Language teacher agency, emotion labor and emotional rewards in tertiary-level English language programs

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ABSTRACT

Research on language teacher agency and language teacher emotions has demonstrated that both are central components of teacher identity and practice. However, few researchers have explored the co-constitutive effects of agency and emotion for language teachers or the role of emotion labor in producing emotional rewards. This article addresses these underexplored components of language teaching through reporting on the findings of a qualitative study with language teachers in tertiary settings in the U.K. and the U.S. The study drew on language teachers' questionnaire (n = 30) and semi-structured interview (n = 25) responses in identifying the most common emotions experienced by these teachers and how their relationships with students engendered emotion labor as well as emotional rewards. We consider these aspects of teacher experience in terms of discourses of teaching-as-caring and Foucault's (1983) concept of ethical self-formation.

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1. Introduction

In this article we investigate the role of agency, emotion labor, and emotional rewards in the teaching practice of English language teachers employed by tertiary-level institutions. We agree with White's (2016, p. 17) contention that emotion and agency *together* "demand further scrutiny" in research among language teachers and see these phenomena as co-constitutive elements of teacher practice. This article reports on a qualitative study conducted with language teachers which asked them to identify the most common emotions that they experienced while teaching in order to learn how they agentively addressed the situations that generated such emotions. Our analysis of teachers' questionnaire and interview responses led us to explore the key role that discourses and values of teaching-as-caring (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Noddings, 2013) play in emotion labor and agency in classroom teaching, and how these teachers characterize the role of experience in bringing about emotional rewards. We end by discussing the importance of teachers' capacity for ethical self-formation through developing an awareness of how their emotions and emotion labor are historically and socially contingent and constituted through discourses of good teaching, such as teaching-as-caring.

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2. Theoretical background

2.1. Language teacher agency and emotions as relational phenomena

The growing body of research on language teacher agency has shown the importance of incorporating agency into studies focusing on teacher identity development (Illieva, 2010; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Morgan, 2004; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), teacher cognition (Burns, Freeman, & Edwards, 2015; Golombek & Johnson, 2004) and professional development (Feryok, 2012; Johnson & Golombek, 2016). We approach language teacher agency as dialogically and historically contingent rather than primarily as an individual capacity or characteristic. Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson's (2015) recent work on teacher agency, based on what they identify as an "ecological approach," is most compatible with our own orientation to this phenomenon for language teachers. As they note, an ecological perspective foregrounds "how humans operate by means of their social and material environments" (p. 20) and therefore avoids an "overly individualistic view" (p. 22) of teacher agency. Priestley et al.'s (2015) perspective corresponds well with views of human agency developed by a growing number of researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. These researchers argue against treating agency as "confined to the borders of [our] bodies" (Enfield, 2017, p. 13), and contend instead that it should be viewed as distributed, relational and inevitably entangled with materials, symbols, practices, and other individuals, as well as historically contingent (see Barnes, 2000; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Glăveanu, 2015; Gunn & Cloud, 2010; Lundberg & Gunn, 2005; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2004; among others). Working from a social psychology perspective, for example, Helsel (2015, p. 159) contends that "persons are connected in multiple relationships from birth, and it is primarily *in these relationships* that they develop *a sense of agency*" (italics added).

When considering language teacher agency from a dialogical, or relational, perspective, one needs to consider the teacher's "history-in-person" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998); that is, one needs to explore how individual teachers are, in part, constituted, and, in part, constitute themselves, through participating in particular historical, socio-cultural, and sociopolitical practices. As Holland et al. (1998, p. 8) point out, the human ability to act independently, as individuals, is possible because the "intimate terrain" of our lives is an "outcome of living in, through, and around cultural forms practiced in social life." We are all entangled in complex, overlapping, and often competing practices. They are distributed in, over and through person. Keeping this perspective in mind can help us avoid taking a too simple approach to language teachers as *a priori* agents who are merely influenced by local, external affordances and constraints (see also Davies, 1990; Miller, 2012: 2014, 2016). Approaching language teacher agency in this way can help to disrupt popular views of teachers as "saviors" of students, or as professionals who must effect change primarily through their individual capacities (Morgan, 2009), or, as we discuss in this article, as individuals whose emotion labor in the classroom derives solely from individual efforts. At the same time, a relational view of agency remains committed to the understanding that humans are intentional, reflective individuals who influence and often transform the course of events and make choices—they are not mere dupes of social processes as some critics (Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, & Fraser, 1995; Fraser, 1989) of poststructural approaches to agency have argued (see Leask, 2012).

