

# CLASSROOM EMOTION AND REFLEXIVITY

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This workshop is based about to be published as well as my doctoral study.

Hopman, J (in press), *Surviving emotional work for teachers: improving wellbeing and professional learning through reflexive practice*, Routledge, London.

Hopman, J 2017, 'Emotional work: applying reflexivity in teacher practice', PhD thesis, Victoria University.

# OUTCOMES

1. Understand the emotional toll of working in classrooms
2. Reflexively inquire into an emotional classroom experience

# **THE SESSION**

## **CLASSROOM EMOTION**

What is emotion?

What is the catalyst for emotion in classrooms?

## **REFLEXIVITY**

What is reflexivity?

An example in practice

Facilitate a reflexive process



# CLASSROOM EMOTION

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# EMOTION

- Emotion is complex.
- Emotion consists of a physical feeling, an appraisal of an emotional incident, and a display of emotion, which takes place within a collective context.
- Emotion and thinking are enmeshed.
- Pleasure and unpleasure rather than positive and negative.
- Specific emotions are always clustered with other emotion.
- Individuals experience emotion within a collective experience framed by **emotional rules**.
- Abiding by display rules and feeling rules requires either faking or hiding emotion.

(Informed by the work of Fried, Mansfield, & Dobozy, 2015; **Hochschild, 2012**; Turner, 2009, Winograd 2003)

# EIGHT NOTABLE EMOTIONS IN TEACHING

Eight notable emotions were identified in the teachers' work:

Defeat (302)                      included words like “*overwhelmed*,” “*challenged*,” “*overworked*,”  
“*difficult*,” “*fight*” and “*hard*”

Contentment (122)

Frustration

Worry

Anger

Sadness

Happiness

Love

# WHAT IS THE CATALYST FOR SUCH EMOTION?

A combination of:

Who teachers are

What is expected of them

How they might be limited

Underlying assumptions that feed into each element



# WHO ARE TEACHERS?

# HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TEACHING PRACTICE?

[Teaching] is a very personal profession I think (Avery).

Being in a classroom can sometimes feel like you are on a roller coaster depending on what's happening around you, but it's my job to make the classroom calm (Remi).

Caring can be the best part of [teaching], but it can also be the worst (Ali).

There are so many corners that you can cut, but it just wouldn't be me if I cut the corner (Logan).

I love seeing progress in the students. Getting good results (Parker).

Teaching is so much more than what it seems (Riley).



# TEACHING IS REWARDING

- **'love'** getting good results
- **'caring'**
- **enjoyment; excitement; passion**



# TEACHING IS HARD WORK

- “*It’s my job to make the classroom calm*” (Remi).
- Riley suggests that teachers might typically have “*loud booming voices*” and be punitive.
- Parker emphasises the importance of “*getting good results.*”

**The ‘hard work’ feeds into the reward.**





**WHAT IS EXPECTED OF TEACHERS?**

**HOW MIGHT THEY BE LIMITED?**

# EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHERS' PERFORMANCE

'loud booming voices'; should continually learn, change, adapt; 'multiple roles'; 'having the answers'; 'getting good results'; 'get students to pass'; 'disciplining kids'; 'protect students'; 'enthuse the kids'; 'enhance and support [students]'; 'nurture'; 'meet students where they are'; 'make the classroom a calm place'.

