Developing Emotional Competence through Embodiment to Facilitate Learning: An Educator's Journey
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Abstract

Developing social-emotional competencies is a complex process and neuroscientists are beginning to understand how emotions impact teacher-student learning and well-being. In the study discussed in this article, I used an autoethnographical approach to explore an educator's journey—mine—through working with emotions. I describe and interpret my experiences, emotions, and encounters with self and with others while teaching eight grief and loss courses. Through this process, I explore the role of emotions in teaching and learning. This article concludes with recommendations on how to develop emotional competence and include it in various educational settings.

Keywords: emotional competence, embodiment, mindfulness, learning and the brain, autoethnography

Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) includes the processes of acquiring and applying knowledge, attitudes, and skills in regards to emotions, relationships, and decision making. SEL competencies involves skills that support individuals well-being (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). In the 2015 British Columbia redesigned school curriculum, there is an emphasis on social emotional skills (Dockendorf, 2016) and teachers are expected to engage these skills in the classroom. In order to do so, educators need to be aware of their own social emotional competencies (SEC). Teachers' SEC has an impact on teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and effective SEC implementation (Jennings et al., 2013).

Developing SEC is complex and neuroscientists are beginning to understand how emotions impact students' learning and well-being (Cozolino, 2013; Immordino-Yang, 2016). Promoting caring and supportive relationships between teacher and student is key to reducing students' behavioral problems and teachers' emotional exhaustion (Olson, 2014). The neuroscience of education looks at which social, emotional, and environmental circumstances are essential for this learning to occur (Cozolino, 2013). Understanding these learning circumstances can enhance educational strategies (Immordino-Yang, 2016; Lieberman, 2013).

Teaching includes personal interactions and contextual consideration—and how can teachers improve their quality of teaching? What teaching strategies support students' learning? While keeping these questions in mind and by focusing on my personal and professional development, I decided to investigate my own experience in the classroom. By looking at the potential to extend beyond my own accounts of teaching to transforming school culture in relationships I utilize action research (Creswell, 2012) as a self-reflective process. Action research is a form of professional inquiry in which practitioners themselves investigate their practices as

they find ways to incorporate their educational values (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to explore my experience of working with my own emotions as an educator. My objectives were to understand the role of emotion in teaching, identify strategies to cultivate emotional competence, and propose interventions to help educators. The overall aim was to provide an account of how I incorporate teaching practices and social emotional neuroscience findings. Implications for understanding what it takes to create supporting learning environments for both students and teachers are considered.

I begin by presenting an overview of current research on learning, neuroscience, emotions, and relationships, describing the research method and then delineating key findings. I conclude by providing suggestions to enhance educators' social emotional competencies.

Learning, Neuroscience, and Emotion

Neuroscience explains the mechanisms underlying the learning process. What we know about brains is that they change, adapt, and learn over time. Research has revealed that social relationships stimulate the neural plasticity required for learning (Cozolino, 2013; Neumann, 2008; Siegel, 2012;). This plasticity assists in gathering information, building expertise, and propagating knowledge to students. Knowledge about learning and the brain has direct implications for teaching.

A supportive learning environment is created through caring for students (Meyers, 2009), the use of immediacy, and congruent non-verbal behaviour that assist in rapport building (Malottet al., 2014), along with organized and clear goals, intentions, and instructions (Pepe & Wang, 2012). Building student-teacher relationships rather than lecturing seems crucial for SEC—this process resembles the establishment of a client-therapist relationship in counselling settings (Geller & Porges, 2014; Stella, 2014).

Relational body psychotherapy, "an alive, pulsing, and breathing interplay of moment-to-moment presence and mutual emergence active on somatic, cognitive, and relational levels" (LaPierre, 2015, p. 99) sheds light on this complex process. The relational matrix of the client-therapist connection includes many features, such as resonance and mutual affect regulation (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014; LaPierre, 2015). Resonance, defined as "a conversation taking place between bodies and the unconscious processes, where the other moves and lives through us and is deeply felt theough our bodies" (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2012, p. 14), is the underlying mechanism beneath attuned communication in the client-therapist and/or teacher-students relationship. Mutual affect regulation, a byproduct of resonace, involves how emotions are expressed both inter and intrapersonally (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014; Siegel, 2007). When a therapist and/or a teacher is sufficiently regulated, they can tolerate being affected by their clients/students and still maintain balance or return to balance (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014).

