

MORAL EMOTIONS AND ACADEMIC TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

Emotion and moral are arguably closely related phenomena in academic life. The everyday life of students' learning and teachers' teaching at universities is not only comprised of coming to know a subject but of coming to feel and evaluate situations in significant ways. To experience an emotion means to evaluate something and evaluation might be a moral enterprise. University teaching is a moral enterprise where the teacher regulates professional norms, embodies values and solves ethical conflicts. Since Aristotle there has been an emphasis that teachers and students in academia should cultivate moral sensibilities. Empirical educational research has found that academic learning is an affective enterprise relating to the development of student interests, motivation, emotional socialization, and academic achievement (Eynde & Turner 2006; Gungor et al., 2007; Pekrun 2006). More theoretical or philosophically informed research has pointed to the social constructionist nature of emotions and their close links with a society's moral order (Averill, 1982; Harré, 1986).

These connections between learning, emotion and moral, are clearly evident in what is termed the moral emotions. Examples of moral emotions include positive emotions like compassion, elevation but also negative emotions like envy, shame, contempt or hatred. Moral emotions can be defined as emotions "that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (Haidt, 2003, p. 276). Thus moral emotions can function as moral orientation guides (Brinkmann & Musaeus, 2012). There is a paucity of research on moral emotions and academic teaching and learning. This paper investigates the nexus of moral and emotion in university teaching and learning.

Focus: Moral emotions and academic learning

A growing higher education literature has addressed the issue of holistic development of students (Barnett & Maxwell, 2008; Beaty & Henry, 2007; Nixon, 2009). This is clearly nothing new. According to influential learning theorists like Vygotsky and Dewey, learning is an activity that integrates both

thinking and affect. But while a holistic account of academic learning is imbued in the notion of moral emotions it is not clear how an educational theory explicates the notions of these interrelationships.

The answer is not that universities should offer general courses in moral education. The point is that values and ethical judgment are important in all professional disciplines ranging from medicine, law, business, psychology etc. But do we have answers as to how higher education shall facilitate student and teacher emotion regulation as part of the learning process? In order to answer this question, this paper will investigate moral emotions in the context of university students' learning and implications for teaching. Whether students behave responsibly, are fair, act with empathy etc. depends in large measure upon moral emotions. Empathy for instance – the awareness of the feelings and behavior of another person and the ability to respond to this person in an adequate way – is an important goal of professionalism.

Universities around the world, whether state, city or private, arguably depend on moral orders informing policies, curriculum and everyday interactions. These interconnections need to be spelled out with empirical examples and theoretical depth. There are educational implications to be drawn from the interconnections between emotion and moral. There is a plethora of potentially relevant research that point to these interrelated phenomena in the contest of academic teaching and learning. What implications can be drawn from the above disparate strands of empirical educational research on emotion on the one hand and moral psychology and philosophy on the other? How are emotion and moral sensibility developed in today's university classrooms, laboratories, study groups etc.? Can and should moral sensibilities be trained at the expense of learning subject matter? When uncovering what norms and values govern the practices of university teaching and learning, we need to delineate the connection between norms and emotion.

This paper will look at the study of emotions as the study of the ways teachers and learners talk about emotions and regulate the display and experience of emotions. The paper will draw its examples mainly from medical education. When medical students engage in becoming doctors they not only acquire concepts about biomedicine but their studying and interacting with medical participants lead then on a trajectory to becoming persons who feel and enact moral emotions as part of becoming a doctor. All students (we hope) develop into professionals with new motives, emotions, interests etc. as a result of

their experiences with university. Feeling something, such as joy at helping a patient, is not only an individual sensation, but also an interpersonal sign to others as well as a cultural phenomenon about what is valued in a community of practice. University students develop values, beliefs, norms, opinions, attitudes that derive from – and in return influence- teaching. How should moral emotions at the university be studied? This paper looks at the embodied, ordered and normative aspects of how moral emotions are enacted in the university context. Examples are given where moral emotions are not simply a reaction to learning and teaching situations, but ways of *understanding* the event. The paper argues that the analytic distinction between cognition and emotion must be questioned particularly when we study university teaching and learning, where the performativity of emotions cut through a dichotomy between either knowing or feeling.

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