

### **T3.1 Beaumaris 2 Friday 7 December 10.30 -11.00**

#### ***Tango Emotions In HE Teaching And Learning: HE Teaching Staff' Identities In Motion (0367)***

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#### **1. Theoretical overview**

Teaching and learning are multidimensional, complex and dialogic processes that ask for personal, cognitive, emotional, social commitments from whom is (should be) intrinsically engaged: the teacher and the student. The relationship(s) with knowledge and with others should be of transformative nature both for the student (Mezirow, 1994) and the teacher, and it is not one free of emotional load. However, when considering the transformation of HE academics' teaching mindset, the development of HE academics' identity, and the emotions involved in these processes, we find limited literature about it. Also, professional development opportunities do not emphasise the role of emotional dimensions in HE pedagogy. We can thus raise the questions: How do academics feel and emotionally experience teaching and learning? What are their anxieties and joys related to the pedagogical process? Could a systematic reflective practice (Bolton, 2010; Moon, 2000, 2005; Schön, 1983) that recognises the role of emotions in the pedagogical process lead to academics' sustainable development and transformation? How does this impact on identity development? These questions trigger this study on emotions in HE teaching and learning.

When approaching the concept – emotion – we follow a definition from social psychology:

*(...) 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 (Schutz et al., 2006, p.344).*

Emotions are not only personal, but also social; are contextual (even culturally); are not static and thus develop over a lifetime; help us to act appropriately and hence have a vital role in guiding behaviour and choice (Kringelbach & Phillips, 2014). Consequently, emotions have different functions: provide motivation and psychological energy, focus attention, and trigger action-related wishes and intentions, just to name a few (Pekrun et al., 2002; Schutz et al., 2006).

Felten and colleagues (2006) assume that emotions are *part of the thinking process*. Cotterall (2013) highlights that *emotions are fundamentally implicated in all human behaviour* (p.175). However, there are very limited spaces and times at HE where the community reflects about the impact of emotional experiences on the transformation of those at its core. Instead, emotions, feelings and affect, which in educational discourse may be used interchangeably (Dirkx, 2008) but are not synonymous (Watkins, 2011), are kept apart from the cognitive processes of knowledge acquisition, skills development, teaching and learning practices. Can we really separate these dimensions? When is it time to focus on the role of emotions for enhancing HE teaching and learning?

This proposal draws on a recent exploratory qualitative study with the main purposes of 1) exploring emotions experienced by HE academics<sup>1</sup> in teaching and learning, 2) reflecting on whether this aligns with their self-perception as HE teachers, and 3) discussing on how this may influence the development of academics' identity(ies).

## **2. Context and method**

As learning and teaching advisor, the author has been developing partnerships with members of academic staff and more broadly teaching staff, such as (Graduate) Teaching Assistants, in Schools within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Queen Mary University of London. In the last academic years (2016-2017 and 2017-2018), these partnerships were aimed at (i) understanding when and why a pedagogical practice was successful, using a cycle of research and evaluation leading to reflection, consolidation and/or change; (ii) boosting teaching practices that already existed; and (iii) providing individualised support to identify/design new teaching practices to foster students' academic success and/or to solve an identified problem.

The nuances of each partnership were adjusted according to each Colleague and/or small teaching team, and this was conducted on a voluntary basis. Partnerships started with initial conversations about teaching practices. The learning and teaching advisor observed classes from a diversity of modules. This practice was central to continue conversations, and to promote reflective moments with teaching staff (around 30) on their teaching and/or curriculum (re)design. Because these partnerships were built on trust, many teaching staff started unveiling, at different points in time, their emotions relating to teaching and learning practices, which were then recorded as field notes by the learning and teacher advisor. This was the trigger to find out more about the emotional dimensions experienced in HE Pedagogy in a more systematic way.

This exploratory qualitative study was carried out at the end of the academic year 2017-2018. The author carried out semi-structured interviews to ten (10) members of staff with whom partnerships were developed in the last two academic years. These members of staff ranged from 1 year to 39 years of HE teaching experience, and worked in diverse disciplines within Humanities and Social Sciences at a research-intensive institution in the UK.

From the interviews, we select to focus on: 1) a positive emotion experienced in relation to HE teaching and learning and related to a key episode, 2) a negative emotion experienced in relation to HE teaching and learning and related to a key episode, and 3) the way they see and perceive themselves as HE teachers. In order to achieve this we carried out interviews' content analysis, by trying to find semantic patterns in the data.

We will discuss whether emotions in relation to key episodes and their description as HE teachers are linked and/or aligned, and how this may influence the development of their own identity as HE teachers.

## **3. Findings: Preliminary reflections**

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<sup>1</sup> From now on, the expression 'teaching staff' will be used as it encompasses (Graduate) Teaching Assistants and established academics.

Relating to the way interviewees perceive themselves as HE teachers:

- Four (4) may be considered *transfer/teacher-focused* (Trigwell, 2012) or *content-focused teachers* (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011);
- Six (6) may be considered *change/student-focused* (Trigwell, 2012) or *learning-focused teachers* (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011).

Four (4) teaching staff who are *content-focused* shared positive and negative emotions in key moments related to specific tasks and/or the subject.

In what concerns to positive emotions, six *learning-focused* interviewees identified: pride (N=5), gratification (N=2), happiness (N=2), and excitement (N=2). They would mention not only one positive emotion but two. On the other hand, self-reported negative emotions were: disappointment (N=3), frustration (N=2), and sadness (N=1). In this case, they would emphasise one key negative emotion.

The key episodes that triggered negative and positive emotions are related to interactions with students and how the interviewees perceive the interactive nature of the teaching and learning processes. In fact, three (3) members of staff highlighted that the transformational nature of teaching and learning is profoundly interconnected with emotions. More details on these key episodes will be explored in the presentation.

#### 4. Final (preliminary) considerations

As already highlighted in previous studies, emotions are relational and contagious:

- *Emotion matters in higher education because education is **relational**, and emotions are central to relationships.* (our emphasis - Quinlan, 2016, p.102)
- *Students are aware of and influenced by teachers' emotions (Sutton and Wheatley 2003), **and, conversely**, teachers' emotions are influenced by students' behaviour and progress (e.g. Hargreaves 2000).* (our emphasis - Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011, p.800)

Finally, the relevance of this study is threefold: by (a) understanding and valuing *the situatedness* (Zembylas, 2003) teaching staff' emotional experiences, we are (b) creating more opportunities to become more aware about the importance of emotions in HE teaching and learning practices in order to (c) (find ways to) empower HE teaching staff and acknowledge their self-knowledge, identity construction/development, and *(self-)transformation* (Zembylas, 2003). We intend to expand on this latter aspect in the presentation. We argue that it is highly important to consider (the role of) emotions when discussing the changing shape of HE.

#### References

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