



Spiral effects of teachers' emotions and emotion regulation strategies: Evidence from a daily diary study

Shiri Lavy*, Ron Eshet

^a University of Haifa, Abba Khoushy Ave 199, Haifa, 3498838, Israel

HIGHLIGHTS

- Daily dynamics of teachers' emotional experiences are crucial to their work.
- Results revealed spiral effects of teachers' negative emotions and surface acting.
- Teachers' positive emotions triggered a positive spiral of decreased surface acting.
- The negative and positive spirals affected teachers' burnout and job satisfaction.
- The results highlight the importance of processing teachers' negative emotions.

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ABSTRACT

Based on the "broaden and build" theory of positive emotions, we explored daily dynamics of teachers' emotions and their regulation, expecting positive emotions to promote teachers' use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies, and trigger upward spirals leading to further use of these strategies and increased teacher well-being. Negative emotions were expected to have opposite effects. Sixty-two teachers completed daily measures of emotions, emotion regulation, burnout, and job satisfaction during 10 workdays. Results supported direct and cyclic effects of surface acting, indicated positive effects of deep acting, and suggested that emotion regulation strategies underlie effects of emotions on satisfaction and burnout.

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1. Introduction

Teaching is one of the most emotionally loaded occupations (Johnson et al., 2005). Teachers' work is filled with emotions, which arise throughout the workday in interactions with students, parents, and colleagues (Hargreaves, 2000; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). This emotional load is one of the most important predictors of burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Farber, 1991; Friedman, 2000), which is a crucial problem of teachers, whose burnout rates (and resulting dropout rates) are very high (De Heus & Diekstra, 1999; Ingersoll, 2003; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). In this context, emotion regulation—the intentional modification of the

experience or expression of emotions (Gross, 1998; Oplatka, 2009; Zembylas, 2005)—is one of the most important tasks of educators, required for their professional functioning and effectiveness, as well as for their subjective sense of efficacy and psychological well-being (Oplatka, 2009; Sutton, 2004; Yin & Lee, 2012; Yin, Huang, & Lee, 2017). Teachers assert that effective emotion regulation promotes their achievement of pedagogical goals and facilitates healthy, strong, effective relationships with their students, which in turn promote educational processes (Hargreaves, 2000; Sutton, 2004). Despite the dominant role of emotion regulation in teachers' work (e.g., Hargreaves, 2000), research on the subject is limited, especially quantitative research (e.g., Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015). As a result, teachers' emotions and emotion regulation often receive limited attention in teacher education, policy, and reforms (Hargreaves, 2000, 2013; O'Connor, 2008; Uitto et al., 2015).

The present research aims to address the need for further

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: shirilavy@gmail.com (S. Lavy), Ron.eshet@gmail.com (R. Eshet).

quantitative examination of teachers' emotion regulation processes and seeks to broaden our understanding of these processes' antecedents and effects, including their role in mitigating (or enhancing) teacher burnout and job satisfaction. Based on relevant literature (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001, 2013), the present research focuses on positive and negative emotions as potential antecedents of teachers' use of certain adaptive and maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, which can be intentionally modified. It further suggests spiral effects of teachers' emotion regulation strategies on their emotions, as well as on their burnout and job satisfaction. The research includes a daily diary survey, which enables the exploration of daily dynamics of emotions and their regulation strategies, while assessing time precedence of their daily changes, and is thus often used to infer causal effects of one variable on the other (e.g., Author et al., 2014; Author et al., 2016; Author et al., 2013; Sonnentag & Starzyk, 2015; West & Hepworth, 1991). To the best of our knowledge, this will be the first quantitative, integrative study of the daily dynamics of teachers' emotions, emotion regulation strategies (including surface acting and deep acting), and teachers' burnout. As such, it can offer important insights about daily emotion regulation processes to researchers, teachers, teacher educators, school counselors, and principals.