Just as we view teacher agency as a dialogical phenomenon, so too we view teacher emotions as relational and as socioculturally and ideologically fostered phenomena. In his research on teacher emotions, Zembylas (2002, p. 196) argues that "emotions are made in social relations" and that emotions are both "social *and* personal, the result of intersubjective *and* political relations and processes" (Zembylas, 2002, p. 193, italics in original). While emotions are clearly embodied experiences, and thus individual in that sense, their discursive, political and social dimensions cannot be ignored. For this reason, we agree with Zembylas's (2002, p. 197) perspective in treating emotions "as elements of relationality [that are] continually shaped and reshaped via language, embodiment, personal biography, and interactions with others" (see also Burkitt, 2014).

With regard to language teacher emotions in particular, there has been disproportionately less research than that focusing on language learner emotions (see Mercer & Kostoulas, 2018). Specific psychological and socio-political constructs have already been examined within the language teaching domain and across different educational settings, including emotion labor (Benesch, 2012, 2017: Gkonou & Miller, 2017; King, 2015; Low & Liew, 2016), anxiety (Bekleyen, 2009; Horwitz, 1996) and emotional intelligence (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; Mercer & Gkonou, 2017). Despite the fact that these publications focused on a range of different constructs, they do have one thing in common: all these researchers call for more empirical work into how emotions are shaped and unfold throughout a teacher's life and what influence they have on a teacher's personal and professional development and wellbeing. Given the omnipresence of emotions — they are part and parcel of teaching and an integral part of a teacher's life both inside and outside of class — more fine-grained and nuanced understandings of what emotions do (see Ahmed, 2004; Benesch, 2017) and how they are tackled, should be reached.

It is not surprising that emotions play such a pivotal role in teacher practice and identity given that teaching itself is fundamentally a relational activity. Gkonou and Mercer (2018, p. 161) argue that "there are increasing numbers of voices suggesting that the focus of classroom life should not be on managing individuals but rather managing relationships between them" (ibid). Indeed, it seems that promoting teachers' understanding of the relational practices at play in their language classrooms can, in fact, contribute to their professional wellbeing (Davis, Summers, & Miller, 2012; Gkonou & Mercer, 2018). We examine this notion further in our discussion of teachers' emotion labor in relation to the discourses and values of teaching-as-caring (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) and how they contribute to teachers' ethical self-formation (Miller et al., 2017).

2.2. Language teachers' emotion labor, ethical self-formation, and teaching-as-caring

In Hochschild's (1979, 1983) ground-breaking research on emotion management and emotion labor, she argued that emotion management is ubiquitous in all human interactions given that we monitor and calibrate not only our outward emotional displays but also work quite intentionally to develop the "inner feeling" (Hochschild, 1979, p. 562) that is deemed socially appropriate or desirable for particular situations or contexts. Hochschild (1979, p. 563) referred to these "shared, albeit often latent" norms regarding "appropriate" emotions as "feeling rules". Emotion *labor* is exerted when feeling rules are tied to a workplace and become part of how one's work is evaluated, validated and remunerated. Hochschild, for example, examined the high toll of the emotion labor required of flight attendants who are expected to be pleasant and accommodating with all passengers, including the difficult and aggressive ones, in order to perform their work satisfactorily.

Hochschild's notion of emotion labor began to be used in teacher research in the 1980s and 1990s, but it was not until the 2000s that researchers began drawing on it to explore the emotion labor unique to language teaching (e.g. Cowie, 2003; Ho & Tsang, 2008). Benesch's (2012, 2017) more recent book-length projects have established language teachers' emotion labor as a central concern for the field. She defines emotion labor as the efforts by which "humans actively negotiate the relationship between how they feel in particular work situations and how they are supposed to feel, according to social expectations" (Benesch, 2017, p. 37–38). In examining how teachers "actively negotiate" their emotions according to situated feeling rules, Benesch and others have incorporated teacher agency into their research on teachers' emotion experiences, though often indirectly or only implicitly so. Benesch delineates her rationale for opting for *emotion* labor instead of *emotional* labor, the latter being what Hochschild (1979) had originally suggested. Benesch (2017, p. 37) explains that the juxtaposition of the words *emotion* and *labor* "signals a critical approach to the study of emotions, one that considers the role of power relations in workplaces" and one which also acknowledges that emotions are not merely internal states but are contingent upon external environments in which individuals are embedded and upon the social expectations they need to abide by. In line with Benesch's critical conceptualization, we too have opted for using the term "emotion labor."

