



# Understanding teacher emotions: The development of a teacher emotion inventory



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- A teacher emotion inventory with five factors is developed.
- It is reported Joy as the most frequently experienced emotion, Love as the least frequently experienced emotion.
- Most pleasant emotions are related to classroom and collegial interactions.
- Most unpleasant ones are associated with educational policies, changes, and imbalance of teachers' lives.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emotions experienced by primary teachers in Hong Kong and Mainland China schools and develops a Teacher Emotion Inventory (TEI). Through surveying 254 teachers in a pilot study and 1830 teachers in the main study, a 5-factor TEI (i.e., Joy, Love, Sadness, Anger, and Fear) is identified using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. This model portrays primary teachers enjoying positive interactions with students and colleagues, recognition from school, family and public, but experiencing negative emotions in relation to unfair treatment, competition among colleagues, imbalance of work lives, and pressure from society, policy, and educational change.

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## 1. Introduction

In the research field of teaching improvement, interest has been continuously directed towards investigating the so-called 'rational' factors (e.g., teacher knowledge, skills, and capacities) that affect teaching practices in different contexts (Campbell, Kriakides, Muijs, & Robinson, 2004; Creemers & Kyriakides, 2008; Kington, Sammons, Day, & Regan, 2011; Marzano, 2007; Sammons et al., 2008; Teddlie, Creemers, Kyriakides, Muijs, & Yu, 2006). However, important as these rational and fundamental aspects are, teacher emotions have often been ignored or underplayed (Crawford, 2011; Day, 2011; Hargreaves, 2001; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) in teaching improvement initiatives.

Emotions are at the heart of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998). Schutz and Lanehart (2002) argue that "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. 67). Schools and classrooms are complex emotional arenas where teachers constantly experience emotional demands from students, colleagues, parents and leaders (Cross & Hong, 2012; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). To cope with these emotional demands, teachers are required to manage their emotions competently in order to successfully deliver teaching and smoothly interact with people around them (Lee & Yin, 2011). This need is particularly apparent during times of continuous educational reform since emotions always run high in schools during change (Day, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). The situation is aggravated by the vulnerability of teachers associated with reforms (Kelchtermans, 2005) and their resistance to change, which inevitably triggers emotions (Bahia, Freire, Amaral, & Estrela, 2013; Van Veen & Slegers, 2006). Nowadays, continuous educational reforms are being implemented in Hong Kong and Mainland China (Cheng, 2009). Teachers in Hong Kong and Mainland China

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are experiencing a paradigm shift into more learner-oriented teaching and greater teacher accountability (Cheng & Mok, 2008; National Assessment of Educational Quality, 2008). These educational reforms in Hong Kong and Mainland China have unfortunately created high pressure and anxiety among teachers and exhausted their energy and time rather than enhancing teaching and learning in order to achieve teaching improvement (Cheng, 2009; Lee & Yin, 2011). This situation highlights the relevance of involving teacher emotions in teaching improvement initiatives in schools in Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Research on teacher emotions in education has warranted attention since the late 1990s (Hargreaves, 1998; Marshak, 1996) and has attracted increased attention in recent years. This is motivated by the realization that teacher emotions influence teacher behavior (Becker, Goetz, Morger, & Ranellucci, 2014; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), teaching (Gong, Chai, Duan, Zhong, & Jiao, 2013; Saunders, 2013; Trigweel, 2012), professional identity (Lee, Huang, Law, & Wang, 2013), teachers' lives (Hargreaves, 2005; Schutz, 2014; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015), student behavior and learning (Brackett, Floman, Ashton-James, Cherkasskiy, & Salovey, 2013; Chang, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and educational change (Day, 2011; Leithwood & Beatty, 2007). However, few studies on teacher emotions have taken place in Hong Kong and Mainland China.

Although previous research on teacher emotions has made substantial progress, it has most frequently used semi-structured interviews (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Examples of such studies, including Day and Leitch (2001), Van Veen and Slegers (2006), and Casey and Morrow (2004), Zembylas (2005a), Cross and Hong (2012), and Bahia et al. (2013). Certainly this methodology is useful, but it only captures teachers' reflections on past emotional experiences rather than examining their moment by moment experience and the findings cannot be generalized beyond those interviewed. Therefore, Stecher and Borko (2002) advocated using a combination of quantitative surveys, which can be used to make generalizations, and in-depth qualitative techniques that bring these generalizations to life and illuminate survey findings (Scott & Sutton, 2009; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). However, many such studies are based on research in social psychology and rely on experiments with college and university students (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; Eaton & Funder, 2001; Larson, Raffaelli, Richards, Ham, & Jewell, 1990; Torquati & Raffaelli, 2004), but few focus on school teachers.

