

Emotions, Physical Education Leadership in Schools, and the Quest for Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership starts with a desire to make a difference, and equally requires the completion of a variety of duties that in turn elicit a range of emotions. This article reports on a research study that investigated key emotions experienced and reported by four Physical Education leaders. Leadership within secondary schools occurs mostly through carrying out the Head of Department or Head of Faculty role, both of which will normally involve overseeing the implementation of Physical Education, Health Education, and in many cases, Outdoor Education. Guided by pre-planned questions, the study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with four Physical Education Heads of Department. The data collected were analysed and interpreted using qualitative thematic data analysis. Two distinct themes revealed contrasting emotional experiences that were consistently reported by all four leaders. The results indicated that leaders experienced negative emotions elicited by professional tasks, but that they also experienced positive emotions when performing tasks that involved staff care. Leaders indicated how their preparation for, and implementation of activities fostering staff care, were important contributors to their job satisfaction. Through executing such deeds, the leaders showed their commitment to maintaining positive socio-professional relationships, and also reported behaviours consistent with high levels of Emotional Intelligence in conjunction with being motivated to develop staff both professionally and personally. The study found that leaders 'live' the curriculum as they believed that this was important in creating personal authenticity.

Key words

Emotions, Physical Education, Physical Education Leadership, Ethic of Care, Humanism

FOREWORD

When visiting preservice teachers at a local high school, I (Heather) witnessed the staff briefing and raffle that was held on Friday mornings. When formalities concluded, two teachers ran the weekly staff raffle where winners chose from a selection of prizes. Those in charge directed a light hearted event which culminated with a 'Booby prize'¹ for

a final 'lucky' staff member. Prior to the presentation, all staff enjoyed the story embellished by dramatic antics and hyperbole. What has stayed with me is the image of the staff coming together at that moment to share a humorous ritual, and the effect it had on their demeanour as they left the staffroom to go out to teach. The teachers' positive mood and the jovial atmosphere, gave me reason to ponder what part emotions play and how important they are in the life of the teacher.

PURPOSE AND INTRODUCTION

This article is an abridged report on a larger masters research study (Lindsay, 2018) that aimed to identify the influence of emotions in school Physical Education (P.E.) leadership, where key emotions experienced and reported by four P.E. leaders were investigated. The research set out to discover ways in which school P.E. leaders embrace the concepts of Emotional Intelligence (E.I.) (Goleman, 1995), and an Ethic of Care (Noddings, 2013) (Manākitanga).

Effective leadership starts with a desire to make a difference, and requires the completion of duties that elicit a range of emotions. P.E. Leadership within secondary schools occurs mostly through carrying out the Head of Department or Head of Faculty role, both of which involve overseeing the implementation of P.E., Health Education, and in many cases, Outdoor Education programmes.

It would seem highly plausible, that due to the nature of this leadership role, requiring interpersonal interactions, and considering the types of tasks the leaders carry out, that there would be many emotion-evoking situations. This assumption led to the major research question: What is the influence of emotions in secondary school P.E. leadership, in particular, what are the key emotions that are experienced and reported by P.E. leaders?

BACKGROUNDING EMOTIONS AND LEADERSHIP

Emotions

Emotions have been described as "a structuring principle of ongoing social relations in nearly every setting and institution in our society" (Marecek, 1995, p. 109). Oatley (2004) suggests that the term 'emotion' is an intense feeling that is short-term

¹ A prize given as a joke to the last-place finisher usually in a race or competition



and is directed at a source. It has a connection with 'affect', which is what Gross (2015) proposes is an "umbrella term for psychological states that involve valuation of circumstances defined as quick good-for-me/bad-for-me discrimination" (p.2). Most commonly, emotions are considered to be affective experiences such as surprise, amusement, sadness or anger (Oatley, 2004). Lazarus's (1991a) theory proposes that emotions are "cognitive-motivational-relational" (p. 13), and occur as a result of our thoughts or judgments about how a situation in relation to our goals or motives. In this way, our judgements or appraisals of a situation are the main contributors to the emotions we are experiencing. Lazarus further states that "appraisals are not merely verbal tricks or labels but reactions to fundamental relational meanings that have adaptive significance in our lives" (p. 826). He proposes that emotions occur when a person perceives a situation will either positively or negatively impact their self-perception and or the achievement of their personal goals. Oatley (2004) similarly expresses that "emotions are most typically caused by evaluations- psychologists also call them appraisals- of events in relation to what is important to us: our goals, our concerns, our aspirations" (p.3). Emotions are therefore linked to what we know as well as what we expect might be about to happen, and have been attributed as historically important in allowing us to be in a state of readiness to act (Oatley, 2004). As well as immediate reactions, emotions may last for extended periods of time that are often then described as 'moods' (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996).

