



Inducing adaptive emotion regulation by providing the students' perspective: An experimental video study with advanced preservice teachers



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ABSTRACT

Is it possible to promote the use of reappraisal as an emotion regulation strategy during teachers' processing of classroom disruptions? We assume that teachers who are aware of the student perspective use reappraisal more often than teachers who are not aware of the student perspective. In order to test this hypothesis, we presented several video cases that illustrated a problematic classroom situation to preservice teachers in an experimental design. In addition, we presented supplementary information to the experimental group, in which the student who caused the disruption, reflected on his/her behavior by commenting on the teaching situation. In contrast, the video solely depicting the disruption was shown in the control group. Following a thorough stimulus evaluation check (both groups showed comparable emotional evaluation of the video cases), it could be demonstrated that the experimental group used significantly more reappraisal than the control group ($\eta^2 = 0.13$), while suppression seemed not to be influenced by the student perspective—it was equally often used in both groups.

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1. Introduction

Teachers who are able to effectively regulate their emotions experience more positive emotions, show good classroom management, and build better teacher-student relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). They are more satisfied with their work, feel more fulfilled, and experience greater social support by their school principals (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010). Generally, they interact more professionally with students (which has positive effects regarding the class and learning environment) as well as with superiors and colleagues (Brackett et al., 2010; Lopes, Salovey, Côté, Beers, & Petty, 2005). Furthermore, they are better able to predict their emotions in future hypothetical scenarios (Dunn, Brackett, Ashton-James, Schneiderman, & Salovey, 2007), which allows them to adopt preventive measures that reduce or avoid unpleasant classroom situations (Coulby & Harper, 2011; Ophardt & Thiel, 2013).

Also, the ability to regulate emotions—particularly in the

context of severe classroom disruptions—has been identified as a protective factor against emotional exhaustion and leaving the teaching profession early (Philipp, 2010). At the same time, a high stress level coupled with ineffective emotion regulation can lead to emotional and physical exhaustion, a cynical attitude, and a diminished feeling of personal achievement. Meta-analyses show that teachers who cope less well with problematic classroom situations are more likely to develop burnout syndrome (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005), which is plausibly related to dysfunctional emotion regulation strategies as an underlying mechanism. According to a study of 158 secondary school teachers, a positive regulation of emotions is the greatest predictor of teacher self-efficacy (Chan, 2004). Similarly, according to Sutton and Wheatley (2003), most of the US teachers consider directive and interactive processes initiated by the teacher as particularly effective when positive emotions are expressed, while the display of negative emotions is rated as (more) ineffective by inservice teachers (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009).

Considering the numerous advantageous implications of a successful emotion regulation in the educational practice and given the fact, that teachers consider successful emotion regulation techniques as extremely important (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), it is

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surprising that there is a lack of studies examining influential factors, the effects of different strategies of emotion regulation, and interventions fostering adaptive strategies in the context of classroom interactions. Drawing on findings from research on emotion regulation, it can be assumed that the regulation strategy of reappraisal of emotions (e.g., changing the way one thinks about a potentially emotion-eliciting situation caused by a repeatedly disturbing student) is more effective with regard to instruction, classroom management, and the engagement of students in classroom processes than the suppression of emotions (Sutton et al., 2009). At the same time, suppression (changing the way one responds behaviorally, see John & Gross, 2004) is not the most adaptive, but a very common strategy for reacting to emotionally challenging situations (Gross, 2002; John & Gross, 2004).

The current experimental study investigates, whether preservice teachers would use the emotion regulation strategy of reappraisal more often if they were presented with additional information on the critical situation, that is, a student's perspective of a severe classroom disruption. We hypothesize that this experimental condition—as a potential opportunity to construct a new point of view on the emotion eliciting situation—leads to a cognitive change in terms of a significant improvement in the use of reappraisal in an experimental group as compared to a control group (in which participants have not been provided with the student perspective). By contrast and in order to cross-validate our results (regarding the experimental manipulation, which was only supposed to be effective on the induction of reappraisal), we further tested the assumption that the participants of the study would also use suppression—but the frequency with which this regulation style was used did not differ between the experimental group and the control group—after having been confronted with severely disrupted classroom scenarios.

