



# Teachers' emotional experiences in professional development: Where they come from and what they can mean

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## H I G H L I G H T S

- Teachers' emotions differed in professional development (PD) and teaching contexts.
- Antecedents of emotions in PD emerged at self, training, and administration levels.
- Pleasant emotions in PD promoted engagement, implementation, and reflection.
- Unpleasant emotions in PD led teachers to disengage and inhibited implementation.

## A R T I C L E I N F O

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Teacher professional development (PD) is increasingly viewed as a promising way to help teachers meet the demands placed on them by ever-expanding accountability measures (Guskey, 2002). Efforts to understand how PD can catalyze change, however, have been fraught with challenges. Scholars have noted a lack of research on whether PD improves outcomes for teachers or students (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Moreover, some studies have identified positive associations between teachers' participation in PD and student achievement (Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2013; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007) whereas others have found null (Jacob, Hill, & Corey, 2017) or mixed (Lindvall, 2017) results.

In response to these inconsistent findings, a growing literature has highlighted the mediating role of teachers' subjective experiences (e.g., efficacy beliefs, prior knowledge) in their interactions with PD (Avalos, 2011). This approach may help unravel some of the mysteries surrounding the impact of PD by uncovering influential

variables overlooked by previous studies. Unfortunately, most studies of the effect of teachers' subjective experiences in PD on their receptivity have been based on retrospective accounts in cross-sectional studies, resulting in increased calls for research on teachers' experiences in PD over time (Kisa & Correnti, 2015).

Often when researchers have focused on teachers' practices and knowledge (e.g., Borko, 2004), they have overlooked affective underpinnings that influence teachers' understanding of PD. Although researchers have studied teachers' emotions while teaching (Frenzel, 2014; Schutz, 2014) and in response to education reform movements (Cross & Hong, 2009; Darby, 2008; Saunders, 2013), teachers' emotional experiences during PD are less well understood. Grounded in Pekrun's (2006) control-value theory of achievement emotions and Lazarus' (1991) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion, and influenced by burgeoning work on emotions and learning, we sought to describe the antecedents of emotions teachers reported experiencing in various PD settings, and the consequences of these emotions on their instruction and engagement in future PD.

## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1. Professional development

Teachers acquire new beliefs, knowledge, and skills through formal and informal PD experiences (Evans, 2018, pp. 1–14). Researchers and practitioners have conceptualized a patchwork of activities as PD, including structured in-service training sessions, co-teaching, observations, book clubs, and even discussions in the hallway (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

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Formal PD experiences include trainings, courses, or other instructional activities conducted to support teachers' continuing education and inspire positive change in their teaching (Yoon et al., 2007). However, PD can be defined more broadly as any activity designed to "alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school persons toward an articulated end" (Griffin, 1983, p. 2), such as improved student achievement. Therefore, PD can be considered effective if it meets its articulated goals and improves teacher practices and student outcomes (Desimone et al., 2013; Hill, 2009).

Attributes considered characteristic of high-quality PD include a focus on content, alignment with teachers' instructional goals, active teacher participation, and use of reform-type structure, such as study groups (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet et al., 2001). However, these characteristics do not necessarily lead to improved teacher practices (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Hill, 2009; Kennedy, 1998). Some researchers, looking beyond training-level features, have found that teachers' implementation of innovative strategies was mediated by several teacher-specific factors including attitudes and beliefs about (Cross & Hong, 2009; Emo, 2015; Steinert et al., 2010) and philosophical alignment with the PD (Briscoe, 1991; de Jesus & Lens, 2005; Emo, 2015), as well as teachers' perceptions of and actual support from school leadership (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1997; Mathison, 1992). Yet, despite the crucial role of emotions in teaching, teachers' emotional experiences during PD have received little attention as a mediator of implementation of what was learned in PD.

## 1.2. Conceptions of emotions

Competing schools of thought conceive of emotions as the product of different processes (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). Emotions have been described as preconscious, physiological responses to stimuli (LeDoux, 1995; Panksepp & Watt, 2011); as disruptive/adaptive forces that catalyze maladaptive/adaptive behaviors (Scherer, 1982); and as the result of multiple, complex, simultaneous processes (Smith & Kirby, 2001). We aligned ourselves with a *cognitive-experiential* conception of emotion, whereby subjective appraisals of antecedents (i.e., "stimuli for the experience of emotion"; Boucher & Brandt, 1981), informed by one's beliefs, attitudes, background, and prior experiences (Lazarus, 1991; Pekrun, 2006), direct one's emotional responses.

Emotional experiences frequently are categorized by valence (e.g., pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative; Russell, 1980). In the current study, we classified emotional experiences as pleasant and unpleasant, as this classification allowed for pleasant and unpleasant emotional experiences to be associated with both positive and negative consequences (Pekrun, Frenzel, Goetz, & Perry, 2007). For instance, uncertainty is an inherently uncomfortable cognitive state typically accompanied by unpleasant emotions (Hofstede, 1986). However, uncertainty has been associated with positive consequences for learning (Glanville, 2007; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Jordan & McDaniel, 2014). Therefore, referring to emotions that accompany uncertainty as *unpleasant* (as opposed to *negative*) accurately reflects its affective component without prescribing a negative valence to the experience overall or its consequences.

**Teacher emotions.** Although all employees experience emotions during their work (Weiss & Brief, 2001), teaching can be especially emotional work (Hargreaves, 1998; Saunders, 2013; Schutz, 2014; for reviews, see; Frenzel, 2014; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015). According to Schutz and Lanehart (2002), "emotions are intimately involved in virtually every aspect of the teaching and learning process and, therefore, an understanding of the nature of emotions within the school context is essential" (p. 199). Teachers' emotional bonds with students are

often at the heart of their work (Day & Leitch, 2001), and teachers frequently experience enjoyment, anxiety, and anger while they teach (Frenzel, Becker-Kurz, Pekrun, & Goetz, 2015; Frenzel, Goetz, Ludtke, Pekrun, & Sutton, 2009a; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Moreover, teachers' emotional experiences during class may directly impact their behavior (Day & Leitch, 2001; Kunter et al., 2008), students' emotional experiences (Becker, Goetz, Morger, & Ranellucci, 2014), and learning outcomes (Frenzel, Goetz, Stephens, & Jacob, 2009b).

It follows that teachers' emotional experiences could be influential in shaping their interactions with PD and implementation of what they learn in PD. Emotions are to some degree dispositional, although they are also highly sensitive to context (Schutz, 2014; Schutz, Aultman, & Williams-Johnson, 2009), which led us to consider teacher emotions specifically in the context of PD. There is some evidence that teachers' emotional experiences during PD may differ from their emotions while teaching (Choi et al., 2016; Saunders, 2013; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). In PD, teachers often are asked explicitly to change their teaching practices, likely causing teachers to experience complex suites of pleasant and unpleasant emotions (Darby, 2008; Lasky, 2005). Teachers' emotional experiences during PD do not appear to be epiphenomenal and seem to support or limit teacher growth (Hunt, 2016; Lasky, 2005; Slavit, Sawyer, & Curley, 2003). Teachers experiencing hope or joy during PD are likely to engage more deeply in the PD, envisioning new, innovative ways to implement what they have learned. Conversely, teachers overwhelmed with fear or anxiety during PD may be unable to make connections to their practice, instead focusing narrowly on the minimum requirements presented in the training.

What research exists on teachers' emotional experiences in PD has taken a grounded approach rather than a theoretical approach from an emotion perspective (Saunders, 2013; Tsang, 2015; Twyford, Le Fevre, & Timperley, 2017). By contrast, we relied on theoretical work on the role of emotion in learning (i.e., Pekrun, 2006; Lazarus, 1991) to advance our understanding of the antecedents and consequences of teachers' emotional experiences as learners during PD. The following sections overview these theories.

**Control-value theory of emotion.** Pekrun (2006) conceived of emotions as "coordinated processes of psychological subsystems including affective, cognitive, motivational, expressive, and peripheral physiological processes" (p. 316). *Control appraisals* (expectations that one can, by one's own volition, successfully achieve an objective) and *value appraisals* (the "perceived importance of success," Pekrun, 2006, p. 317), along with the temporal context in which they are considered (i.e., reflecting on a past outcome, assessing a current activity, or imagining a future outcome), trigger these processes and elicit emotions, which in turn guide motivation and learning. For example, in a three-year longitudinal study of the connection between math teachers' enjoyment of teaching and students' enjoyment of math class, Frenzel et al. (2009a,b) found that students, by observing their teachers' enjoyment of a topic, learned to value the topic and experienced enjoyment in class.

Moreover, emotional experiences can affect interpretations of and reactions to situations (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Schiefele, 1999), and teachers' emotional experiences in a PD may affect their outlook on future PD. Thus, teachers' emotions serve as feedback loops, driving their ongoing perceptions of control and value and altering their motivation and behavior (Goetz & Bieg, 2016; Pekrun, 2006). For example, Daniels et al. (2009) reported that certain achievement emotions significantly predicted college students' goal adoption (e.g., mastery, performance-approach), which in turn predicted achievement. Thus, unpleasant emotions may initiate a feedback loop if teachers come to associate PD with external control, negative value, and unpleasant emotional

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