Therefore, this study addresses the following issues on the teacher emotion literature: (1) there is insufficient research on teacher emotion at the school level, especially in the Hong Kong and Mainland China contexts; (2) teachers in both places are facing high pressure during school change; (3) current research on teacher emotion over-emphasizes on the 'technical' dimensions of teaching to the detriment of its 'emotive' dimensions; (4) current research is dominated by qualitative research design and lacks of studies with a quantitative and/or mixed-method research design.

This study primarily aims at exploring how school teachers perceive their emotions in schools of Hong Kong and Mainland China. A second aim is to develop and validate a Teacher Emotion Inventory (TEI) using a pilot quantitative study and a main quantitative study based on a prior qualitative study. The study offers potential contributions to the literature and practice of teacher emotions and teaching improvement. In addition, this study develops the first quantitative instrument on teacher emotion in Chinese contexts which may be adopted in teacher emotion studies in the similar context but also provide a reference for developing a Teacher Emotion Inventory in other contexts. Please note that comparison between teachers from Hong Kong and Mainland

China was not an aim of this paper, but would present in a companion paper.

## 2. Teacher emotions

### 2.1. Understanding emotion and teacher emotion

Emotion is a mysterious human phenomenon that has puzzled us for centuries. Emotions comprise mostly dynamic qualities since they are fundamentally about movement (Hopfl & Linstead, 1993). Schutz, Hong, Cross, and Osbon (2006) define emotions as "socially constructed, personally enacted ways of being that emerge from conscious and/or unconscious judgments regarding perceived successes at attaining goals or maintaining standards or beliefs during transactions as part of social-historical contexts" (p. 344). This definition of emotions is used in this study as it is grounded in the assumption that teacher emotional experiences not only occur in individual's psychological activities, but also involve the emotional feelings of others and interactions with the personal, professional, and social environment (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008). Farouk (2012) states that teacher emotions comprise individual teacher's dynamic mental state level, ability of emotional self-regulation and response to exterior stimuli, and an approach of synthesis. Teacher emotions are not "internalized sensations that remain inert within the confines of their bodies but are integral to the ways in which they relate to and interact with their students, colleagues and parents" (Farouk, 2012, p. 491). Therefore, teacher emotions are relational with the environment, which means teacher emotions do not exist within an individual or environment independently, rather they involve person-environment transactions (Schutz et al., 2006).

### 2.2. Classification of emotions

Emotions have been categorized in many ways which could be summarized into dichotomous, multiple, and dimensional categories. The dichotomous classification of teacher emotions into positive and negative is common in the literature (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987; Diener, 1999; Larson et al., 1990; Torquati & Raffaelli, 2004; Watson & Clark, 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985) though this is claimed to narrow down the nature of emotions or to be too straight-forward (Kristjánsson, 2007; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Positive emotions generally include joy, satisfaction, pride and excitement, and negative emotions include anger, frustration, anxiety and sadness (Hargreaves, 1998; Kristjánsson, 2007; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). This dichotomous category has formed a fundamental basis for the latter research on emotion classification. In a more complex multiple categorization, Plutchik and Kellerman (1980) propose the wheel system to identify different human emotions. The diameter level represents how strong each emotion is while the whole circle indicates similarities among different emotions. In total, eight sections characterize eight basic emotions, set out as four pairs of opposites. Gross and Barrett (2011) theorize there are four major perspectives of emotions and place them into an emotion continuum which encompasses basic emotions, appraisal, psychological construction, and social construction from left to right.

Parrott (2001) describes a comprehensive list that organizes emotions into a dimensional tree structure where basic emotions are divided into secondary emotions, which are in turn subdivided into tertiary ones. Six primary emotions are included in the first level, namely love, joy, surprise, anger, sadness and fear. The second level contains more emotions within each primary emotion group. Love, for example, is followed by affection, lust, longing, cheerfulness as secondary emotions. Each emotional feeling from the

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