



EMOTIONAL TRANSITIONS AND BELONGING: A POETIC ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

How Higher Education Feels: Commentaries on Poems that Illuminate Emotions in Learning and Teaching by Kathleen M. Quinlan (Ed) 2016, Sense Publishers consists of short, evocative case studies to prompt discussion and reflection on the practice of teaching in higher education, and is perfect for use in instructional development and in graduate level courses on teaching, learning and student development. This study paper analyses a poem about learner's feelings on transition from high school education to higher education.

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, learners, transition from high school education to higher education.

1.0 BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE BOOK

This book highlights the key role of emotion, bringing together expert commentators to explore a variety of theoretical perspectives on emotion in higher education. This book charts new territory by using poems as case studies to contribute to important, under-researched social scientific questions.

Teaching and learning in higher education can evoke strong feelings, including confusion, anxiety, boredom, curiosity, surprise and exhilaration. These emotions affect students' learning, progress and overall success. Teachers' emotions affect how they teach and their relationships and communication with students. Yet the emotional dimensions of teachers' and students' experiences are rarely discussed in the context of improving higher education.

This book addresses that gap, offering short, evocative case studies to spark conversation among university teachers. It challenges readers to reflect on how higher education feels, to explore the emotional landscape of courses and programmes they create and consider the emotional effects of message embedded in various policies and practices.

Following the student lifecycle from enrolment to reunion, each of the main chapters contains 10 to 15 accessible, emotionally-engaging poems that serve as succinct case studies highlighting how some aspect of learning, teaching or development in higher education feels. Each chapter also contains an expert scholarly commentary that identifies emergent themes across the cases and establishes connections to theory and practice in higher education. The poems-as-case-studies are ideal for use in faculty or educational development workshops or for individual reflection. A variety of theoretical perspectives and associated reflection prompts provide lenses for variously interpreting the poems. An appendix offers suggestions for structuring case discussions as part of educational development activities.

The book promotes a person-centered discourse, giving voice to previously neglected aspects of higher education and reminding us that education is essentially a human endeavor.



In academia, there is often a distrust of emotion; it is seen as a hindrance to the objectivity, distance and rational thinking that are the traditional hallmarks of universities (Leathwood & Hey, 2009). It is precisely this distrust, though, that leads to the ‘cognitive bias’ in education described in the previous paragraph (Liston & Garrison, 2004). It is not necessary to see emotion and cognition as opposed to one another, though. A variety of fields, including philosophy (e.g. Boler, 1999), cognitive science (e.g. Maiese, 2010), cultural studies (e.g. Ahmed, 2004), sociology (e.g. Zembylas, 2007), politics (e.g. Clarke, Hoggett, & Thompson, 2006), neuroscience (e.g. Damasio, 1994) and education (e.g. Goleman, 1996; Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007; Hargreaves, 1998) are now embracing a more integrated view of cognition and emotion. Although different disciplines and theorists conceptualize emotion differently (see chapter 2 for a discussion of different conceptual stances), there is general agreement that we cannot separate mind from body or feeling from thinking. Emotions cannot be neatly packed away while people are engaging in ‘rational’ thinking or public life. Feelings come into decision-making, problem-solving, learning and teaching. They are a part of our social institutions, from media and politics to religion and education. Through this book, I intend to spark conversations among teachers about the emotional dimensions of learning and teaching in higher education. I hope this book challenges you to consider how you experience teaching and how your students experience their education with you. Through conversation with colleagues, I hope you will explore the emotional landscape of courses and programs you create and question the emotional messages your policies and practices send to students. I aim to contribute to our understanding of emotional experiences in higher education by offering a language, some key concepts and illustrative, emotive examples (as poems) of how emotion is entangled with thinking in higher education. In chapters 3 through 11, case studies – written as poems – illuminate the integrated nature of education, with evocative representations of a wide range of emotions associated with learning, teaching and growing in higher education. The chapters are organized roughly to follow the lifecycle of students, starting with the transition to higher education, the associated challenges of belonging and identity and the implications of students’ struggles for teachers. Chapters 7 through 9 highlight the process of teaching and learning in particular subjects and the emotions these subjects prompt. Examinations characterize the end of courses and programs, thus the success and failure chapter comes toward the end of the book. Chapter 11 includes a number of poems that look back on the higher education experience from a distance.

2.0 UTILITY FOR READERS

- It provides readers with a sense to appreciate the holistic nature of teaching and learning in higher education; emotion is intertwined with cognition and affects both process and outcomes.
- It aids in Practice of using different theoretical stances to interpret (and re-interpret) emotionally-laden classroom episodes.
- It helps in considering alternative courses of action and their implications in emotionally-laden teaching situations.
- Clarify one’s own educational philosophy.

3.0 REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS FOR ANALYZING THE POEM

1. What are the feelings evoked by this poem?
2. What is this case about? What is/are the key issue(s)?
3. What educational questions does it raise for teachers in higher education? For teachers in your discipline specifically?
4. How would you explain or interpret the situation in the poem using one or more of the theoretical stances outlined in the pre-reading? Which theoretical stances are most helpful in interpreting it?
5. What might the teacher do now? Or, what else might the teacher do or have done?

4.0 GIST OF THE CHAPTER TRANSITION TO HIGHER EDUCATION – IN SEARCH OF BELONGING

The transition to higher education is a significant milestone in the life-cycle of students. It evokes a range of emotions from excitement to fear as they make a new intellectual and social home for themselves. Traditional-aged students who leave home often find themselves mingling with and learning from students with quite different backgrounds. How students adjust and the extent to which they are able to establish a feeling of belonging in new communities can set the stage for much of their university experience (Strayhorn, 2012). This chapter is particularly important in light of massification and increased internationalization of higher education, as more students find themselves navigating unfamiliar cultures in higher education.

5.0 COMMENTS ON THE POEM

Education is, fundamentally, a human experience – one that involves feelings as well as thoughts. However, the emotional experiences of teaching and learning in higher education have been neglected. There is little attention to the emotional challenges faced by teachers, with texts on teaching instead emphasizing conceptual change, expanding knowledge or theoretical grounding of practice. Likewise, books on teaching in higher education often focus on developing students' thinking skills, mainly analytical and critical thinking. While cognition is certainly a key facet of learning in higher education, it does not capture the whole experience or all of the important goals we might have for university education. There is less attention to other ways in which students may be growing and developing as people during the formative years of higher education. Yet, challenges to attitudes and identities and the forging of new relationships and commitments in a culture beyond family and home communities are all significant aspects of students' experiences of higher education and are strongly emotional. In these ways, students are – first and foremost – humans who are in transition.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The aim of this book is to help fill that gap, by supporting a person-centered discourse in higher education that enables us – as university teachers – to voice aspects of the experience of academia that have been hitherto silent. To ensure that higher education succeeds as a learning environment that nurtures the growth of students – broadly conceived – teachers must consider the role that emotion plays in learning and teaching processes.

WEB RESOURCES:

<https://www.sensepublishers.com>

<https://www.springer.com>

<https://www.tandfonline.com>

<https://www.forbes.com/>