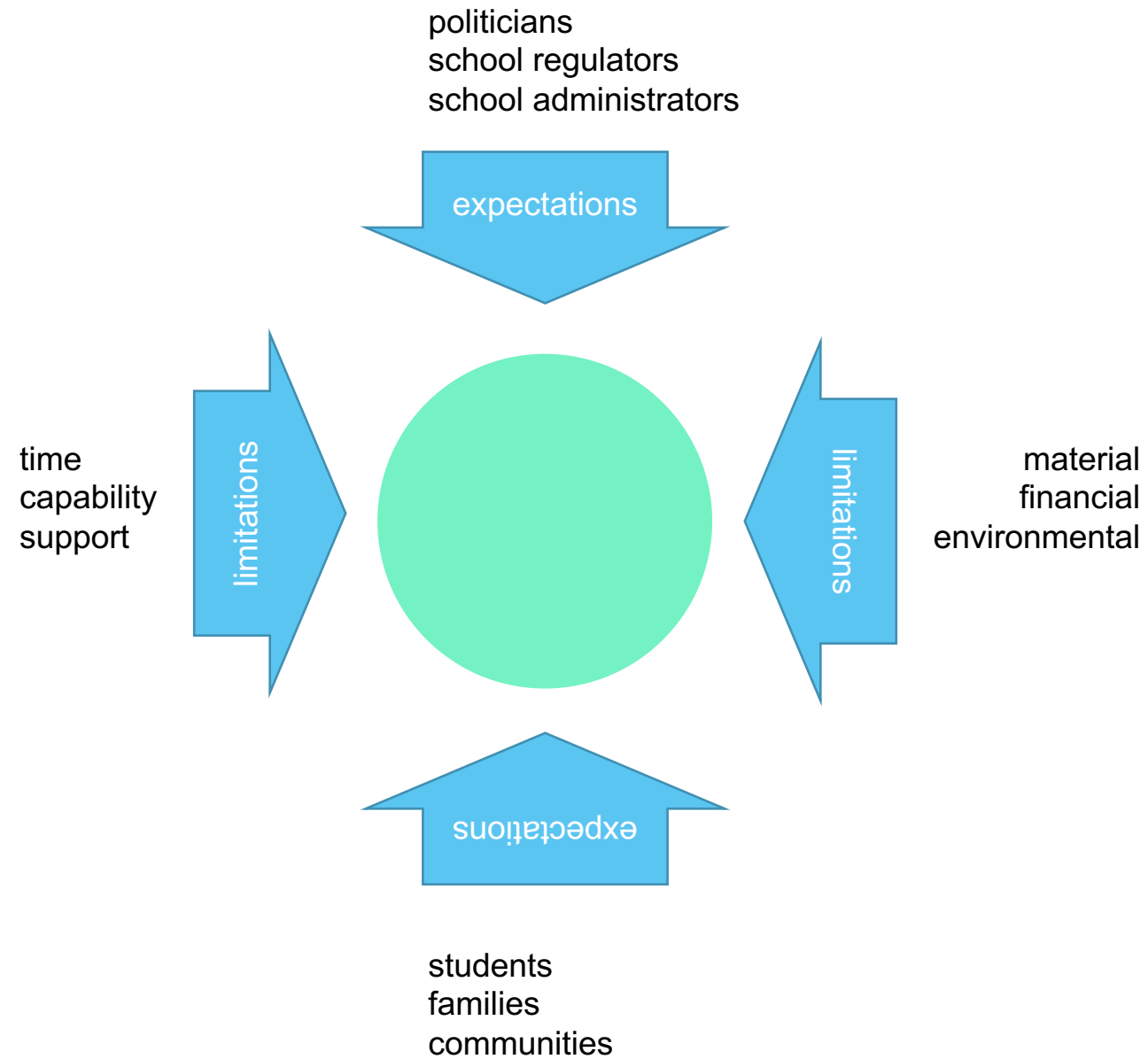


# EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHERS' PERFORMANCE

There is a **set of norms** and common knowledge drawn on to inform a teacher about how to 'perform' (Edwards 2017; Kelchtermans, 2009).

Teachers are expected to **fit a mould** (e.g. Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015; Edwards, 2017; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2012; Johnson & Down, 2013; Priestley et al., 2012; Ryan & Bourke, 2013; White, 2010).

Teachers are expected to abide by **rules** (Winograd 2003).



# TEACHERS IN TENSION

*“There are so many corners that you can cut, but it just wouldn’t be me if I cut the corner” (Logan).*

What if “*cut[ting] the corner*” was the expectation in a certain situation?  
Then, Logan could no longer be “*me.*”

**[T]eachers are supposed to enjoy children, enjoy their work, maintain a patient and kind front, become angry with children infrequently and so on. These rules are not necessarily taught formally to teachers, but they are collaboratively constructed in the everyday work of teachers, students, principals, parents, and teacher educators (Winograd 2003, p.1645).**



# TEACHER EMOTIONAL RULES

- Frustration, worry, sadness and anger are evoked by student interactions;
- Teachers should not feel or display fear;
- Teachers should not display anger;
- Teachers should not display sadness to students;
- Contentment is evoked by the act of teaching, students and other teachers;
- Happiness is evoked by the act of teaching and students;
- Love is evoked by the act of teaching;
- Teachers should not feel or display love for their students or other teachers; and
- Defeat is inherent in teaching but must not be shown.

