



## ARTICLE

### The 'Hunger Games': emotions of student teachers on school placements

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## The 'Hunger Games': emotions of student teachers on school placements

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### **Abstract**

Having the opportunity to teach in a school alongside a more experienced teacher is a crucial part of the learning and development of a student teacher. This research focuses on the one-year Professional Graduate Diploma in Education Programme (primary), during which student teachers spend 50% of their time in placement in two schools. School placements can be a rollercoaster for many student teachers, generating a range of emotions, from happy and comfortable to deflated and fearful. Yet, although teaching has been described as an emotional practice (Hargreaves, 1998), little is known about the emotional experiences of student teachers during their school placement. This study set out to identify and address this gap. The research is grounded in a sociocultural perspective which sees the emotions as highly situated. As such the research focus aimed to explore the dynamic interplay between individuals and their contexts in order to understand more about the ways student teachers understood their emotions, regulated their emotions and engaged in emotional labour. Hargreaves's emotional geographies provided the theoretical framework for the study. Data was built around individual weekly audio recordings, responses to semi-structured interviews and guided focus groups. While data analysis is still on going, some tentative emerging themes will be discussed towards the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** emotions, emotional labour, emotional geographies, student teachers, initial teacher education

## **Introduction**

The emerging role of emotions in the context of a school placement for student teachers is an uncommon focus for most researchers. For the past decade researchers have been focusing on the emotions of classroom teachers. Hargreaves (1998) identified that teaching is an emotional practice and along with learning is irretrievably emotional in nature (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Henry and Osborne, 1983). While teachers experience a variety of emotions during teaching; therefore, student teachers are also going to experience a variety of emotions during their school placements. Understanding emotions is an important determinant of understanding the various complexities that student teachers go through during their school placements. Previous researchers (Sutton and Wheatly, 2003; White, 2009) have established that initial teacher education (ITE) could be improved on by understanding the emotions and complexities that student teachers encounter. Therefore, the emotions of student teachers during their school placements have been the aim of this research project.

How student teachers understand their emotions while constructing their personal teaching identity and practice during their school placement experience is how the theoretical framework for this research project was decided upon. Hargreaves (2001) introduced five emotional geographies to describe the patterns of closeness and distance of our human interactions that create the emotions experienced in relationships with ourselves, each other and the world around us. This was the theoretical framework used for this social constructionist analysis of student teachers' emotions while on school placement. This theoretical framework was chosen for this research because the five different emotional geographies consider not only the student teachers' individual emotions within the classroom but also the influencing impact that the educational system structures may have on a student teachers' emotional experience. Furthermore, previous research suggests that an understanding of the educational structures may be incomplete and that researchers should explore not only how social constraints and conditions of a student teachers practices effect their emotions, but also how the working conditions influence the emotions of developing student teachers (Tsang, 2014). For the purpose of the article restraint on word allowance, this paper will provide an overview on only two of the emotional geographies; the physical and moral. This paper is part of a Ph.D. thesis that used all five of the emotional geographies- physical, moral, sociocultural, professional and political to identify the emotional experiences of student teachers 'during their school placements.

Seven participants who were in the post graduate diploma in education (PDGE) primary programme volunteered to participate for one year. A PDGE student teacher is on a 1-year route to a primary or secondary teaching qualification. Recruitment and selections of participants for this study were given to primary PDGE students who volunteered after a presentation was given and followed up with participation information. A case study with these seven participants was carried out for a year during their two primary school placements. In a case study the researcher must have an in-depth understanding of the case (Yin, 2017). Therefore, the data tools used in each case study consisted of individual audio recordings, semi-structured interviews and a final focus group with all seven participants.

## Emotional practice of teaching

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the emotions of teaching. Studies have found that good teachers are emotional, passionate individuals that connect to their students through their work by making their classrooms pleasurable, creative, challenging and fun. It has previously been observed that teaching is an emotional practice (Denzin, 1984) and contended that teachers are passionate about their ideas and relationships (Fried, 1995). Teaching is one of the most emotional practices that arouses and influences the feelings and actions of a teacher (Hargreaves, 1998). Therefore, a teacher must have the emotional ability to interpret their own thoughts, understanding of situations, and the feelings of not only themselves, but also of all those around them (Max van Manen, 1995). Here it is discussed the thinking that has developed around the emotions of teaching and what has influenced this research.