1.1. Emotion regulation in the context of teaching and learning

On a daily basis teachers work in an emotionally charged atmosphere and are more frequently confronted with emotional demands than members of most other professions (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). For instance, in the professional practice of schools, teachers often pointedly show calmness (expressed positive emotion), despite actually experiencing feelings of anger (experienced negative emotion), for example in the face of lacking student participation. As a consequence, teachers might experience emotional dissonance (Philipp, 2010; Sieland, 2008). Researchers have different notions about emotional dissonance. Some define emotional dissonance as a state of tension that creates the desire in people to resolve, reduce, or regulate this tension via adaptive emotion regulation (Krause, Philipp, Bader, & Schüpbach, 2008; Rubin, Tardino, Daus, & Munz, 2005; Zapf, 2002). Other researchers view it as the result of emotion regulation (Nerdinger & Röper, 1999; Van Dijk & Brown, 2006). In the current paper, we conceptualize emotional dissonance as an initial state which creates “psychological discomfort that individuals are motivated to reduce” (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 194), and which necessitates a regulation of the teacher's emotions by the teacher. Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, and Isic (1999) demonstrated that job satisfaction is significantly negatively related to the experiencing of emotional dissonance. Thus, for teachers it is crucial to successfully regulate emotional dissonance in their everyday work. However, not every type of regulation strategy is suited to resolve emotional dissonance. There are regulation strategies which maintain the feeling of emotional dissonance (see next paragraph).

According to the process model of emotion regulation (Gross & John, 2003), individuals, who expect an emotionally difficult situation and emotional dissonance, first assess if this situation could

be avoided. It is difficult for teachers to avoid problematic situations in the context of teaching and learning and it would require drastic and not very constructive measures. Teachers can choose to ignore severe disruptions and focus only on students who engage in the lesson, or they may avoid teaching difficult classes by staying at home at the concerned days. In order to ensure high teaching efficacy and job satisfaction, teachers need strategies to adequately regulate unpleasant emotions while retaining the ability to react to the situation. Gross and John (2003) differentiate between five emotion regulatory processes (situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change and response modulation; for definitions, see Gross, 1998, pp. 271–299). These five processes are then further divided into processes which are employed early (e.g., reappraisal, a form of cognitive change) and processes which are employed late (e.g., suppression, a form of response modulation). In the context of the emotion generating process they are labeled antecedent-focused vs. response-focused strategies (see also Gross, 1998). That means, the ability to reappraise a negative emotional situation is a strategy with an early onset in the emotional processing—people use it before a full-blown emotional response has been triggered—while suppression has a later onset, when a person has fully experienced the emotional arousal. Thus, suppression is not helpful for reducing emotional dissonance—quite the opposite—suppression maintains emotional dissonance. The current study primarily focuses on these two specific emotion regulation strategies—reappraisal (antecedent-focused) and suppression (response-focused).

1.2. Reappraisal and suppression

Reappraisal and suppression are the two most studied (Gross, 2002; John & Gross, 2004) and “commonly used strategies for down-regulating emotion” (Gross, 2002, p. 281). Reappraisal is defined as a cognitive change, which is formed by reinterpreting the negative emotional stimulus that allows the involved person to stay open-minded, discover positive aspects, and find options to act. Thus, the emotional impact of a situation can be changed in a positive way and decreased by constructing a new (more objective) perspective (Carson, 2007; Gross & John, 2003; Gross, 2002; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012). Suppression is defined as an inhibition of the inner (negative) feelings by showing a different (positive or neutral) one. “Suppression decreases behavioral expression, but fails to decrease emotion experience, and actually impairs memory” (Gross, 2002, p. 281).

Theoretical insights show that reappraisal is a more adaptive and effective strategy than suppression. Suppression is not helpful for decreasing negative thoughts and feelings, moreover it impairs the cognitive performance of the involved person (Richards & Gross, 1999). In addition, this regulation style leads to a decrease of positive emotions, psychological well-being, and has a negative impact on social interactions. Furthermore, the constant suppression of emotions is linked to negative long-term effects, like emotional exhaustion, or even burnout (Carson, 2007). In contrast, reappraisal is more useful for regulating aversive emotions, because cognitive change is associated with significantly more positive emotions, a reduction in negative emotions, a greater psychological well-being, and an increased interpersonal functioning (Gross & John, 2003). Moreover, Butler et al. (2003) showed that interacting with someone who is using suppression is much more stressful for the counterpart than interacting with someone who is using reappraisal.

Gross and John (2003) showed that people have a habitual preference and can be divided into being primarily reappraisers or suppressors, which is associated with different consequences in terms of affect, relationships, and well-being. For instance,

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