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**EMBODIED EMOTIONALITY IN TEACHING AND RESEARCHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**MEGTESTESÜLT ÉRZELMEKKEL TANÍTANI ÉS KUTATNI**

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**Abstract**

This reflective piece of work discusses my embodied emotional experiences and the ways in which my professional practice has been influenced by them. I draw on the idea of ‘othering’ (Ozbilgin and Woodward, 2004) by utilising series of reflective (field)notes that I have written about teaching and research practice in higher education in the UK context. The effects of the rapid political and technological change have shaped the social research that has turned its attention to ‘the body’. I consider the implications of such a turn on the ways in which I (re)position myself as a higher education teacher and researcher. I argue that by ignoring the emotional embodiment the appreciation of the embodied nature of the human actions can be neglected.

Keywords: Emotion, higher education, research, embodiment

**Context**

As part of my roles as a senior lecturer in one of the post 92 higher education institution, I was encouraged by the university to enrol on the Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme. This programme is a high-quality form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that enhances the professional practice and expertise of the students who are our future and current early years practitioners/professionals and teachers. I took up on this opportunity to pursue areas of research which are of direct relevance to my practice interests. At the final stage of the doctoral journey in this paper l demonstrate the ways in which I (re)positioned myself as a higher education teacher as a result of the programme I had undertaken.

**‘Othering’**

My current academic identity is a result of a complex interaction between the multi-cultural environments I have grown up in, the educational institutions I have attended and my ethnic identity. I draw on the idea of ‘othering’ that makes it possible to understand the ‘dualistic processes by which the normative and deviant, centres and margins, core and periphery and powerful and powerless are identified and differentiated’ (Ozbilgin and Woodward, 2004). These reflections demonstrate the ways in which my experiences of the formation of self is relational to the academic life.

In order to understand the series of reflections, it is important to make who I am and where I am located in relation to my teaching as well as on my research explicit*.* I am White, but I am not White British, as were the large majority of my students. This detail makes me an ‘invisible other’. I was born and raised in Yugoslavia by Hungarian parents, and so therefore I grow up in a multicultural context. At the beginning of the Yugoslavian war in 1992 I came to live and work in the UK, and for over a decade now I have been involved in teaching within higher education; mainly teaching on Early Childhood Education and Care programmes. These elements gave me the second layer of the ‘othering’, and that is the way I speak, write and conduct myself. I was inspired by the writing of Tsouroufli (2012) who addressed ‘othering’ in higher education through her experience as a Greek academic. Her reflections were concerned with gender injustice addressing new managerialism and its impact on the emotional wellbeing in Medical School. I argue that ‘otherness’ influences the ways in which I (re)from emotions that are embodied. Through the case study I illustrate how academic performance within an organisation can influence the professional self and affect the academic careers and identity.

**The importance of acknowledging teachers’ emotion**

One might rightly ask why educators should interest themselves in researching and analysing emotion which has previously been extensively defined and researched by psychologists and sociologists (Harré and Parrott, 1996; Williams, 2001). One of the foremost reasons for doing so is that emotions are involved in many aspects of the teaching and learning process. Dewey (1987:61) states:

…it is not possible to divide in a vital experience to practical, emotional and intellectual from one another and to set properties of one over against the characteristics of the others.

Yet, there is little written about the ways in which emotion is embodied in our teaching, especially if we take a position that emotions play a central role in the construction of the teacher subjectivity (Zembylas, 2005). Based on the understanding that there is a link between subjectivity and emotion where emotion is acting as discursive practices which are relational to power, it is possible to demonstrate that emotion is embodied into our teaching practices. Since emotions are a complex phenomenon, they are treated as situated, fragmented, contextual, fluid, performative and contradictory. To understand what emotions do to us, I used Zembylas (2003:115) definition of emotions stating that:

Emotions are discursive practices operating in circumstances that grant powers to some relations and delimit the powers of others, that enable some to create truth and others to submit to it, that allow some to judge and others to be judged.

By drawing on Zembylas idea, the process of subjectification and emotional othering can be unravelled. It can be argued that the emotional othering was embodied in the power mechanism of the UK education system and research processes. Therefore, emotions and emotionality in this paper are discussed as a reflection on my experiences as a migrant teacher and researcher in the UK. To demonstrate the ways in which emotion is embodied in my teaching, I will draw on my reflective diary and field notes about my experiences as a teacher and novice researcher which were written over a period of one year. Initially, these notes were written to inform my doctoral research in terms of data analysis and ‘meaning making’ (Davies and Gannon, 2011; Osgood, 2012; Stanley, 2013) in order to find a way in which capturing and (re)presenting the participants’ voice in my research. After re-reading my notes, it became apparent that they were an extremely useful collection of information that informed my teaching, as well as the research and the analysis process. Firstly, they captured the moments of ‘happening’ that influenced the way I position myself as a teacher. Secondly, due to the nature of the qualitative inquiry, the notes and reflections were additional information to the data that can be read in the ‘right’ context.