## Emotional geographies

To analyse the emotions identified by the student teachers during their school placements, as previous mentioned in this article was the theoretical framework of “emotional geographies” (Hargreaves, 2001). Hargreaves (2001) described these geographies as the spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in the human interactions and relationships between colleagues. The geographical context of where the emotions a student teacher identifies while interacting with others in their school placement will bring forward the student teacher emotional understanding (Denzine, 1984). Researchers have used the concept of emotional geographies to identify the supports and threats of basic emotional bonds from the closeness and distance of relationships or interactions in schools. Hargreaves (2001) established that emotions are felt in the context of five different geographies that can cause emotional misunderstanding among teachers, students, colleagues and parents. However, few studies have used the concept of the emotional geographies to identify the supports and threats of student teachers’ emotions during their school placement. The five emotional geographies that Hargreaves (2001) identified that were used in this study to interpret student teachers’ emotions are the following:

- *Physical geographies* are the time and space that can bring and keep people in longstanding positions where relationships might develop or where relationships might be reduced to strings of episodic interactions.
- *Cultural geographies* are where differences of race, cultural background, gender, or disability can create a closeness or distance between people.
- *Moral geographies* are when people pursue a common purpose while feeling a sense of accomplishment together. It can also be when they are defensive about their own purpose and disagree or demonstrate a lack of concern about others’ purposes.
- *Professional geographies* are where definitions and the norms of professionalism either separate professionals from their colleagues or open them up to explore professional issues together.

- *Political geographies* are when the differences in power and position can alter interpersonal communication and or where differences cannot be used to protect others interests while empowering others.

The five emotional geographies describe the patterns of closeness and distance in human interactions that shape the emotions that student teachers' experience within the relationships with themselves, each other, and the world around them. I will limit my discussion here to only the two geographies that I mentioned earlier in the paper for they are the two being presented at this time. The concept of the physical emotional geography identifies the possible supports and threats of the basic emotional connections and understandings that may arise in schools due to the distance or closeness of the different interactions and relationships between student teachers, mentors and other staff. Student teachers' closeness or distance in their interaction and relationships among the physical emotional geography could or could not allow them to cultivate their emotional understanding through their collaborative learning with teacher educators, mentors and peers while developing confidence in their own abilities (Goodnough *et al.*, 2009). Positive emotions are experienced in the context of the physical geography when gratitude, appreciation, agreement, and support given are received (Hargreaves, 2001; Oatley, 1991). We will now examine the moral geography and explain how it allowed for participants to explore their emotional experiences during their school placements.

The moral geography is when people pursue a common purpose while feeling a sense of closeness and accomplishment together. When there was a common purpose in place between the mentor teacher and student teacher a shared learning goal was developed with an emotion of accomplishment. Lui (2016) suggests that when teachers from different social and educational backgrounds come together, they may have a set of different purposes. When student teachers enter a school placement, they may or may not have the same beliefs or purpose that their mentor teacher or school community is trying to achieve. Previous research has established that by teachers' identifying their emotions within an emotional geography, they will be able to understand the unexpected and unknown emotional experiences they may have during teaching (Hargreaves, 2001). Understanding the emotions of student teachers during their school placements and identifying ways to improve their experience in their developing teaching practice and sustainability is what brought me to ask the following questions:

1. Through reflecting on emotional experiences during school placements, how do PDGE student teachers identify significant emotional experiences through emotional geographies?
2. How do PDGE student teachers with various background experiences begin to identify and understand their emotional understanding in cooperation?

These questions seek to understand the emotions that PDGE student teachers experience during their school placements and how they use their developing knowledge and practice to cope with those experiences.

## **Methodology**

### **Research context**

In Scotland currently, all Primary and Secondary school teachers are required to support and mentor student teachers who are in a university teaching programme. The PDGE course is a full-time course of 36 weeks, where 18 weeks are comprised of on-campus teaching/study and another 18 weeks of two different school placements. The amount of time that the student teachers are required to spend in their school placement is regulated by the General Teaching Council of Scotland. The COVID-19 pandemic altered this time frame for PDGE students during this research project. Before COVID-19, the two school placements comprised of two 9-week sessions with one starting in October and the following starting in February. The blend of time in university and time on placement was set up with a 7-week placement during November/ December and an 11-week placement starting in February/March during this study.

