

## What can English Teachers Tell Us about the Emotional Demands of their Work?

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### KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Teachers and teacher educators should reflect on the ways in which their personal values, beliefs, and emotions influence what they teach and how they teach.
2. School leaders and policymakers should acknowledge the kinds of emotional work demanded of English language and literature teachers, particularly the emotional labours involved with values education, culturally responsive teaching, and the marking of students' essays.
3. Teacher education pedagogies should incorporate case-based learning, where teachers read, write, and reflect on their own narratives of experience.

### BACKGROUND

Expert teaching involves a complex interweaving of cognitive and affective competencies. Accordingly, previous studies of teaching practice and teacher identity have pointed to the ways in which pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) and personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) are mutually implicated. How these connections play out in the context of English teaching remains under-researched, particularly in the Singapore context. In this study, we sought to address this question by relying on the potential of teacher narratives to illuminate the complexity of teachers' identities, in particular, their beliefs, values, and attitudes.

### FOCUS OF STUDY

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of English Language, English Literature, and General Paper teachers from a range of secondary schools and junior colleges in Singapore. Through interviews and focus groups, the study elicited teachers' accounts of their personal beliefs and practices, articulated through narrative accounts, belief statements, and analytic reflections. This qualitative data reflected previous scholarship on the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching in general, while drawing attention in particular to the experiential, value-laden, and emotionally charged nature of English teachers' work.

### KEY FINDINGS

- The pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of English teachers is inextricable from their *personal practical knowledge* (PPK). The latter embodies “a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing life's educational situations” (Connelly & Clandinin, p. 85).
- The pedagogical practices of English Language, Literature, and General Paper—such as selecting and analysing rich texts, and interacting with students to facilitate critical thinking and personal responses—frequently involve complex emotional work.
- English teachers' emotional work may be quantitatively and qualitatively different from that experienced by teachers of other subjects. Such emotional experiences are

compounded by the subject's value-laden content, the need for culturally responsive pedagogies, and the stresses of grading essays.

- Encourage further research on the complex interrelationships between PCK and PPK in other disciplines.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

### Implications for Practice

- School leaders can further support teachers of English Language, Literature, and General Paper by:
  - a. Honouring English teachers' emotional investments in their pedagogical aims and practices, which go beyond care and concern for students' examination success;
  - b. Reducing or moderating the quantitative workload of English teachers in proportion to the type of assignments (particularly essays) they have to mark;
  - c. Developing whole-school English curricula, where different subject teachers share the responsibility of teaching students the skills of writing, speaking, and reading.
- Narrative approaches to teacher professional development (e.g., case-based teaching, journal-writing, analysis of fictional narratives) can develop teachers' reflective practice.

### Implications for Policy and Research

- Conceptualise "English pedagogy" more broadly to include the relational, emotional, and ethical practices of intercultural communicative competence, values education, and emotional labor.
- Consider how teachers' emotional labour varies quantitatively and qualitatively across different subjects/disciplines, so as to develop policies that can support the workload of English teachers.

### Proposed Follow-up Activities

- Dialogue with school leaders and ministry officials about ways to support the emotional work of English teachers within the organisational, economic, and ideological constraints of existing policies and practices.
- Incorporate narrative inquiry as a pedagogical tool within pre-service and in-service professional development programs.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participants included a total of 43 secondary school English teachers from a range of government, autonomous, and independent secondary schools. These English teachers included current and former English Language, Literature, and General Paper teachers.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 43 teachers were conducted in this qualitative study. Principles of narrative inquiry were applied to the elicitation and analysis of interview data.

## REFERENCES

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