**Fieldnotes**

Davies and Gannon (2011) suggest that using fieldnotes helps to produce meaning in research hence me writing about the interview process. I recorded my initial thoughts about what was said and the context in which the data was said. At the same time, I recorded a series of reflections on my teaching. The notes can be grouped into two main categories, one that reflects on my teaching and learning practices, and second, that reflects the research process that involves participants. These categories can be grouped further; one that reflects my ever-changing and sometimes contradictory thoughts of the social world that intersects with my personal emotional experiences and teaching practices. And second, that reflects the dilemma of the way qualitative finding can be and should be presented. Either way, emotionality informed the notes I have written. To demonstrate that emotions are embodied in teaching, I analyse two quotes that are directly linked to my teaching practices and one quote that is linked to research.

This is to demonstrate that emotions are always in process that are temporary fixed and re-fixed in the memory, in the language and in text. In Figure 1 I illustrated the factors that were influential to the way in which I positioned myself and the way in which the process of subjectification (re)forms the teaching and learning practices.

Figure 1. Main factors that influence the teaching and learning practices

**The intersection of my personal experiences and teaching practices**

The groups I am involved with were ‘traditional’ undergraduate students studying on the childhood programme. The size of the group varies between forty and fifty each academic year. The undergraduate programme is a full time course delivered over three years involving practice based elements. About 15% of students I teach have children. I recognised from my own experience as a student mother in the late 1990s, what a difficult and emotionally engaging journey being a mother/parent whilst studying can be. I wrote:

*I recognised myself in some of the mature students. I recognised the feeling of struggling with childcare, trust, embarrassment for asking for a help… My children were very young when I decided to get a UK degree and I recall the feeling that had to ask my neighbours to look after my children while at the university. Yes, I did face difficulties with the childcare… Unconsciously, I have developed a deep empathy towards student mothers which manifested in me being more lenient with their attendance and assignment submission deadlines. (Diary, 2016)*

This quote indicates that my own experience as a mature student mother, has an impact on the ways in which I have adapted my teaching to a certain group of students. While this approach initially was unconscious, it became more explicit through my reflective diary which made me think about it. The idea of the personalised teaching approach is not new. However, by doing the doctoral research, I learnt to apply reflexivity through which my teaching has significantly changed. This change helped me understanding the discursive ‘self’, that is the importance of making the teacher’s positionality explicit in their work, rather than pretending to be neutral and objective. This procedure is essential part in the in the process of subjectification. The recognition that my past experiences that are emotional, are deeply embodied into my professional practices gave me new ways of understanding of my profession.

*Case study*

After a teaching session involving an undergraduate group of fifty female students, studying on an Early Childhood programme, I reflected on the ways in which I positioned myself as a teacher. These students were studying on their final year, and as part of the degree, they had to conduct a small-scale research. My task was to explain to the research process including research techniques and ethics. In this particular instance, I struggled to capture the attention of the whole group. Some individuals refused to participate in the activity I have designed, and when challenged, I received some feedback which made an impact on the process of my subjectification/ identity shaping.

I recorded my feelings about a comment I received as they were about my accent and grammar. This was the first time when I felt that I was treated as ‘other’ due to my origin. After more than ten years in the teaching profession, this particular experience has inevitably impacted my teaching practices. I have analysed the ways in which my emotions are embedded while I teach but also the ways in which the tacit becomes explicit. I wrote:

*I see myself as sensitive and responsive to the needs of students, as well as professional, reasonable and equitable. Yet, in my classroom practice I fall into an old power trap where – for diverse reasons - I tend to interact more with those who have ‘sparks’ in their eyes, and also with the ones who are willing to be active/participative. Although I have the power to select student(s) to participate in discussion, my authority is tenuous and depends on the willing subjection of students, to the classroom dynamics and to the disciplinary regimes of the university. Yet four students refuses the subjection of the university, and adopt authority in the class by ‘invading’ my space, the very space they are not authorized to be I initially felt.* *(Diary, 2016)*

How can this reflective piece be understood? These students felt the need to comment on my accent and grammar. Further comment was made about the high tuition fee, as they felt a native English-speaking teacher would afford them a better education experience.