Once ethics approval was granted by the university and all local authorities where the seven participants were placed, data was collected using individual weekly audio recordings, two semi structured interviews one in December 2020 and the second in April 2021. Finally, a focus group in May 2021 with all the participants. As mentioned before, a case study approach was used to allow each participant to share the story of their complex, diverse and emotional experiences. It is in these narrative stories that the shared and persistent dilemmas, as well as commonalities and celebrations will emerge (Bloomfield, 2010). Each of the seven participants shared a weekly audio recording where they followed a guide of questions through each emotional geography (see appendix I). Each recording was transcribed and analysed based on the theoretical framework proposed by Hargreaves (2001). There was not always a consistent submittance of a recording each week from all the participants. This can be one of the drawbacks of using this data tool approach, but it was found to benefit participants by giving them a daily routine to reflect on their emotions and teaching practice.

Another well-known tool for assessing emotions is through interviews that focuses in on the participant's emotional experiences in relation to the context of each of the emotional geographies (Hargreaves, 2001). The benefit of this approach is that it allows the participant to share in detail particular emotional experiences that were either positive or negative with anonymity. At the end of their first and second school placement, student teacher participants were given a semi-structured interview over Microsoft Teams. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and was recorded with the permission of each participant. Questions and prompts were prepared based on the theoretical framework and from the transcribed audio recordings. It was important to this research to get the participant's story with details about their experiences and the emotions they felt.

However, there are certain drawbacks associated with the use of semi-structured interviews. A single interview limits the participant from the access of others' experiences and to disclose their experiences while sharing their emotional understanding. Therefore, after all interviews were completed at the end of the final school placement and a focus group discussion was conducted with all the participants. A focus group can spotlight each participants various backgrounds while surfacing the norms and processes of their social interactions as they present and discuss their experiences with each other

(Green and Hart, 1999; Kitzinger, 1994). The main disadvantage of the method is that when analysing the data gathered it could become complex and multilayered from the seven participants (Warr, 2005). Therefore, the focus group will not be used to generate multiple individual accounts but rather try to focus on the participants interactions and exchanges of emotions while they formulate understanding of their experiences (Carpini and Williams, 1994). Mixed method in a triangulation of data in this qualitative research provided credibility in identifying student teacher emotions during their school placement (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Knafl and Bretimayer (1998) argue that the research phenomena being explored from multiple perspectives enhances the data collection with the use of comparison based on the principals of the idea convergence and the confirmation of the findings.

### **Data analysis**

The use of life story data has a relatively long tradition within emotions (Bloomfield, 2010). There are various ways to gather the emotional experiences that student teachers experience. The data gathered from the various recordings that the participants submitted served as a guide in creating the questions for the individual semi-structured interviews after each placement. After transcribing each interview, a comparison of common themes from all the interviews were identified amongst the five different emotional geographies. This process was also repeated with the focus group after being transcribed. As a comment or an emotional experience occurs repeatedly among the data, themes were initiated followed by sub themes integrity, resentment, isolation, vulnerability, inadequacy and resilience.

Returning to the identified themes that emerged from the data, illustrative quotes were selected that gave the 'emotional flavour' to the emotions and feelings the student teachers experienced during their two school placements. Final theme codes were given to map out the emotional journey of each student teachers' school placements. The sub themes mentioned above came from a similar data analysis used by Bloomfield (2010) on a single case study of a student teacher navigating through a school placement. A data analysis of the audio recordings, semi-structured interviews and focus group, gave a cross analysis across all seven cases. As the data was recontextualized into themes around each emotional geography it created a reduced set of data. The sub themes that developed from each emotional geography gave a greater transparency to the student teachers emotions.

## **Emergent findings**

### **Physical geography**

The data from the study was focused around all five emotional geographies, while there was a significant aspect on the relationships between the student teacher and mentor teacher. These relationships varied in each experience where some developed a closeness with their mentors while others did feel a distance. The relationship between student teachers and mentor teacher is important to a student teacher as they seek appreciation and gratitude for their achievements (Hargreaves, 2001). Feedback on their teaching skills and practice is what all the participants wanted from their mentors. If that was not received in a positive and constructive manner, the confidence in the student teacher becoming a teacher decreased.