In outlining her poststructuralist approach to language teacher emotion research, Benesch (2017) departs from Hochschild's emphasis on emotion labor as leading to individuals' estrangement from their authentic or true emotional selves. As Benesch (2017) notes, a poststructuralist approach views the self as historically and socially constituted, not an essence that can be identified as *essentially* authentic (or fake)—a perspective of the self which aligns with our view of teacher agency and emotions as dialogically constituted. That said, emotion labor is often experienced by teachers as internal work and as individually controlled. Likewise, the feeling rules with which teachers align their emotion labor often seem commonsensical rather than political. In fact, as Zembylas has noted, in most cases, teachers' emotion labor comes to be treated as routine practice, as a "natural aspect of teaching" (Zembylas, 2005a, p. 209). It is important to recognize that emotion labor is not restricted to extraordinary, highly charged situations but is folded into the everyday relational dynamics of teaching, such as when teachers manage classroom discussions, respond to student essays, or contend with tardy students (see Benesch, 2017). In foregrounding this "common sense," "everyday" status of much of teachers' emotion labor, we find it helpful to conceptualize it in terms of ethical self-formation as a way to further explore and highlight its sociopolitical and sociocultural character.

Ethical self-formation, according to Foucault (1983, p. 243) involves "a sort of work, an activity" that individuals undertake to improve the self. Teachers often exert great effort to control their displays and felt experiences of emotions in their efforts to become better, more professional teachers. This kind of emotion labor corresponds to the ethical dimension of Foucault's perspective on self-formation—an orientation to identity and agency which involves self-reflection and making choices regarding how best to live and act in the world (cf. Clarke, 2009; Miller et al., 2017). Importantly, ethical self-formation involves recognition of how socio-political norms impinge on one's ability to act, while simultaneously stimulating or inciting individuals to adopt particular actions and emotional dispositions that they view as important for becoming better and more professional teachers. That is, the very personal "self-policing of emotional conduct" that is often part of teachers' ethical self-formation, must, as Zembylas (2005b, p. 946) points out, be understood as always enacted within what Foucault (1983, p. 221) described as "a possible field of action" that is influenced by processes and discourses and power relations greater than the individual.

We thus view teachers' emotion labor and agentive practice as often constituted through the discourses and values that have been attached to exemplary teacher practice such as the growing body of research on teaching-as-caring, demonstrated through teachers' supportive, responsive, nurturing actions (Gkonou & Miller, 2017; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Noddings, 2013). As such, a Foucauldian approach to ethical self-formation does not see teachers' emotion labor as always "imposed" (see Benesch, 2017, p. 49) but rather as labor that teachers often willingly undertake for the benefit of their students and for their own emotional well-being—such as the emotion labor required in showing care for one's students. For this reason, we discuss the important effects of what can be regarded as "positive" emotions that result from emotion labor (see Zembylas, 2005a and Cowie, 2011 for more examples), and particularly when teachers align with discourses of teaching-as-caring (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). That said, in considering how teachers' agentive exercise of emotion labor can lead to emotional rewards, we want to emphasize that the common sense status assigned to such emotion labor and the individualistic orientation that it typically takes—as opposed to a recognition of it being relationally, and often politically, mobilized according to particular feeling rules—require further scrutiny and problematization.

3. The present study

It is this complexity of language teaching in terms of the emotional labor that it entails and the role of teacher agency in undertaking such labor, as co-constituted effects and actions of particular emotion discourses (Zembylas, 2003), that has compelled us to engage in this collaborative project. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the most common emotions experienced by tertiary-level English language teachers while teaching?
2. How is teacher agency enabled and constrained in teachers' emotion labor?
3. How does their exercise of agency, through emotion labor, lead to emotional rewards?
4. How can teachers' reported emotions and emotion labor be understood from the perspective of ethical self-formation and teaching-as-caring?

4. Research methods

4.1. Participants

To collect data on language teacher agency and emotions, we first administered an online questionnaire to English language teachers working in six tertiary education programs, three in the US and three in the UK. Thirty teachers completed the questionnaire and twenty-five of these teachers also participated in a follow-up, semi-structured interview with the researcher who was based in the same country as them. Table 1 below includes a summary of the demographic information for all thirty teacher participants.

4.2. Data collection tools

Data collection took place in two interconnected phases. In Phase One, we administered an online questionnaire (using Google Forms). The questionnaire contained closed-ended and open-ended questions (requiring an answer of maximum 100 words) on teachers' agency and emotions. Specifically, respondents were asked to select six emotion words out of a list of twenty that represented what they felt most commonly when teaching English. This list of twenty emotion words was adapted from Zembylas's (2005a) study with elementary science teachers (see Appendix). We then asked respondents if they would like to add any two other emotion words that identified emotions they felt most commonly when teaching English. Next, we included four open-ended questions (two concerning "positive" emotions and two concerning "negative" emotions) which asked teachers to explain or describe a common situation during their teaching of English and what they did to ensure that they felt or did not feel the positive or negative emotion respectively. The final section of the questionnaire asked for volunteer teachers who were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

In Phase Two of the project, we conducted individual, semi-structured interviews. All face-to-face interviews took place within university premises, and on ten occasions we used Skype. The interview protocol consisted of eleven questions covering the following areas: teachers' primary responsibilities in their current position, aspects of their teaching that they loved and those that they enjoyed the least, further discussion of the six emotion words selected from the online questionnaire, the degree to which emotion management while teaching was easy or difficult and how it was performed, job stress, teacher autonomy, and advice on emotion management for colleagues. The interview conversations were allowed to develop according to any interesting points raised the participants.

