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EMOTIONS IN LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Researchers have focused primarily on cognitive aspects of students' experiences of learning and development in higher education. However, since the early 2000's, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of emotion in students' experiences and increased research attention.

According to Klaus Scherer, emotions are multifaceted phenomena involving affective, cognitive, physiological, motivational, and expressive components. For example, a student's exam anxiety may include nervous feelings (affective), worrying about failing (cognitive), sweating (physiological), a desire to avoid it (motivation), and frowning (expressive). Sara Ahmed, on the other hand, emphasizes how emotions are shaped and constructed within particular socio-cultural, historical and political contexts. Thus, a student cares about exam performance because of conditioning from school, family and community.

Emotions are typically described as having two dimensions: a valence (positive or negative, e.g. happiness versus sadness) and a degree of activation (strong or weak. e.g. rage versus annoyance). Starting from these definitions, this entry explores different ways of thinking about the role of emotion in learning and their implications for practice.

Psychological Approaches

Psychological research focuses on the individual psychological processes that lead to and result from emotions. Insofar as human actions are goal-directed, one's goals link cognition, motivation and emotion. People are constantly interpreting and making judgments related to their goals, and those appraisals affect how they feel.

For example, Reinhard Pekrun's control-value theory emphasizes that emotions arise from appraisals about how important those goals are, how much you feel in control, how able you feel to handle emergent problems, and your perceived success in reaching those goals. These assessments affect how you feel when approaching a situation, during it, and looking back on it.

Therefore, people can regulate how they feel by reappraising the situation, their goals, others' actions or their self-perceptions. According to James Gross' theory of emotional regulation, adults can regulate their own emotions by: (a) *selecting* the situation (e.g. avoiding negative situations); (b) *modifying* the situation once in it; (c) *focusing* attention on particular aspects; and (d) *reappraisal*, taking a different perspective on a situation that has different emotional consequences. People can also *suppress* a physiological, emotional response once it is underway, rather than *expressing* it. Research suggests that reappraisal yields better social, health and emotional results than suppression.

There has been considerable interest in how students self-regulate. While much of that research focuses on how students regulate their thinking, increasing attention is being paid to how they regulate their emotions individually and in groups. Psychological interventions often focus on appraisal processes.

How well a person is able to identify and process emotions has been called "emotional intelligence." According to Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, people grow through a sequence of four major sets of emotional processing skills. *Emotion perception* involves being able to perceive others' emotions through, for example, facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. *Emotion facilitation* involves using emotional information to help support one's performance. *Understanding emotions* involves awareness of emotional terminology and how emotions work, change, blend together, and interact with situations.

Managing emotions deals with regulating one's own emotions in relation to the emotions of others. Thus to regulate emotions, you must first perceive, use, and understand them.

These emotional skills can be seen as intended learning outcomes of higher education insofar as they underpin professional success. Various pedagogies, including reflective practice, may help students become more emotionally intelligent.

Sociological Approaches

Sociologists focus on the social, cultural, political and historical contexts that structure and reproduce emotions. Emotional capital, a concept that extends Pierre Bourdieu's human capital theory, is a set of emotional resources, assets, and predispositions that a person learns from their social environment (*habitus*). Bourdieu assumes that society is stratified and that a person's capital can help or hinder their social mobility.

Emotional rules and norms, which vary culturally, govern appropriate behaviour within particular organisations or settings. For example, whether it is acceptable to cry or express anger in a class are implicit rules that students learn. As Megan Boler argues, these norms are also gendered, raced and classed, meaning that different emotional rules apply to different groups of people. Thus, emotional capital also varies along these lines.

When a person must behave in particular ways to be socially acceptable (such as avoiding expressions of anger, even when they might justifiably feel angry) they are said to be performing emotional labor. Through enforcement of emotional rules, organisations and those with greater power in society may control and, therefore, benefit from the emotional labor of those with less power. Thus, an individual's emotional regulation is happening within larger contexts that shape how one appraises or interprets situations and expresses emotion. Emotions and emotional rules can become the object of curricular attention and, through critique, sites of social resistance.

Student Development Theory

Some theories of adult development and student development acknowledge the emotional challenges associated with transforming one's worldviews or sense of identity, key outcomes of the criticality cultivated in higher education.

Higher education presents opportunities for students to challenge received values (those from schools, churches, families) with alternative values. Sharon Daloz Parks has researched the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the struggle to remake meaning and faith (broadly defined) when a closely held worldview has been shattered. Emotional disorientation can prompt re-analysis and construction of new perspectives and commitments.

Kathleen M. Quinlan

See also Student well-being, sociology, student development theory, self-directed learning, teaching soft skills, human capital theory

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