



Emotion regulation in teachers: The “why” and “how”

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We used examined teachers' emotion regulation goals and strategies.
- Teachers reported instrumental as well as hedonic emotion regulation goals.
- Teachers mainly reported regulating both their own and their students' emotions.
- Most regulation attempts were to down regulate negative emotions.
- Teachers most frequently used the response modulation strategy of suppression.

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ABSTRACT

We used the process model of emotion regulation to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' emotion regulation goals and strategies. Fifty-six teachers reported why and how they regulate emotions while in the classroom. Findings indicated that teachers have instrumental and hedonic emotion regulation goals, are focused on regulating both their own and their students' emotions, and are typically attempting to decrease negative emotions. Findings showed that teachers use a variety of strategies to regulate emotions; however, the response modulation strategy of suppression was the most frequently reported strategy. Implications for teachers, teacher education programs, and future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Teachers' emotions are related to a variety of important teaching-related outcomes, including teachers' classroom effectiveness (Sutton, 2005), their well-being and health (Chang, 2013; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015), and student emotions and motivation (Becker, Goetz, Morger, & Ranellucci, 2014; van Doorn, van Kleef, & van der Pligt, 2014). Importantly, teachers often exert some level of control over their emotions via emotion regulation (Sutton, 2004; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015), which may be defined as 'the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions' (Gross, 1999, p. 275). As with other types of self-control, emotions are regulated to achieve various goals, and different strategies may be used to achieve these goals. To date, there remains considerable

uncertainty as to *why* and *how* teachers regulate their emotions while in the classroom. Existing research on how teachers modify their emotions has predominately focused on teachers use of the emotional labour strategies of deep acting – the act of internalizing the desired emotion so that the expressed emotion matches the felt emotion (Grandey, 2000), and surface acting – the act of expressing an unfelt emotion (Grandey, 2000; e.g., Hülshager, Lang, & Maier, 2010; Näring, Briet, & Brouwers, 2006; Näring, Vlerick, & Van de Ven, 2011; Philipp & Schüpbach, 2010; Yin, 2015). While this research has provided valuable insight in how regulating emotions is related to teachers' well-being, it is limited in that it only focuses on two types of strategies. Our aim was to use the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 2015) as a framework to examine teachers use of a wider range of regulation strategies as well as their goals for regulating their classroom emotions.

1.1. Teachers' emotion regulation goals

An essential aspect of emotion regulation is the activation of a goal to influence the emotion (Gross, 1998b, 2015). This goal can be

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to change the emotion so that one feels positive rather than negative emotions, which is referred to as a hedonic goal, such as regulating anger because it is often unpleasant to feel angry. The goal could also be to change the emotion in order to meet another important goal, which is referred to as an instrumental goal, such as regulating anger to effectively make one's point in a discussion. Furthermore, the goal can be to influence one's own emotions (intrinsic emotion regulation) or the emotions of another person (extrinsic emotion regulation), and it can entail increasing or decreasing positive or negative emotions (Gross, 2015). Outside the classroom, individuals often report trying to decrease their negative emotions and increase their positive emotions (Gross, Richards, & John, 2006; Quoidbach, Berry, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2010). However, individuals' goals for regulating their emotions are multifaceted and can be any combination of the above goals. For example, an individual can have an intrinsic emotion regulation goal to increase his or her positive emotions for instrumental purposes. Alternatively, an individual can have an extrinsic emotion regulation goal to decrease someone else's negative emotions for hedonic purposes.

1.1.1. Hedonic versus instrumental

Prior research on teachers' emotion regulation goals has predominantly focused on teachers' instrumental goals for regulating their emotions. This research has found that teachers typically regulate their emotions to improve their teaching effectiveness (Sutton, 2004; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). This is because most teachers view positive emotions as fostering their teaching effectiveness and negative emotions as impeding their teaching effectiveness (Sutton et al., 2009). Being perceived as professional is another instrumental goal of teachers for regulating their emotions (Sutton, 2004). This instrumental goal is connected to teachers' beliefs that a modest amount of emotions is appropriate in the classroom. Previous research has largely neglected the possibility that in addition to instrumental goals, teachers may have hedonic goals for regulating emotions. Teachers may regulate their own or their students' emotions because they want a certain emotion to be (not to be) felt. That is, teachers may at times partake in intrinsic or extrinsic emotion regulation not for utility purposes but rather for the sake of a certain emotion being felt.