The process of building relationships with their mentors, colleagues, parents and students was their goal and turned out to be one of the most challenging professional undertakings for some of them. In this study, it was found that the way a mentor gave or did not give feedback to the student teacher, affected the student teacher's motivation. Participant D shared in an interview, "It was hard to get my mentor teacher's approval. This caused my confidence to dip. It would have helped me if I received more approval from my support teacher." In asking another participant what they learned about relationships within a school community, they replied, "Relationships are tricky, but are one of the most important things in a school. You need someone to lean on. I don't think student teachers are respected by everyone in the school" (Student teacher G, Interview). Both illustrative quotes indicate that a mentor teachers' acceptance of the student teacher's presence in the school impacted the student teacher emotionally.

### **Moral geography**

The process of building relationships was not the only emotional experience felt around the emotional geographies. The expectations from their mentors versus what the university expected of student teachers caused challenging professional undertakings for some. The data revealed that there was a discrepancy around the moral geography in the work load that student teachers were expected to carry out. There was evidence that the student and the mentor teachers did not have a shared understanding of the university guidelines, which led to increased workload for the student and thus greater pressure and stress. Student teacher E shared, "I was doing two full days week six and seven, our guidance university book says that during the days you are not teaching and in agreement with yourself and your support teacher just decide just what other support you will provide your school. Whereas my support teachers there was not an agreement as I was just told. They said, "we had a discussion, and we think you should be doing this this and that instead. Which I thought was not in line with what was supposed to be with the university." Student teachers are not expecting to be passive recipients in the work and challenges of developing their teaching practice, they desire involvement in all aspects. Bloomfield (2010) suggests that a student teacher will navigate through many complex and diverse experiences that for them will challenge consistency. Participant E shared, "It becomes more of what the school and your mentor want you to be. You do what is expected of you and you try to please people more. I think you just need to put your head down and work hard." Hargreaves (2001) stated that teaching is no exception to how people experience or express emotions from one geography to another. Hence becoming a teacher is about being tactful, caring, and an obedient teacher that is expected to display emotions.

Student teachers, mentor and school colleagues work in close proximity and hopefully pursue the similar learning objectives for their students and themselves. Therefore, they may share similar troubles and accomplishments. What is surprising is that student teachers all agreed that their school placement felt like the Hunger Games. During focus group the participants explained why the Hunger Games was an appropriate term of what their school placements felt like. Participant D shared, "Well, I felt it was like the Hunger Games, like my undergrad business degree, you are almost granted to pass by doing the work. You may not get the grades you want always, but with the PDGE you are continuing to have



to prove yourself. There is a lot of people involved in the decision of whether you are going to pass, and you see other student teachers in your school who may or may not pass, so there is the creation of that added pressure. Who was going to survive?" It then becomes a question of whatever is necessary to get by, rather than focusing on becoming a teacher.

In summary, it was in the content of the physical geography that student teachers wanted more supportive and collaborative relationships in their school placement with clear and balanced expectations. This also accords with other studies, which showed that support and collaboration among teachers creates new ideas, creative energy and moral support that will help student teachers be more effective with their students (Rosenholtz, 1989; Fullen and Hargreaves, 1996; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993; Wiley, 2001). It is within the physical *geography* that the time and space can bring and keep people in longstanding positions where relationships might develop or where relationships might be reduced to strings of sporadic interactions. In an audio recording, participant C stated, "It felt good that I can go back to the school and that they made me feel part of the school. I know I made an impact on the staff and the students. It is nice to having that connection." When mentors and school colleagues appreciate a student teachers' efforts and endorse their efforts with clear expectations the student teacher feels a closeness and a positive emotion in their developing relationship with their mentor. Therefore, the student teacher begins to identify their emotions and beginning to gain the emotional understanding of their own emotions and the experiences of others. Hence why it was suggested by Hargreaves (2001) to look emotions around each of the five emotional geographies discussed in this paper.