Gross (2015) supports the notion of the functionality of emotions and describes them as being "either helpful or harmful, depending on the context" (p.4). For example, to be useful, emotions must guide sensory processing, accurately interpreting and bringing to action behaviours and responses that support an individual's choice course of action. Emotions can be harmful when they inhibit the ability to behave or respond appropriately in certain situations, often related to the intensity and duration of the emotions that one experiences. Where the outcome of emotional expressions is harmful for the individual, Gross (2015) suggests that it is important to consider the process of emotion regulation, which refers to the processes that are used to modify an emotional response in order to manage emotions. Teachers use emotion regulation strategies on a daily basis, such as masking their emotions, or changing their evaluations of a student's work or behaviour in order to reduce feelings of anger in order to feel more calm (Sutton, 2004). Re-evaluating or reappraising a situation is the most effective way to regulate emotions and better for one's health also (Gross, 2015). Emotion regulation is also regarded as one of the components of emotional intelligence (EI), defined by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2016) as an "ability model" (p. 290) whereby we are able to reason about and use emotion to optimise our thinking and problem solving.

The emotional theories underpinning this research draw on Lazarus' (1991b) Cognitive-Motivational-Relational theory, Gross' (1998) Emotion Regulation theory, Mayer, Salovey and Caruso's (2016) Emotional Intelligence theory, and Noddings' (1995) Ethic of Care (for the full explanation of these theories, refer to (Lindsay, 2018). These theories resonate with humanist philosophy, and links can be made between these emotional theories and Health and Physical Education in the *New Zealand Curriculum (HPE)* (Ministry of Education, 1999 (MOE, 1999) and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2007).

Leadership

While there is a plethora of literature on Leadership frameworks, styles and approaches (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Struyve & Kelchtermans, 2013; Tracy, 2014; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2009), one of the most commonly referenced leadership frameworks has been developed by French and Raven (1959). This framework explains the effects of leadership types on social power relations. The focus of the framework analyses how individuals use sources of power to lead others. French and Raven identify six types of leadership power, these are:

1. Legitimate power- power through the position one holds
2. Expert power- power developed through personal expertise
3. Informational power- power demonstrated by the strength of the argument
4. Reward power- power developed through an ability to control rewards to others
5. Coercive power- power developed through one's ability to punish others
6. Referent power- power based on respect (French & Raven, 1959)

While caution is given to the generalised use of this framework (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004), it is argued that the framework has value in understanding the multi-layered and multi-faceted construction of leadership power relations and the emotions they generate. Other research and writings on leadership have tended to paint only a positive picture of leadership (Ehrich, Ehrich, & Knight, 2012). Ehrich et al (2012) describe how contemporary leadership styles embrace humanistic and humane procedures, where the act of leading involves positive and respectful approaches requiring the formation of trusting relationships between leaders and followers. However, due to competing pressures and accountability that leaders face, it is difficult for leaders to "live out such humanistic leadership ideals and practices" (Ehrich et al., 2012, p. 34).



METHODOLOGY

A socio-constructivist framework (Burr, 1995) informed this interpretive study (Mutch, 2013) that involved conducting 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews with four P.E. heads of departments. The interviews were guided by the following five questions:

1. What personal emotions do you experience when you perform your leadership role?
2. What leadership tasks generate these emotions?
3. What do you perceive are the emotions that you express that generate the most positive responses from your staff?
4. What do you perceive are the emotions that you express that generate the least positive responses from staff?
5. What emotions do you believe should be role modelled in P.E. Leadership? Why do you think this?

The data collected were analysed and interpreted using qualitative thematic data analysis techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Canterbury's Educational Research Human Ethics committee. This approval required attention to appropriate consents, confidentiality, adherence to Treaty of Waitangi principles, and the rights of the participants. All names used in this paper are code-names.

