanted and useless, sad, ashamed and guilty, hurt and embarrassed (Sutton and Wheatley 2003). That created the environment which is not conducive for teaching and learning. This contradicts the finding which points out that effective and efficient teaching entails the creation of an atmosphere that upholds empathic understanding (Hargreaves 2001). The teacher has a duty to create a conducive atmosphere for learning and teaching.

The participants indicated that when teachers display negative emotions they become difficult to deal with colleagues, what more the learners? Teachers full of negative emotions lose control, they shout, and become reckless when talking. Teachers are encouraged to never become defensive or get carried away by emotions (Sutton and Wheatley 2003).

It was also indicated that participants' negative emotions lead them to shouting and harassing learners resulting to learners' feelings of shame and humiliation in front of others. Vocal variations in tone, volume and speed accompany the emotional process (Johnson and Scherer 2000), whereas particular facial expressions are linked with emotions such as anger, sadness, joy and surprise (Keltner and Ekman 2000). Learners are often aware of and influenced by teachers' expression of negative emotions. Teachers' yelling made learners feel small, sad, ashamed and guilty, hurt and embarrassed (Sutton and Wheatley 2003).

# Theme 3: Management of Teachers' Emotions

Teachers need to be helped to control their emotions. There is a need to address emotion in teaching and learning especially during teacher training (Hawkey 2006). It is also of utmost importance for teachers to know how to express their emotions, manage their moods, empathize with the emotional states of other teachers and learners, motivate themselves and others, and use variety of social skills to be highly effective as a teacher or a leader (Hargreaves 2000). The participants indicated that it was very important that they control their emotions, especially in front of learners and colleagues. It was also indicated that teachers needed help so that they acquire the skills to help them control their emotions.

One participant responded: "My management of anger is important, because when I am angry, I overreact, sometimes I shout to learners unnecessarily. Later I feel ashamed and I cannot explain to my learners why I shouted."

The other participant said: "I think teachers need to be helped to control their emotions. Even among the staff members, there are some teachers who raise their voices to colleagues, it is not right."

Teachers have a role of creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Teachers have a responsibility to create a warm and caring classroom where learners feel welcome and free to share their feelings with the teacher and other learners. Effective and efficient teaching needs teachers to create an atmosphere that encourages empathic understanding (Hargreaves 2001).

Above all, teachers have a responsibility to teach learners to manage their emotions. Some learners regard teachers as their role models, this calls for teachers' exemplary management of anger in particular and emotions in general at all times.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The role played by teachers' emotions in teaching cannot be underestimated. Through proper management of the teachers' emotions, a good classroom atmosphere which is conducive to learning can be built or vice versa. It is essential for teachers to acquire skills and strategies to help them manage their emotions in order to avoid learners in the foundation phase from identifying with destructive negative emotions detrimental to their learning and development. Noting that the learners' major part of their life is constituted by teachers, it is imperative that teachers do their very best to develop the best learners without letting their emotions to get the better of them.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers as learners' role models should be competent in anger management. It is, therefore, recommended that teachers be trained through in-service training, workshops and short courses on anger management.

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