In taking a relational perspective to teachers' emotions, we recognize that the emotion words included in our questionnaire might seem to describe "pre-existing things" (Zembylas, 2006, p. 264) due to their itemization and separation as distinct entities. However, we believe that the labels that we adapted from Zembylas's (2005a) study were useful for helping teachers to identify a range of emotional experiences as they completed the questionnaires. They could do so by drawing on the socially normative meanings that are associated with particular situations and expressions of emotion. As Tracy (2000, p. 94) has pointed out, "We can only feel emotions that fit within a specific language and repertoire of social practices" (cited in Zembylas, 2004, p. 303). We recognize that assigning the qualifiers "positive" and "negative" to particular emotion labels

Table 1
Demographic information for teacher participants.

Gender	Male: 7
	Female: 21
	Prefer not to disclose: 2
Full-time/Part-time	Full-time: 23
	Part-time: 7
Qualifications	PhD: 6
	MA: 26
	Language teaching certification: 17
Teaching experience (in years)	Mean: 16.62 (min = 2, max = 45)

further reifies the socially constructed connotations attached to particular emotional expressions. We however decided to include the distinction between "positive" and "negative" emotions in both data collection tools because we felt that these would be more relevant conceptualization of emotions for the participating teachers and would facilitate their understanding of the questions found in the research protocols.

4.3. Data collection procedures

An invitation email containing the link to the online questionnaire was first sent to the directors of the six English language programs in the participating universities. Once permission to proceed with the study was obtained from them, emails were sent to individual teachers in these programs inviting them to complete the anonymous online questionnaire. Language teachers who indicated that they wished to participate in follow-up interviews were then contacted by one of the two researchers, and all interviews were completed in the summer of 2016. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interviews lasted up to 1 h, with an average length of 33 min, for a total of 831 min or nearly 14 h of interview talk. The corpus of transcribed interviews contains a total of 99,925 words.

4.4. Data analysis

In examining the online questionnaires, the researchers counted the frequencies of the emotion words selected by the participants. The answers to the open-ended questions were then extracted to Word documents for ease of reading and for the purpose of writing questions for the follow-up interviews. The interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were exchanged between the two researchers and were inserted into the qualitative data management software Atlas.ti for analysis. Each researcher coded the data separately; coding was primarily data-driven and thus conducted inductively, having no pre-conceived frameworks from the literature in mind when coding the interviews. Examples of codes included emotion words as such, teachers' agentic behaviors relating to their own emotions, strategies for dealing with learner emotions in class, references to teacher experience, teachers' comments on classroom interpersonal relationships, among others. Codes were then exchanged between the two researchers, and after three rounds of discussions, codes were checked for agreement, refined, and grouped into meaningful themes. In the following section, we report on the most common emotion words selected by the participating teachers in the online questionnaire. We then focus on the interview conversations in considering, first, how teachers oriented to their relationships with their students and how their orientation to teaching-as-caring (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) mobilized both "everyday emotional labor" (Koster, 2011, p. 69) and emotional rewards. Finally, we explore how their comments regarding their accumulated experience and competence in (some aspects of their) emotion labor are implicated in discourses of teaching-as-caring. We include representative excerpts from the interviews in the analysis discussion based on how directly and succinctly interviewees described particular experiences that were relevant to these focal topics.

5. Findings

5.1. Reporting on emotions

The study participants' emotion-word selections in the online questionnaires were strongly skewed in favor of what can be regarded as "positive" emotions: 138 positive emotion-word selections compared to 42 negative emotion words, in total. This bias was also true for each individual participant in that no individual participant selected more negative words than positive words. The four most frequently selected positive emotion words were *Enthusiasm* (selected by 28 out of 30 participants), *Happiness* (27 participants), *Caring* (26 participants) and *Satisfaction* (22 participants). By contrast, the four most frequently selected negative emotion words were *Frustration* (selected by 14 out of 30 participants), *Anxiety* (10 participants), *Irritation* (5 participants) and *Disillusion* (4 participants).