DATA ANALYSIS

The first set of data revealed that the P.E. Leaders reported more negative (unpleasant) emotions than positive emotions in general. Negative emotions totalled 12 and included *frustration, stress, anxiety and overwhelmed*, and positive emotions totalled nine and included pride, happy, humbled and compassion. In this paper we are focusing on the contexts of the P.E. leaders' emotions and their perceptions on how they manage or regulate these.

Data analysis followed the recommended procedures of Bogdan and Biklen (2007). Specifically, responses to the interview questions were transcribed from recordings, codes were developed from the participants' statements, and similar codes were grouped and any uniquely coded responses were maintained separately.

Coding patterns were established and categories were created which were then collapsed into 2 themes:

1. Performing Professional Tasks
2. Staff Care

Performing professional tasks were indicative of administrative responsibilities such as organising and running meetings, managing equipment and facilities and staffing issues. All of these have been categorised as 'Internal department responsibilities'. Other management related tasks, including leaders' perceptions related to

self-management of their emotions while performing professional tasks, were similarly coded. The second theme of Staff Care was characterised by professional interactions with staff, opportunities to share leadership responsibilities, fostering positive relationships with colleagues, receiving collegial support, role modelling leading in ways that support others to experience personal growth, and achieving a sense of authenticity by ensuring the department's *modus operandi* aligned with the humanist philosophy of the curriculum. These two themes gave rise to four findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first finding was that all four leaders expressed that many of the administrative tasks generated negative emotions. Conversely, the generation of these leaders' positive emotions was associated with developing socio-professional relationships through supporting their staff. Leaders reported experiencing more positive emotions and joy in their job when facilitating an Ethic of Care (Noddings, 1995) that promoted personal and professional growth of their staff. In contrast, they referred to the frustration of not always being in control of the factors affecting the running of their departments, and how this often led to them feeling overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted. One leader reported that,

The problem with schools or education is that every minute seems to be different and everything you're trying to do seems to be different. There's always going to be a build-up of helplessness and frustration as you're trying to be and do everything, and that is sometimes when you're potentially less able to meet the vision that you want because you're restricted by resources, time and processes (Mike).

The second finding was all four leaders' explanations of how in their leadership role they were very conscious of regulating their emotions (Gross, 2015; Hargreaves, 1998) to ensure that their department had a culture that was typified by a positive emotional climate. For instance, one leader described offering a "front" that appears to be positive, allowing him to perform his role according to the expected normal behaviour of teacher leaders. His descriptions suggested a method of masking his negative emotion by creating a positive or pleasant facial expression, illustrating the internal conflict that plays out. He believed, "in the job... you want to appear to be calm, cool and collected even though at times you can be angry in terms of things that are impacting on either your teaching or the things that you want to do" (Erik).

Leaders talked about emotions in line with emotion theory (Lazarus, 1991a). They offered a context for, or description of, a certain emotional climate. All leaders described performing emotion regulation as a part of their leadership roles, indicating a belief that cognitive reframing (reappraisal) (Lazarus, 1991b) of their emotions was required ahead of

time to be in the correct state to do caring tasks similar to Sutton's (2004) findings with teachers. For example, one leader stated that, "I have learnt the importance of offering a front that appears to be positive, and I say, appears to be; sometimes I am and sometimes I'm not" (Erik). Another leader also provided an example of emotion regulation when he expressed that, "on the inside you may not be in the frame of mind that you want to be in, but on the outside, when you deal with people, they are unaware of that" (Mike).

When questioned about what they felt they were able to control in their jobs such as the types of emotions that should be role-modelled in P.E. leadership, links were made with how expressing pleasant emotions can promote a positive culture within their departments. One leader described the emotional environment in the department stating, "I love it, how we all strive to do our best, you know, no one is more important than anyone else. Like if one of our staff members comes in after a frustrating class, there'll be an instant kōrero and the whole department will be giving them advice and tips and ideas" (Mia).