1.1.2. Intrinsic versus extrinsic

Both teachers and students experience and express a multitude of emotions while in the classroom. It is often the responsibility of the teacher to direct and establish the emotional climate of the classroom. In order to establish an optimal emotional climate, teachers may wish to regulate their own emotions (i.e., intrinsic regulation) or the emotions of their students (i.e., extrinsic regulation). It could very well be that one emotion regulation action serves both intrinsic and extrinsic regulation functions. For a teacher, this could be redirecting a disruptive student's attention to an interesting aspect of an assignment to decrease the student's task-related boredom and prevent oneself from being annoyed and snapping at the student for disturbing the class. It could also be that teachers consciously regulate their emotions as a means of influencing their students' emotions. For example, they may choose to teach in an animated and excited manner to increase their students' interest in the learning material. So far, research has focused on teachers' intrinsic rather than extrinsic emotion regulation (cf. Chang, 2009; Sutton, 2004; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015); however, to meet their instrumental emotion regulation goals, teachers may need to regulate their students' emotions. Teachers may also regulate their students' emotions because they would like for their students to experience positive rather than negative emotions, that is they might have a hedonic goal for regulating their students emotions.

1.1.3. Decrease versus increase emotion

Previous research has found that teachers report trying to up- and down-regulate positive and negative emotions (Taxer & Frenzel, 2015); however, teachers particularly seek to down-regulate negative emotions, such as anger, and up-regulate positive emotions, such as happiness (cf. Sutton, 2004; Sutton et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there are certain situations that might call for teachers to up-regulate their anger to, for example, maintain classroom order (Averill, 1982), or to down-regulate their amusement at a student's inappropriate but funny joke. The down-regulation of positive emotions and the up-regulation of negative emotions is referred to as counterhedonic regulation and often serves instrumental purposes (Netzer, Van Kleef, & Tamir, 2015; Tamir, 2009). For example, a teacher may want to increase a student's feelings of guilt about their recent misbehaviour to discourage the student from repeating the behaviour in the future. In addition to changing the intensity of an emotion, teachers may also regulate the quality of their emotions. That is, teachers may at times need to change their emotional response from negative to positive or positive to negative. For example, when disciplining students for comments the teacher finds funny but are at the expense of another student, a teacher may need to mask their amusement with anger.

1.2. Emotion regulation strategies

Emotion regulation goals are achieved using emotion regulation strategies. The process model of emotion regulation proposes five families of emotions regulation strategies, which include situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation (Gross, 1998b, 2015). Because these strategies intervene at different points in the emotion-generative process, these strategies result in different immediate and long-term social, cognitive, and affective consequences (Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012).

1.2.1. Situation selection

Situation selection refers to selecting situations based on the anticipation of experiencing certain emotions in a situation (Gross, 2015). Situations can be approached or avoided based on an individual's expectation of experiencing a desirable or undesirable emotion in any given situation. Situation selection is the most forward looking strategy because it happens before any emotion has been generated. This strategy is about predicting which emotions are likely to be experienced in any situation, which given the complexity of situations is probably difficult to accurately judge. Nevertheless, situation selection has been linked to making successful life changes and to orchestrating positive life experiences (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999; Jacobson, Martell, & Dimidjian, 2001; Kober & Bolling, 2014). Teachers usage of situation selection to regulate classroom emotions has, to our knowledge, never been examined. However, we propose that situation selection could be used when planning lessons in an attempt to avoid or enhance certain emotions either in the self or in students or for constructing classroom situations that are likely to decrease the likelihood of student misbehaviour.

1.2.2. Situation modification

Situation modification refers to actively changing a situation in order to alter its emotional impact (Gross, 2015). Depending on the extent to which a situation is modified, it could result in a new situation being created. Thus, it can be difficult to clearly differentiate modifying from selecting situations. Within the present work, we defined instances where teachers anticipated either themselves or their students' emotional experiences and selected a

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