



Developing resilience in response to critical incidents in teaching

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Presentation outline

- Language teacher emotions, critical incidents and resilience
- The study
- Emotional turmoil vs. emotional victories
- Developing and embracing resilience

Teacher expertise (Underhill, 2013)

- Knowledge of the topic
- Skill with classroom methods and management
- Competence with inter- and intrapersonal relationships – Classroom psychology

Yes? No? Maybe?

Teachers engage emotionally with what is happening in class.

Teacher emotions

- Honest about own emotion experiences, but school cultures construct “*emotional rules*” (Zembylas, 2002: 196)
- Emotion labour (in teaching; Benesch, 2012, 2017): teachers need to edit out their truly felt emotions in order to project the organisationally desired ones



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Emotion labour

- **Negative: loss of one's true self** (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Zembylas, 2002, 2003)
- **Positive: often willingly undertaken for the benefit of students and for teachers' professional and personal wellbeing** (Chang & Davis, 2009; Gkonou & Miller, 2019, 2020; Hargreaves, 2000; King, 2016; Miller & Gkonou, 2018)

Critical incidents

- *“incidents happen but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation”* (Tripp, 2012: 8)
- Unanticipated events that are *“vividly remembered”* (Brookfield, 1990: 84)

Critical incidents (cont.)

a critical event as told in a story reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller. [...] and it can only ever be identified afterwards. [...] The longer the time that passes between the event and recall of the event, the more profound the effect of the event has been and the more warranted is the label critical event. [...] Over time, the mind refines and discards unnecessary detail and retains those elements that have been of changing and lasting value. [...] The event is likely to have changed their [the participants'] experience and understanding, informing future behaviour and understanding.

(Webster & Mertova, 2007: 73-74)

Critical incidents and resilience

- ✓ lived critical incidents
- ✓ effort to understand and overcome them
- ✓ (resilience)
- ✓ change in practice
- ✓ (resilience)

Teacher resilience

“...the teachers’ capacity to continue to function effectively in their professional roles in the face of adversity” (Kostoulas & Lämmerer, 2020: 89)

Complex: not just a trait characteristic but a process of psychological adaptation

The study

- Emotion-related language that teachers use in recollecting critical incidents
- Meanings/outcomes teachers assign to them
- Impact of critical incidents

Participants

- 8 US-based, 5 UK-based teachers of English in HEIs
- 12 female, 1 male
- 10 full-time, 3 part-time
- Average number of teaching experience: 21.8 years

Data collection

- Qualitative interview protocol:
 - teachers' primary responsibilities and aspects of teaching they enjoyed the most/least
 - types of emotions that they experienced most frequently while teaching
 - easy/difficult to manage emotions and how they did so
 - work-related stress, perceived autonomy, advice for colleagues

Structural features

- Referred to a past event
- Incorporated emotionally charged language
- Treated as a significant turning point for teaching practice/teacher identity
- Evaluated/explained in terms of its impact on teachers' experiences

Emotionally charged discourse

anger/angry (4)	interested/interesting (2)
betrayed/betrayal (3)	laughing/laughter (2)
blossom (2)	mad (5)
care (2)	nose to nose with me/nose-to-nose conflict (2)
cruel (2)	problem (3)
difficult time/situation (7)	rapport (3)
emotional (2)	respect (2)
enjoyable/enjoy (2)	scary/scared (2)
exciting (2)	struggle (6)
failure (2)	terrible time (3)
frustration/frustrated/frustrating (5)	value/valuable (2)
happy (2)	vulnerability/vulnerable (2)
hurt (2)	yell (4)

From emotionally charged situations...

- Ethical dilemmas
- Difficult students
- Academic offences
- Difficulty with creating positive and healthy group dynamics in their classes

... to emotional victories

- Dealing with challenging students
- Understanding students' emotions and behaviours
- Not taking things personally
- Experiencing emotional rewards

Dealing with challenging students

- “difficult”, “disruptive”, “awkward”
- Keeping a bit removed from students’ highly emotional situations
- Needing to work pre-emptively to prevent negative situations from happening

Understanding students' emotions and behaviours

“we never really know what the emotions of the students are”
(T1)

“probably the times I've been unhappiest as a teacher over the last ten years are when I've badly misread students' emotions” (T5)

Not taking things personally

“it’s not like
a personal
attack” (T1)

“it was like
a betrayal
of me” (T8)

Not taking things personally (cont.)

“There was an Oral Skills Class and this one guy just crushed my hand and it really hurt and I was like (whimpering sound), but mostly I felt really betrayed, and like, why would you do that? And I remember it being a really difficult time making it to the end of the class, but now I know they’re all little devils and they’ll test you and they’ll do things that maybe they would regret, so I guess I don’t take it so personally anymore.” (T5)

Experiencing emotional rewards

“I learned so much from my students”
(T12)

“that was so exciting for me” (T12)

“I think my encounters with those two ladies made me feel like I’m such a richer person for knowing them.”
(T4)

Some thoughts

- Situations treated as formative
- Development of teacher resilience



“...emotionally challenging experiences can trigger processes of growth and professional development”
(Kostoulas & Lämmerer, 2020: 89)

Some thoughts (cont.)

- How teachers felt:
 - Students' behaviours were likely not intended in the way teachers initially perceived them
 - Remorseful
 - Empathetic

Some thoughts (cont.)

- Gaining emotional rewards:
 - took time
 - emerged from moments of hardship
 - required hard work with own teaching selves
 - required carefully thought-out changes in lesson preparation and classroom practice



Conclusion

- Teacher emotions in a state of flux
- Recounting critical incidents led to understanding themselves, their practices and their students
- Overcoming critical incidents led to the development / boost of teacher resilience

Thank you 😊



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