A third finding, was all leaders applied an Ethic of Care (Noddings, 1995) to both staff and students. This Ethic of Care was characterised by shared leadership responsibilities, and implemented through a referential leadership style (French and Raven, 1959). It provided staff with opportunities for professional growth by empowering them to take on greater professional responsibilities. One leader described how in their department, "everyone's a part of everything we do, whether it's decision making or whether it's sharing the excitement of a lesson ... and that breeds a culture of sharing" (Mike). There was high need expressed by the leaders to show care to make their job enjoyable. Problematically, it was reported there was not much time afforded for moving between performing the professional role, and being in the position to offer care. Leaders described how staff interactions elicited pleasant emotions that reinforced the experience itself, which in turn led to continued engagement in similar activities and roles. These acts of caring are consistent with what Noddings (2013) describes as relationships of care and trust, and the leaders all described these in a very positive manner. One leader expressed this by saying,

I love organising things. I think that it's a real teaching personality trait but I'm happy in here ... sorting stuff out, organising it so that their (my department staff) jobs are easier. I work really hard in that way to make sure that things are there for them. In turn everyone embraces a team approach, a group hug mentality where everyone wants to support everyone else (Mia).

The leaders' descriptions of their leadership styles indicated that they value the humanity they brought to the job, regardless of how this was expressed with their staff. The leaders appeared to be aware of power relationships and

indicated through sharing leadership responsibilities, their preference for Referential Leadership (French and Raven, 1959), or power that is based on respect (Haber-Curran, Allen, & Shankman, 2015), indicating a humanistic leadership style. As part of this humanistic approach, the leaders also demonstrated high levels of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in maintaining positive socio-professional relationships. They made links between the perspectives they held as physical educators, such as the importance of contributing to the humanistic development of all individuals, and the intentions of the HPE Curriculum (MOE, 1999). One leader described how he aligned himself with the curriculum.

As physical educators we have such diverse areas to cover with our curriculum but it gives us such a great point of reference for how we want to be. Whether it be a young teacher or a new teacher. One of the first emotions that they (new teachers) probably feel is, is that lack of confidence and that high amount of fear. If I can do anything that helps here I should exude confidence and trust in them to help them become their best (Erik).

A second leader explained that she will always support the endeavours of her staff stating that they should strive "to continue to develop their own strengths, to live the curriculum" (Nicky). These links led to the fourth and final finding.

The final finding was that all participants indicated a strong desire that leadership of their staff and the staff's leadership of their students, needed to be authentic. Authenticity being determined by the department's modus operandi being aligned with the humanistic philosophy of the HPE Curriculum (MOE, 1999). One leader gave an example, stating "we've got to work together collegially as a staff, and our kids have got to see us as good role models about how we work together to solve problems" (Erik).

The Curriculum provided a reference point for authenticity in P.E. leadership, and was seen as more than simply a document of educational policy for student learning. Leaders described how they 'live' the curriculum, contributing to a sense that everything required of them in the job was worthwhile. It seemed that the HPE curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999) held a special place in the hearts of the leaders in this study, as it shaped their thinking and behaviours.

MOVING ON

This study could have implications for P.E. leadership, in particular, the key finding that highlighted how participants in this study experienced far more negative emotions than positive emotions during the administrative tasks of their role. An implication is that the hierarchy in secondary schools may need to consider the impact of their requests for administrative procedures to be upheld, and monitor this so that any administrative trivia is eliminated. A second implication stems from the leaders in this study being

arguably successful HOD's in P.E., and their desire to achieve authenticity in the alignment between their leadership style, with the curriculum philosophy (humanism) staff delivery, and student learning. Professional Development could therefore be encouraged for aspiring P.E. HOD's around leadership styles that are humanistic in nature and develop an Ethic of Care that aligns with the philosophy of the curriculum.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The strength of this study was the research design which enabled the researcher to provide more exploratory type questions in order to gain a rich tapestry of data associated with the participants' responses. The nature of the semi-structured interviews provided greater opportunities for participants to self-disclose their emotional behaviour. Arguably the richness of such data may not have been obtained by surveys or written responses to questionnaires.

A second strength of the research was that the interviews appeared to be cathartic for the leaders as they were given the opportunity to recognise and share feelings that would normally (O'Toole, 2018) participants to talk about and describe their personal experiences, and as such was a strength of the research design.

Perhaps a limitation of this study centres on the socio-constructionist framework where the problems of administration were highlighted more so than the positive nature of policy assisting operations. Further to this, the self-reported data such as the emotions described by the participants could also be a limitation of this study (O'Toole, 2018). It may be that the specific emotion words used by the participants to describe feelings they had experienced, had subtle definitional differences that might mean the coding incidence of some data was not representative of some of the reported emotions. This coupled with the fact that this research study was relatively small in size, meant the generalisability of the results is limited.

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