Cowie (2011) noted that much of the research that has focused on teacher emotions, starting with the work of Hargreaves (1998, 2000, 2005), has examined emotional processes at moments of educational change and school reform and has identified teachers' emotional selves as primarily characterized by high stress, frustration, and burnout (e.g. Frenzel, 2014; Schutz & Zembylas, 2010). Such studies are vitally important for helping to identify crucial contributors to teacher burnout. However, it is just as important to consider alternatives to these "pessimistic perspectives" (Zembylas, 2005a, p. 156) and to "explore the positive aspects of emotional labor" (Zembylas, 2005a, p. 50). The follow-up interviews that we conducted with 25 of the 30 questionnaire respondents helped us begin to better understand what led to the above strongly positive characterizations of the participants' teaching lives and how these teachers experienced emotion labor in light of emotional rewards identified as "enthusiasm" and "happiness," among other positive emotion words.

5.2. Relationships and caring as fundamental to teachers' emotional rewards and emotion labor

Given the questionnaire respondents' strong orientation to positive emotions, we asked the language teacher interviewees to identify what they enjoyed most about teaching English in their current contexts. They indicated, nearly unanimously (21 out of 25), that they most enjoyed interacting with their students. Other studies have likewise found that teachers gain

"emotional pleasure" from their "professional relationships" with their students and colleagues (Warren, 2014, p. 266; see also; Cowie, 2011; Dewaele & Mercer, 2018; Mercer, Oberdorfer, & Saleem, 2016; Zembylas, 2005a). Table 2 includes a representative selection of brief excerpts taken from the interviews that illustrate this point. In the necessarily selective set of responses listed below, one can find a subset of the emotion words produced by the language teachers in their comments on the emotional rewards that they have gained from their relational engagement with students.

Each of the teachers interviewed in our study indicated that they willingly exert great effort to create desirable learning environments and strong relationships. They suggested, either explicitly or implicitly, that doing so can bring them emotional rewards such as the emotional effects identified in the above excerpts. We see evidence of how teachers often paired such emotional rewards with mundane or "everyday emotional labour" (Koster, 2011, p. 69) in the excerpt below in which a teacher noted that she can "get good emotions" through helping students to understand and apply the content of her language instruction and to achieve their aims:

> And my aim therefore, is to help them with the understanding, help them with the application of what I am saying …. the emotions are a product of either achieving their aim or not achieving their aim. If you achieve the aim, then you will get good emotions. (T24).

In another example, a teacher portrays her efforts to improve her teaching as a constant "cycle of development" and then added:

> The harder I work on trying to understand the students and trying to articulate things in ways that they understand, I suppose I am reinforcing those positive emotions, maybe unconsciously, but just as part of my professional approach as a teacher. (T21).

This teacher indicated very explicitly that she perceived a clear link between her hard work to understand students better and to be better understood by them with "those positive emotions" that can come from teaching.

Given the emphasis these teachers placed on the emotional rewards that they can reap from nurturing good relationships with students, we view their comments as indicative of an investment in an approach to teaching that can be described as "teaching as caring", which Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006, p. 122) describe as involving "receptivity, relatedness and responsivenesses." In line with Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006, p. 124), we regard these teachers' efforts to reach out to students and show sensitivity to their interests and goals as the "rewarding" and "joyful" aspects of everyday emotion labor. We found further evidence of these teachers' investment in teaching-as-caring in their comments about a teacher's "duty" to be "aware of what's going on" (T16) with students. One teacher noted explicitly that she "care[s] about students" and for this reason, "whatever I can do to help them, that's what I want to do" (T23). Another teacher noted that she finds "purpose" in teaching "in terms of working on what [students'] issues are, working on what their needs are at the time" (T3). Yet another described the importance she place on developing "a feeling of caring for your students" and of forming "a relationship with them." She added that forming this kind of relationship with students "means that you care about them, how they achieve in most things. So I think that's why most people do teach really, it is because they get that … those emotions from it" (T20). One teacher commented on her efforts to "tailor" her lessons to her students "needs," adding that "I think that if you do that, then this can increase the emotions of happiness. And this makes you love your course, your teaching more, and also it shows that you really care" (T25). In a final example, one teacher noted, "I feel like students come in with their varying needs for support in lots of aspects of life and I just kind of naturally care about most of them" (T7).

Table 2
Language teachers' emotional rewards resulting from engagement with students.

