THE PERSONAL IS THE POLITICAL: AN INQUIRY INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONS OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN SINGAPORE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper aims to delineate the emotional characteristics of teaching in the secondary school English classroom in relation to the concept of teachers' "emotional labor" (Hochshild, 1983). Drawing on interview and focus group data from 43 middle and high school teachers in Singapore, I argue that the emotional labors of English language and literature teachers may be qualitatively different from those experienced by teachers of other subjects, given the inescapably value-laden, affect-driven nature of English teaching as an ideological practice within the demands of the country's high-stakes standardized assessment system. The analysis of our data further suggest that the emotional burdens and tensions most keenly felt were those that challenged teachers' value orientations towards the means and ends of English education, particularly with respect to Schiro's (2013) four curriculum ideologies: the Scholar-Academicism, Learner-Centeredness, Social Efficiency, and Social Reconstrucrtionism. In the case of English teaching, therefore, the objective, intellectual, apolitical components of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1987) are inextricably tied to the personal, political, and affective strands of Personal Practical Knowledge (PPK) (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). The paper's aim is to give voice to the lived experiences of teachers working at the complex intersection of PCK and PPK to help their students succeed pragmatically in both local and international achievement tests. I conclude by suggesting how further studies of teachers' lived experiences in relation to their disciplinary domains can offer teacher educators and policymakers insights into the ways in which curriculum and policy impact on, and are impacted by, the emotional realities of teachers' work.

Keywords: Lived experiences, English language and literature education teachers, Emotions, Emotional labour Personal Practical Knowledge, Singapore.