Generally, the individual, in this case the teacher, should be rational and free from emotional experiences. Despite evidence that emotions have a direct impact on the teaching and learning process (Carlson, 2010; Lawson, 2011), there is considerable evidence in the literature that in higher education emotion has never been fully acknowledged (Perkun et al., 2009; Perkun and Stephens, 2010). Perhaps because it is very fluid ‘quick to occur and quick to change’ (Schultz and DeCuir, 2002:125). Within higher education the focus is mainly on student academic achievement with little attention paid to issues of emotion, especially on teachers’ emotion. This is called the ‘affective equality deficit’ (Lynch et al., 2009, p.12) where emotions in education are treated as private matters not sufficient for political debate or empirical survey. Therefore, the teacher (me) should be called a professional who follows a collective dualism, that is to accept and to become indoctrinated into a Higher Education current trend, or rebel against the sometimes-unwritten rules and to deviate from it.

An important point of this quote from my reflections is that it is written by the competent agentic adult (me) after an event occurred. The question is, how to reflect on the situation in which I am the main actor, who is captured by my own discursive self - called subjectivity. This case highlighted that subjectivity and subjectification is an ongoing, never ending process, that is influenced and shaped by external human interaction. However, this can also take a form of more than ‘human’ engagement with the non-human material world such as a classroom climate where the emotional affects become enacted (Fairchild, 2017).

The way in which I am positioning myself by reflecting on this particular event, means that my subjectivity is also contradictory. For example, the ‘choices’ that I make to deal with the situation are based on my rational analysis, but my desire may subvert rationality. Desires are integral to the various discourses through which I am constituted that are not necessarily amenable to change through rational analysis. But my subject positions (where the subject is me as a professional HE teacher), which I take up are made available through a variety of discourses. For example, my initial reaction to the event was based on the *migrant* rather than *academic.* This meansthat I embodied the migrant teacher positioning which is perceived as more vulnerable in the current and changing post Brexit political climate. My emotional reaction was not planned nor rationally inspired, but deeply embodied in my migrant subject positioning that is culturally and socially constructed.

I argue that one subject position is more often made available to ‘white middle class’ than ‘others’, and in this case the migrant teacher. The question is how to act upon this concept, as the choices I make and the authority I exercise has been influenced by the comment about native English speaking teacher would afford a particular group of students a better education experience.

However, the relationship between me, as a teacher and the collective are not to be understood as dualism, but where ‘I’ is to be understood as a discursive construction where the embodied emotions are present, sometimes even visible. Going back to my original question of ‘Why is it important to acknowledge teachers’ emotion?’ is about recognition of the need to address the complex and fluid issue of emotionality and its embodiment. Currently there is little evidence that supports this growing need as HE’s been seen as emotional-free zone (Leathwood and Read, 2009). Yet some aspects of positive student experiences are based on the passion, enthusiasm and emotional wellbeing of their teachers (Mikuska, 2014). By recognising the place and importance of emotions in HE is a first step to address complex and discursive issues, such as: What can we do to recognise and make space for teachers’ emotions? How can teachers do this for themselves? Is there space within institutions to do this? In what ways does this improve the learning experience for students?

**Reflection on the research**

As I have written fieldnotes over a period of one year where I recorded my experiences as a researcher, this part introduces one aspect of emotionality during data collection processes. In my research I used interviews as a tool to collect data. I wrote about this process and recorded my initial thoughts about what was said. For example, after an interview with the nursery owner I wrote:

*It was a very challenging interview. I wasn’t expecting her to cry and to burst into the emotional meltdown purely from my question which was around her decision to open her own nursery… She drew her experience on her personal/emotional memories of having difficulties becoming pregnant and then leaving her own child in the care of others/other mothers. (Fieldnote, 2016:3)*

The personal statement of the participant which was shared with me highlighted the complexity of understanding emotional experiences and ethics fully. This reaction was unexpected and made me emotional. While I considered this as an important element of the research, the fieldnote acted as an additional information that helped to contextualise the data. Although this example does not reflect on my emotion as such, instead of it highlights the participants emotional burst, it clearly shows that emotions are deeply embodied in our thoughts and memories. It acts as interrelation between the researcher and researched; and as a researcher, it is difficult to capture and analyse emotions as they are fluid and momentary.

**Conclusion**

While all the discussions and findings about embodiment offer important insights questions still remain. The question about emotion and how that is embodied in higher education is still open because of its complexity. The importance of reflection and awareness of my own embodiment is crucial to understanding the complex relationship of how both emotional labour and emotionality influence the multiplicity of the personal, professional and research roles. Wehrle (2016) states that it is through this process of reflection that new ways of being and understanding of how research can inform teaching emerges.

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