### **Conclusion and future inquiry**

Emotional understanding has always been part of the conversation with emotional geographies in the literature around teachers' emotions. A key feature of emotional understanding is when one person's shares the same emotional experience and has for themselves the same or similar experience (Denzin, 1984). For student teachers to be able to have the same emotional understanding they need to be able to draw from their own teaching emotional experiences to unravel and interpret the emotional experience they are encountering and the way their mentor or other colleagues are responding will open our understanding of what they experience during their school placements. Previous studies have mainly looked at the emotions of teachers and not the emotions of student teachers. The data showed that emotional understanding played a significant role in the student teachers' interactions and relationships with their mentor teachers during their school placement. This is a new thread of data on emotions in the world of education and will add to how student teachers are supported by universities, schools, teachers, and the teaching council.

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## Appendix

### Guide for Audio Digital Recordings

**Introduction and Ethics:** Thank you for agreeing to use digital recording during your participation in this research study. You will be using the app voice recorder on your smart phone that I have instructed you on. You will be sending me an audio file each week that may last between 15 and 30 minutes prompted by the open-ended questions of the theoretical framework of emotional geographies. Before we begin, I'd like to remind you of your right to withdraw at any time. If there are any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them.

*(Reasoning: I want to make sure that the participant is aware of their rights prior to starting the interview to minimise distress by having clearly established that they can interrupt the interview at any point, and by reassuring them that though this interview is for my research, I am putting their comfort first. Through this I hope to establish a rapport with the student)*

**Data collection:** I'm going to be keeping this recording and transcribing it. I will transcribe the audio data myself to ensure data protection and anonymity. This data will be analysed by myself, with input from my two supervisors. I may use a data analysis software called NVivo to help me analyse the data. Both the audio files and transcribed data will be stored on a password protected computer. The transcribed files will be individually password protected for added security. Throughout the thesis writing and submission process all participants will be kept anonymous and the data will be treated confidentially.

*(Reasoning: telling the participant how I'm recording the interview will continue to establish the rapport).*

Even though I have some questions and prompts prepared, I am really interested in your story. It is your stories about your placement that are important to this research, so include as many details as you can about your experiences, emotions and feel free to go on tangents. Could you start first by stating your name, school and class placement?

Emotional Geography	Prompts/Questions
Transitions- an ongoing process which involves adapting to different contexts and changes in interpersonal relationships.	Describe and share the emotions you had in a transition you had this week in your 2 <sup>nd</sup> school placement that you did not have in the first placement. How has this impacted your collaboration with your mentor teacher?
Physical Geography-closeness and distance of working together in time and space (collaboratively or alone).	How have the different transitions or phases this week in your school placement impacted your developing teaching practice, learning and planning? What emotions did you feel?
Moral Geography-closeness and distance of having a shared purpose and accomplishing it together.	Has this 2 <sup>nd</sup> placement made you in anyway refocus on what is important in education and your development as a teacher? If so, share how it has and what emotions arise with this.

<p>Cultural Geography-closeness or distance created in relationships based on cultural background (gender, race, ethnicity, language, or cultural way of doing things).</p>	<p>What emotions have you experienced with the lack of or no interactions with teachers, pupils and parents during this school placement?</p> <p>What emotions are you feeling about developing future relationships with students, colleges and parents?</p>
<p>Professional Geography-where teacher image of professionalism creates a distance between teachers, pupils and parents. How the teacher primary role is seen and carried out by the teacher.</p>	<p>Share a way that your interactions with students, colleges and parents have been different compared to your first school placement. How has this impacted your teaching practice?</p>
<p>Political Geography- where the power of the closeness or distance in relationships distort the emotional as well as cognitive aspects of communication between teachers.</p>	<p>Share how or how not the school structure during the school placement has supported you.</p> <p>Describe some of the uncertainties you have experienced and what emotions developed? How has this been different or similar to your first school placement experience?</p>

**Debrief:** Thank you for taking part in this research study. I hope that you have found this experience helpful as well. I would like to remind you of your right to withdraw at any point. Should you decide to withdraw, I will delete all your data in its entirety and will not use any part of it in my thesis. I will continue to stay in touch with you throughout your placement and throughout my research. I may send you an email to see how you are doing and possibly provide extra prompts or questions for your next week's audio recording. If you have any questions or concerns following a week's recording, or you would like more information about my research, you may contact me on this email and phone number, as well as my supervisors email addresses should you wish to contact them. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview.