



# Choose your strategy wisely: Examining the relationships between emotional labor in teaching and teacher efficacy in Hong Kong primary schools



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Grandey's integrative model is promising for researching teachers' emotional labor.
- Surface acting negatively related to teacher efficacy.
- Deep acting and genuine expression positively related to teacher efficacy.
- Emotional job demands of teaching positively related to surface and deep acting.
- Trust in colleagues positively related to expression of naturally felt emotion.

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## ABSTRACT

Following Grandey's integrative model of emotional labor, this study examined the relationships between teachers' emotional labor strategies, the emotional job demands of teaching, trust in colleagues, and teacher efficacy. The results from a sample of 1115 Hong Kong primary school teachers showed that surface acting played a dysfunctional role, but deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotion facilitated teacher efficacy. Trust in colleagues was found to be an organizational resource for teachers that helped them to cope with the challenges brought about by the emotional demands of teaching. The results indicate that teachers should perform emotional labor wisely.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, education research has increasingly focused on the importance of emotional labor to teaching and teachers. Emotional labor, in Hochschild's (1983) terms, is "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p. 7). Although the term was initially used to describe the work of employees in the service sectors, it has also been argued that schools are complex emotional arenas and teaching is a form of emotional labor (Hargreaves, 1998; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; O'Connor, 2008). As some researchers

(Winograd, 2003; Yin & Lee, 2012) have noted, teaching fulfills all three of Hochschild's criteria for work that entails emotional labor: a) it requires face-to-face contact between teachers and others, especially their students; b) it requires teachers to produce emotional states (e.g., joy or fear, excitement or anxiety) in their students or other people around them; and c) there is a degree of external control over teachers' emotional activities in classrooms or school settings, usually in the form of cultural expectations or professional norms.

In this study, the emotional labor of teaching refers to the effort, planning, and control needed for teachers to express

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organizationally desired emotion during their interpersonal transactions with students and others in classroom and school settings (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Effective teachers need to be adept at regulating their feelings and emotions “in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines” (Wharton, 2009, p. 147). These rules and guidelines, called feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983), display rules (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), or emotional rules (Yin & Lee, 2012; Zembylas, 2002), are implicitly reflected in a set of normative beliefs held about the teaching profession that point out what feelings or expressions are acceptable for teachers. The emotional labor of teaching stems mainly from the interactions between teachers and students. However, due to the implementation of educational reform initiatives such as project learning, life-wide learning, team teaching, and professional learning communities in recent years, Hong Kong teachers have gradually become accustomed to teaching collaboratively with their colleagues in or beyond the classroom (Carless & Walker, 2006; Pang, Wang, & Leung, 2016). Therefore, the interactions between teachers and their colleagues may also require teachers to perform emotional labor.

Recent studies have examined the magnitude and dimensionality of teachers' emotional labor (Näring, Briët, & Brouwers, 2006; Yin, 2012) and its associations with teachers' emotional intelligence (Karim & Weisz, 2011; Yin, 2015; Yin, Lee, Zhang, & Jin, 2013). Other studies have looked at the relationship between teachers' emotional labor and well-being indicators, such as burnout (Noor & Zaiduddin, 2011; Näring, Vlerick, & Van de Ven, 2012; Philipp & Schüpbach, 2010) and/or job satisfaction (Cheung, Tang, & Tang, 2011; Kinman, Wray, & Strange, 2011). However, little is known about the relationship between teachers' emotional labor and their sense of teaching effectiveness in terms of specific performance-related indicators.

There are two fundamental approaches to the study of emotional labor: the job- and employee-focused approaches (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). The former focuses on the level of emotional demands in an occupation, such as the frequency of client interaction, the duration and intensity of emotions required during job-related interactions, and the display rules for expressing certain emotions. The latter stresses the process of emotion regulation to meet work demands, i.e., the strategies individuals adopt to perform emotional labor. Due to the absence of a comprehensive conceptual framework, few studies of emotional labor in teaching have attempted to combine these two approaches.

Emotional labor derives from the need to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Although trust has been suggested as one of “the taken-for-granted elements of social interaction” (Misztal, 2012, p. 209), with rare exceptions in organizational studies (e.g., Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009; Grandey, Foo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012), the role of trust in emotional labor processes has seldom been examined. In the field of teaching and teacher education, the relevance of trust to teachers' emotional labor has not been adequately explored.

To address these gaps in the literature, this study adopts Grandey's (2000) integrative model of emotional labor and combines the two approaches to emotional labor research to investigate teachers' emotional labor and certain organizationally desired consequences in Hong Kong primary schools. In particular, it examines the relationships between the emotional demands of teaching, teachers' emotional labor strategies, and teacher efficacy. The role of individual teachers' perception of trust in colleagues, a perceived organizational factor influencing teachers' emotional labor, is also explored.

## 2. Literature and hypotheses

### 2.1. Grandey's integrative model of emotional labor

In her integrative model of emotional labor, Grandey (2000) noted that all conceptualizations of emotional labor had the same underlying theme: individuals could regulate their emotions at work. The strategies that individuals adopt to conduct emotional labor match the working definition of emotion regulation and provide a useful way to operationalize emotional labor. At the level of the individual, emotional labor “is the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for the organizational goals” (Grandey, 2000, p. 97).

To uncover the specific mechanisms of emotional labor in the workplace, Grandey presented a comprehensive framework to show the relationships between emotional labor and its antecedents and consequences. This framework has four parts. First, there are situational cues that elicit individuals' emotional labor, including interactional expectations and emotional events. Second, individuals' emotion regulation processes, located at the core of the framework, include emotional labor strategies such as surface acting and deep acting, defined by Grandey (2000, p. 99) as “modifying expressions” and “modifying feelings,” respectively. Third, individuals' emotion regulation may also be influenced by personal (e.g., gender and emotional intelligence) and organizational factors (e.g., job autonomy and social support from supervisors or co-workers). The fourth part includes the long-term consequences of emotional labor, consisting of individual well-being (e.g., burnout or job satisfaction) and organizational well-being (e.g., performance or work-avoidance behavior).

This model of emotional labor not only integrates the job-focused approach (i.e., situational cues) and the employee-focused approach (i.e., individuals' emotion regulation), but also provides a detailed picture of the mechanisms involved in understanding the role of emotional labor in the workplace. Empirical research in organizational studies and occupational psychology has supported the applicability of this integrative model (e.g., Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). In teaching and teacher education, most studies of teachers' emotional labor have focused on only some of the relationships presented in the integrative model, such as the associations between teachers' emotional labor and the emotional job demands of teaching (Yin, 2015), their emotional intelligence (Karim & Weisz, 2011; Yin et al., 2013), psychological capital (Cheung et al., 2011), social support (Kinman et al., 2011), or well-being (e.g., Näring et al., 2012; Yin, 2012; Yin, Huang, & Wang, 2016). Grandey's framework has rarely been used to comprehensively examine teachers' emotional labor.

### 2.2. Teachers' emotional labor strategies and the emotional job demands of teaching

Emotion plays important roles in teachers' well-being and students' mental processing. It has been reported that teachers' harmonious passion is positively related to well-being indicators such as job satisfaction, positive affect and subjective happiness (Moè, 2016a) and that children's displayed enthusiasm facilitated their recall performance and increased their intrinsic motivation (Moè, 2016b). Considering the intensive relationship between teachers' social and emotional competence and student learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), teachers' competence in conducting emotional labor and emotion regulation in the classroom has been ascribed great importance (Fried, 2011; Yin, 2016).

Surface acting and deep acting are two emotion-regulating

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