Emotion words	Teacher comments
Love	• What I *love* most is interacting with students. Um absolutely that's the best thing. (T1)
Happy	• Generally, my students make me *happy* and so I try to focus on those really good relationships and the gains that I can see and those make me *happy*. (T6)
	• You get students who engage sometimes very well and ask you interesting questions, and suddenly you are very *happy* with teaching. (T22)
Rewarding	• It's very *rewarding* to see the growth in students, but also the relationships that one builds as a teacher. (T7)
Fun	• I put my sense of humor in my teaching, whatever I set them up to do, it gives me a chance to interact with them, it's also *fun* and we tend to laugh a lot in class — that keeps me fresh. (T9)
	• For me it's *fun*; it's engaging with them on all sorts of levels. (T14)
Enjoy	• I *enjoy* the relationship building with students — to know them and build mutual respect, we work cooperatively. (T7)
	• I particularly *enjoy* the one-to-one support …. The contact with students is, for me, always positive. (T21)
Enthusiasm/-tic	• A lot of times when I leave class I just feel good, I just feel *enthusiastic*, I feel *happy* because just the way class has gone and um … it's that having planned something that worked, interacting with those students. (T14)
Happy/-iness Positivity	• And so things like *enthusiasm* and *happiness*, a certain sort of *positivity*, you have to … by doing that you feel it as well, by performing it you come to feel it — by the end of the lesson you feel that way. (T20)
Satisfying/-action	• I enjoy spending time with the students in the classroom and getting to know them as individuals, that's the most *satisfying* thing. (T9)
	• The *satisfaction* comes from when the collaboration between me and them you know, meets their goals, and meets mine too. (T14)

Of course, in aligning with a teaching-as-caring ethic, teachers also described their efforts to attend to the relational aspect of their teaching as contributing to their emotional stress. As one teacher noted, "It's quite difficult to meet the needs of every individual if there's one of me and fifteen of them; their individual needs may vary significantly" (T21). One noted the difficulty of not focusing on "how much effort you put, [but to] think about what's best for the students' learning" (T2). Yet another commented that "trying to balance the needs of different people in the classes" contributes to the "anxiety" (T18) that she sometimes feels in relation to her work. In the excerpt below, a teacher comments on the fluctuation of emotions that attends her teaching practice and the exhaustion that she feels in "trying to keep all the momentum going.".

> I mean sometimes you come out, you feel like you are floating but other times if it's a difficult class or the class is down for whatever reason … You know … You are really sort of emotionally pulled and it can be exhausting. Cause you're trying to keep all the momentum going. So that's why I think it is exhausting at times. (T18).

Each of the teachers provided examples of and comments on these kinds of emotional strains in response to our question regarding what they least enjoy about teaching. However, given these teachers' strong emphasis on the emotional rewards that they experience in their teaching practice, as indicated in their responses to the online questionnaires and in the interviews conversations, we want to explore further the interwoven influences of emotional rewards, emotion labor and teacher agency, and teaching-as-caring discourses.

Similar to Burkitt's (2014, p. 140) discussion of the emotion labor required in nursing, we see that for these language teachers "emotion is central to doing the job at all levels," and that it enables them to create and maintain "*the right kinds of relationships* (italics added)" in order "to do their jobs effectively." As such, we consider these teachers' investment in their relationships with students, which is often enacted through agentive demonstrations of caring, as a form of everyday emotion labor. Though they treat their efforts at showing care as relatively easy to perform, the teachers are still working to bring their emotions in line with the feeling rules active in their teaching contexts. That is, teachers are *expected* to demonstrate caring by displaying optimism, empathy, patience and enthusiasm to their students and to develop good relationships with them though the intensity of such expectations often varies depending on the gender identity of the teacher as well as different institutional and professional expectations. The teacher interviewees indicated that they view providing care to students as part of their professional responsibility, and one that they seem to take on willingly. However, it is the taken-for-granted status that these teachers assign to teaching-as-caring feeling rules that requires further consideration.

Along with Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006, p. 122), we want to consider how the discourses of caring "act upon teachers in terms of the emotional labour demanded and the systems of beliefs and emotions that underpin these practices and are embodied with them." They add that it is often difficult to distinguish between caring and emotion labor. But such discourses do not merely control teacher actions; as Zembylas (2003, p. 226) has noted elsewhere, teacher agency is "constituted" in "emotion discourses." While research has shown that teaching-as-caring can contribute to teachers' emotional stress and eventual burnout when they feel forced to demonstrate care which is not reciprocated or is not valued (Acker, 1995), it is just as important to recognize that the same feeling rules can have positive effects for teachers' own well-being through motivating particular actions that are often rewarded by student reciprocity, engagement, and high achievement. In these cases, we can understand how even "the negative aspects of emotional labour might become a catalyst for positive functions of emotional labour" (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006, p. 130). In examining the language teachers' accounts of experiencing happiness or satisfaction or enthusiasm far more frequently than frustration or anxiety or irritation (both in the questionnaires and in the interviews), we come to understand how feeling rules give meaning to their teaching experiences. The emotion labor that they undertake in order to incite emotional rewards for themselves do not arise merely from idiosyncratic, personal dispositions but are "'located' in particular educational histories (of institutions and individuals)" (Zembylas, 2011, p. 41). In this way, we can see that teachers' capacity to exercise agency through undertaking emotion labor is distributed across and entangled with co-present others and is mobilized by particular discourses, values, and valorized practices such as those associated with teaching-as-caring. We also find that these teachers' accounts of their accumulating professional experience further helps us understand what emotions *do* and how they help constitute agentive acts.