1.1. The nature of positive and negative emotions

Emotions comprise sequences of physiological, psychological, and behavioral responses, which arise when individuals need to evaluate a situation that encompasses an opportunity or a challenge (Gross, 1998). They play a crucial role in decision making (Damasio, 1994) and in preparing individuals for responding to events in the world (Fridja, 1986). More specifically, emotions are created in a process of appraising the meaning of an event (Gross, 1998). When the event is positively appraised, the resulting emotion is positive; when the event is negatively appraised, the resulting emotion is negative (Lazarus, 1991). Positive and negative emotions have different effects, and both can be beneficial (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Tamir & Ford, 2012). Negative emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, frustration) decrease the thought-action repertoire, lead to a single action possibility (Fredrickson, 2001, 2013), and prompt the arousal of several systems related to the autonomic nervous system (e.g., heart and vascular systems; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Kreibig, 2010). When facing immediate danger, minimizing the response repertoire to a single response and increasing physiological arousal leads to prompt action, which can save a person's life (Fredrickson, 2001; Levenson, 1988). Positive emotions, on the other hand, as suggested in Fredrickson's (2001) "broaden and build theory", broaden individuals' perception of the world and can have long-term effects on these perceptions, broadening the thought-action repertoire and increasing restorative physiological and psychological ability (Tice, Baumeister, Shmueli, & Muraven, 2007; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004). Thus, positive emotions increase individuals' ability to create and develop new responses and build resources, which can further increase their positive emotions in the future and build their psychological resilience (Fredrickson, 2001, 2013).

Over prolonged time periods, chronic experiences of negative emotions have been associated with physiological and psychological ailments, such as heart disease (Engbretson, Matthews, & Scheier, 1989), cancer (Gross, 1989), and emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). At work, such prolonged experiences of negative emotions impair employees' performance and increase their turnover intentions (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). On the other hand, positive emotions have been associated with better health (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001; Fredrickson &

Levenson, 1998) and better coping (e.g., Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002) in life, and with increased performance (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), more organizational citizenship behavior (Author et al., 2016; Author et al., 2016), and less withdrawal behaviors and turnover intentions at work (see meta-analysis of Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

1.2. Emotion regulation strategies: Deep and surface acting

Several jobs in modern organizations require expressing certain emotions and avoiding the expression of other emotions in order to pursue job and organizational goals. Emotion regulation at work, referring to the process by which individuals intentionally regulate the time or nature of their experiences or expressions of emotions in order to obtain short- or long-term job goals (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998), has also been called *emotional labor* (when this emotion regulation is motivated by external factors such as managerial demands) and *emotional work* (when motivated by internal factors; Callahan & McCollum, 2002; Hochschild, 1983). Both terms have been used in reference to teachers' work (see Oplatka, 2009), and thus here we have chosen to use the more basic term *emotion regulation* (e.g., Yin et al., 2017). Emotion regulation processes are crucial to teachers' work, as a core component of educational work includes expressing care, empathy, and support for students and exhibiting appropriate emotions during teaching and interpersonal interactions with students (Maysel, 2016; Oplatka, 2009; Sutton & Harper, 2009). Teachers' ability to effectively regulate their emotions is closely linked with students' learning (Fried, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and to teachers' sense of efficacy (Yin et al., 2017).

Emotion regulation processes can include *deep acting*—a deliberate change of the *experienced* emotion through regulating the precursors of the emotions. Such change can occur, for example, when one changes the evaluation of the event as negative or positive, while reappraising the event or situation – thinking about it again while considering alternative appraisals/evaluations, which can lead to other emotions. Emotion management processes can also comprise *surface acting*—a mere change of the *expressed* emotion without changing the felt or experienced emotion (i.e., "faking in bad faith"; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, p. 32) (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Both deep and surface acting aim to result in similar emotional expression, congruent with the job goals (Hochschild, 1983). Additional emotion regulation strategies, which have been recently suggested, allow adaptive integration (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009), and/or genuine expression (Yin & Lee, 2012) of the felt emotions. Although these strategies seem to be interesting and effective (at least to a certain degree), studies on these strategies are more limited, and they were not included in the present research, which focused on the more broadly studied strategies—deep acting and surface acting.

Although deep acting and surface acting seem to have similar end goals—to yield an emotional expression congruent with the job requirements (Hochschild, 1983), they differ in their effectiveness and in their physiological and mental costs. Deep acting is typically considered more adaptive, because it has been associated with decreased teacher burnout (Chang, 2013) and exhaustion (Philipp & Schupbach, 2010) and with an increased sense of self-efficacy (Yin et al., 2017) and accomplishment (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010). Furthermore, teachers' subjective reappraisal of their students' behaviors has been shown to mediate the associations of students' behavior, motivation, and discipline with teacher burnout, suggesting that specific kinds of appraisals may be key in buffering the exhausting effects of students' misbehavior (Becker, Keller, Goetz, Frenzel, & Taxer, 2015; Chang, 2013). Surface acting, on the other hand, is typically considered

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