# REFLEXIVITY

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# REFLEXIVITY

- More than reflection — thinking about what happened
- Critically considering the deeper influences that compel action and how you relate with others:
  - What was your thought process?
  - How did you feel?
  - What beliefs, values or habits of mind fuelled assumptions?
  - What power relationships influenced the action?

# LOGAN'S STORY: The Fragile Kid

The story has been put together from a series of conversations over several sessions and contains only the voice of the recounting teacher.

It is set in a government secondary school

# COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS

STAGE	person recounting	group
share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did you feel?</li> <li>What was expected of you?</li> <li>In what ways did you feel limited?</li> </ul>	Listen to person recounting
identify strengths	Listen to group response	What were the strengths in the story?
perspective		<p>Think of a similar incident, where the answers to the questions below come close to the answers of the original story, and share.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did you feel?</li> <li>What was expected of you?</li> <li>In what ways did you feel limited?</li> </ul>
inquiry	<p>What assumptions drove the stories?</p> <p>What have we learned?</p>	

# COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY PROCESS

## How did you feel?

- Frustrated
- Torn
- Sad
- worried

## What was expected of you?

- maintain a calm classroom and happy students
- not make a spectacle of the situation
- engage students in the next activity
- talk to the fragile kid
- protect students

## In what ways did you feel limited?

Logan managed most expectations at the cost of not supporting the fragile kid

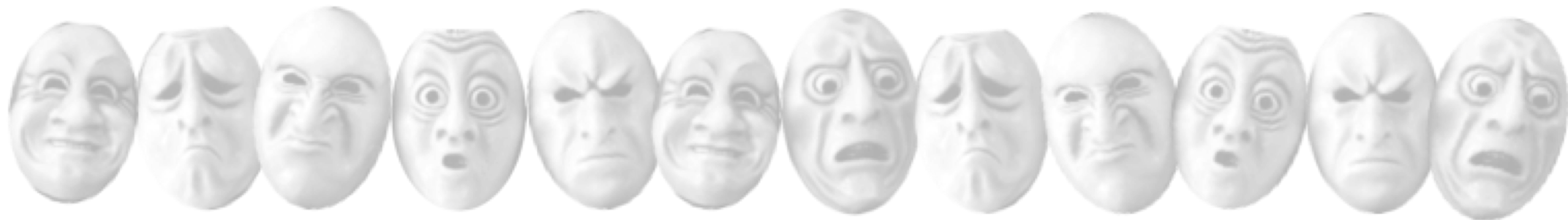
# TEACHERS SHOULD NOT DISPLAY SADNESS TO STUDENTS

*I think this was a real personal let down for her and I felt sad for her.*



# FRUSTRATION WORRY SADNESS AND ANGER ARE EVOKED BY STUDENT INTERACTIONS

- *I was actually quite worried about her.*
- *I was really frustrated because I wanted to go and talk to her*



# TEACHERS SHOULD NOT FEEL OR DISPLAY LOVE FOR THEIR STUDENTS OR OTHER TEACHERS

- *I really wanted to highlight and praise her for what she had done really well and what she could do to improve the next assignment— care*
- *You can be mate, you can be a parent — attachment*
- *What this [student] probably needed was a friend ... a hug or something. [It was] really confronting but I had to be a bit calculating [and stand back].*



# ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT STUDENT ABILITY

*I think in terms of work and academics if you set low expectations, sometimes it can teach kids learned helplessness ... where they say, "I can't do this so I'll just wait for [the teacher] to come and 'I'll rely on [the teacher] to do this". That's not what I want to teach. So, I'm guessing the same thing sort of applies to behaviour ... But everyone's involved and it's a long term process so it's not as though what I do makes or breaks it, it's just a building block (Logan).*



# THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER REFLEXIVITY IN MANAGING EMOTIONAL WORK

# CONCLUSION

- A teacher cannot physically, mentally and emotionally control every aspect of their practice, yet they are expected to follow a 'script', which often expects them to.
- We are not always consciously aware of what motivates us but a process of reflexivity can help us interrogate.
- Emotion is a useful gateway to explore the complex thinking around an experience where limitations, expectations are in tension.
- Reflexivity is made even more difficult when politicised institutional emotional rules manipulate teacher emotions.
- So, reflexivity and emotional consciousness is a necessity of teacher practice.
- A process of support is needed to formally confront the unknown aspects of teachers' work.



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**THANK YOU**

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