5.3. Discourses of experience and teaching-as-caring

In accounting for their years of experience with emotion labor and emotional rewards, many of the teachers commented on how, at one time, managing their emotions had been much more difficult for them. For example, one teacher with nearly four decades of English language teaching experience noted that it "didn't use to be easy to manage emotions." She then added, jokingly, that she has learned that students are "all little devils and they'll test you and they'll do things … so I guess I don't take it so personally anymore" (T12). Another teacher commented on how she used to feel disappointment when the "flow of the class" did not go as she had planned, but that her frustration was due to her not knowing "how to combine the tasks and how to make a smooth transition from one task to another." She then added, "Now I know" (T25). Over and over again, teachers commented on how they had gained confidence with practice, how they now had a repertoire of alternative activities to draw upon if a lesson was not going well, and how they had come to recognize that a bad lesson or even a difficult semester would pass and that they had learned how to put such setbacks in perspective. This "backlog of experience" (T4), as one teacher described it, seems to allow these teachers to feel more "relaxed" and to be more "at ease and confident" (T9) in their professional selves.

In fact, each of the twenty-five teacher interviewees commented explicitly that they have learned, over the years, to attend to emotionally challenging situations through creating momentary physical and/or emotional detachment from the relational flow of teaching practice in order to gain some control over the emotional intensity that can develop in these situations. They advocated, for example, "taking a step back," "stepping outside the classroom," "taking a deep breath," "taking a second," going on a "5-minute walk," "just hav[ing] to walk away," and creating a "little space" in a class session by assigning students "independent work," or as one teacher phrased it, "put[ting] it in a drawer." They also repeatedly commented on the need to remind themselves "to not take it personally" when things do not go well, to recognize that "it's not about you," to tell themselves to "just let it go" or "to think of the bigger picture" or to "try to have a bird's eye view" of a situation, and also to "leave the work behind" on weekends.

In stepping back from scenarios which might damage the reciprocal harmony of teacher-student relationships, a teacher can more easily avoid emotional entanglements that might escalate into highly problematic situations. Though one could regard this as a personal, psychological exercise of emotional detachment (King, 2015), we also can examine such emotion labor as co-constituted in the interrelationship among emotions, agency, and discourses of good teaching. As already noted, teaching-as-caring is practiced through nurturing relationships but also through *not* displaying anger or frustration according to social expectations regarding appropriate emotions. Zembylas (2005b, p. 942) has argued that teachers' orientation to valuing particular emotions is "not inherently natural" for a classroom context; it is "historically contingent." While the language teachers in our study all reported that they had become more adept at managing their emotions with their years of experience, we cannot forget that these individual efforts develop within socioculturally constituted contexts and align (or fail to align) with the feeling rules of such contexts. Thus is it not merely the objective fact of their years of experience and repeated practice in "stepping back" or "taking a deep breath" (i.e. their increasingly routinized practice in such everyday emotion labor) that has helped these teachers gain emotional rewards from their teaching, but also the fact that these actions are in line with particular discourses of good teaching such as teaching-as-caring.

It is in this sense that Zembylas (2002, p. 193) argues that "'feeling' exists within a framework, or structure, articulated as social *and* personal, the result of intersubjective *and* political relations and processes," as noted earlier in the article. Though not addressing teachers in particular, Emirbayer and Mische (1998, pp. 1008–1009) note that individuals who feel as though they able to "exercise a high degree of personal agency … to creatively solve emergent problems within the context of the workplace" are often found to be reproducing "scripted" or "'iterational'" patterns of actions. We take to heart Britzman's (2003, pp. 67-68) approach to both honor and learn from teachers' "cumulative experiences" while also recognizing that their stories must be regarded as "representations of particular discourses." Language teachers' "individual" efforts and strategies develop within a "possible field of action" (Foucault, 1983, p. 221) that is shaped by the discourses and values related to "good teaching," including the feeling rules of teaching-as-caring. It is in such fields of action that teachers are enabled to agentively undertake emotion labor and experience emotional rewards.

6. Discussion

In examining the comments produced by teachers who indicated that they are "happy" and "satisfied" with their work lives far more often than not, and who hold relatively privileged positions in language teaching (three quarters of them had full-time positions in which they worked at only one location), we still find that emotion labor is part of their daily teaching practice. Such everyday emotion labor is not inherently problematic nor something to be avoided, but it is important that we recognize that the emotions and actions associated with teaching-as-caring are, at least in part, socially and politically fostered rather than merely the effects of teachers' "natural" feelings of caring. Feminist researchers have critiqued teaching-as-caring discourses for assigning traditional views of women as naturally caring to teachers (e.g. Acker, 1995), and Bolton (2009, p. 556) contends that emotion labor "practices remain undervalued" in large part because "caring labour" is granted less status given that it is viewed as "women's work—and this is applicable whether we talk of a care assistant or a lawyer." We did not draw attention to the teachers' self-reported gender identities in analyzing their responses, in part because we had many fewer male compared to female participants (roughly one quarter identified as male), thus making comparison by gender problematic. That said, we did not perceive any differences in teachers' comments regarding their investment in teaching-as-caring. While the discourses of teaching-as-caring can be oriented to and expressed differently by male vs. female teachers (see Pullen & Simpson, 2009), the teachers in our study, no matter their reported gender, demonstrated a strong investment in creating good relationships with their students and in showing care. They likewise all reported on their growing confidence over their years of experience in their ability to implement strategies for addressing difficult emotional situations, thereby indirectly orienting to the discourses of teaching-as-caring.

However, in focusing on the need to recognize that the obligations to engage in teaching-as-caring develop in educational discourses about good teaching rather than simply from individual, "natural" responses to students or colleagues, we believe that language teachers can gain a clearer understanding of their emotion practices and experiences. Coming to such an awareness can contribute to teachers' reflexive engagement in ethical self-formation. Ethical self-formation entails more than implementing intentional strategies such as "stepping back" from emotional turmoil. Engaging in ethical self-formation compels language teachers to consider how their emotional experiences are socially and historically constituted and how feeling rules and discourses of good teaching have "installed" particular kinds of "desires" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 229) in them for becoming good teachers. This kind of reflexive care of the self does not lead to freedom from feeling rules or liberation

from constraints, but rather, it can lead to critical awareness of why, when, and how they experience emotions that they come to characterize as positive or negative.

Though many would argue that discourses of teaching-as-caring lead to positive outcomes for teachers and students, both in terms of enhanced learning and teacher well-being (e.g. Noddings, 2013), these discourses still need to be understood as contributing to particular socially and politically organized ways of being. Such an understanding can be particular useful when teachers do not find it easy to show care to particular students or in particular situations. Rather than regarding the feelings of shame, frustration, or anger that often accompany such moments as signals of personal inadequacy, teachers can locate them as signals of how their emotions are constituted in particular discourses. Drawing on Zembylas (2003, p. 232) we believe that it is important for language teachers to critically reflect on how their emotions "inform" them of how they orient to feeling rules in their everyday teaching practices and how they incite emotion labor, as well as to consider how they might exercise agency in choosing to "think and act differently". In adopting this active reflexivity, language teachers can learn to regard their emotion experiences, not simply as effects that should be either avoided or embraced, but as moments that require them to make judgments regarding whether to resist or accede to particular feeling rules and to avoid interpreting such emotions as intrinsically "positive" or "negative".

7. Conclusion

Emotion labor is woven into the most mundane aspects of teaching practice, even among highly experienced and generally "happy" teachers, such as those in our study. We agree with Benesch (2017, p. 182) that teacher emotions provide necessary "signals" for language teachers to initiate reflection on how particular discourses of teaching intersect with their emotion experiences and choices to exercise agency through emotion labor. We thus urge language teachers to consider how their efforts to become "good teachers" through undertaking emotion labor can gain clarity when considered in light of ethical self-formation. We find Infinito's (2003) characterization of ethical self-formation a fitting challenge for language teachers—and for all of us. He contends that ethical self-formation involves adopting "a critical stance that moves us continually to re-create ourselves and the world" and recognizing that "living in the tension between discourses that have created us and those we choose to draw from in constructing ourselves, while not always a comfortable place to be, may be the most ethical way to live" (p. 170–171). Developing teachers' awareness of their potential for exercising agency relationally can enable them to reflect on, respond to, and sometimes challenge the feeling rules active in their teaching contexts in their ongoing efforts to become better teachers.

Appendix

The following prompt was included in our online questionnaire:

Listed below are 20 emotion words. Please select **six** words that identify emotions you feel most commonly when teaching English in your current position.

Happiness	Frustration
Sadness	Disappointment
Irritation	Disillusion
Anxiety	Guilt
Disgust	Despair
Fascination	Caring
Pride	Love
Enthusiasm	Loss
Boredom	Powerlessness
Awe	Satisfaction

Note: This list is adapted from Zembylas (2005a, p. 220). After deliberation, we removed the words "Intimacy" and "Wonder" from Zembylas's original list because of their ambiguity and potential for being misunderstood in a decontextualized list such as this and added the word "Satisfaction."

Appendix B. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.03.002.

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