In a caring and supportive environment, the instructor's interpersonal attunement creates a biological state in the student's brain, which supports the incorporation of new information (Cozolino, 2013; Olson, 2014). On the other hand, a perceived dangerous environment and chronic stress turn a brain off from learning (Cozolino, 2013). Child, adolescent, and adult learners alike may experience high level of stress due to school-related memories of failure and shame. Others may struggle because their world-view is questioned or they feel anxious about being evaluated (Olson, 2014). Through acknowledging and including these situations in learning activities—such as discussions or reflections—while encouraging struggling students, teachers can rebuild trust and support changes in students' brains. Integrating critical thinking or intellectual challenges with emotional experiences helps reduce stress responses (Cozolino

& Sprokay, 2006) as both cognitive and emotional brain centers are interrelated and regulate one another.

Neural connections of the frontal cortex play an essential role in forming judgments and making decisions, and in regulating emotions, whereas the limbic area regulates basic drives and emotions, playing an important role in survival and safety (Mischel, 2014). As these areas of the brain interact they may expand (Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006), resulting in students calming down and feeling more at ease. Further, as organised teachers provide clear goals and intentions, they assist in reducing the stress students may experience—students may relax if they know what is expected of them. Looking at brains as social organs that learn best in the context of trusting relationships, creating an environment that includes both safety and emotional attunement optimises learning (Cozolino, 2013; Immordino-Yang 2016; Olson, 2014).

Emotion plays a critical role in learning (Immordino-Yang, 2016). Neural wiring between the cognitive and emotional regions of the brain suggests that emotions can either strengthen or suppress the brain's ability to learn. Heightened emotional states create anxiety whereas low affect does not engage the learner (Cozolino, 2013). Maintaining a certain level of emotional arousal that supports learning while considering potential emotional triggers is important. There is also a need for instructors to monitor their moods as these also affect the learning environment (Hendel-Giller et al., 2011).

Utilising emotion, eliciting connections to existing knowledge, including novelty and using storytelling are all ways to focus and take advantage of attention. Attention is necessary for learning; yet, finding ways to gain and hold the student's attention is not a simple task (Hendel-Giller et al., 2011). The brain is designed to focus on what is relevant and ignore what is not. In designing learning experiences, teachers must discover ways to quickly, effectively, and powerfully grab the students' attention. Attention management requires that instructors be aware of the limitations of working memory and avoid cognitive overload in their students (ibid). Applying this knowledge to teaching practices not only enhances learning but also creates stronger interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Relationships, Attunement, and Presence

The quality of interpersonal relationships between teacher and students affects the learning process. These relationships can be likened to the healthy caregiver-child attunement that supports emotional regulation by providing a safe haven—a core requirement for learning to occur (Cozolino, 2013). Attunement refers to the sharing of vitality affects, or affective emotional expressions, in the caregiver-child dyad through facial expressions, emotional tones of voice, gestures and touch (Schore, 2012, Schore & Schore, 2014). This experience creates neurobiogical changes in both parties, as physical proximity shapes the electrical activity in both brains (Siegel, 2012). In the classroom, when a teacher is warm and inspired, the students know this by observing the facial expressions, gestures, and hearing the prosody in the teacher's voice (Hughes, 2013). The students begin to match the teacher's affective expressions, and the entire classroom eventually is more likely to be in a state of attunement.

This attuned communication is based on exchange: the teacher responds to the students' signals in a way that is rhythmically and affectively attuned to the student's last cues. This way the teacher and students affect each other, contributing to the regulation of neurology. When the teacher is regulated, the students, regardless of their states, begin to co-regulate their emotional states and relax (Olson, 2014; Siegel et al., 2016). Allowing students to develop a sense of safety over time through providing consistent presence, the teacher relationally regulates the students'

nervous system stress responses. This process, in turn, facilitates learning in the classroom.

The quality of teacher presence is an essential component to support this learning. Siegel (2007) refers to presence as:

> The quality of our availability to receive whatever the other brings to us, to sense our own participation in the interaction, and to be aware of our awareness. We are open to bear witness, to connect, to attune to our students' internal states. (p. 263)

This presence establishes strong social bonds through emotional attunement and in the moment engagement, allowing the students to feel safe. Further, the students' brains develop new neural connections, leading to calmer and healthier emotional states. I believe that a teacher's presence invites students to feel seen and understood and safe to be present within their own experience.

In summary, social emotional interractions affect the receptivity of the brain to learn. Teachers' SEC is a necessary ingredient to support learning. By incorporating neuroscience of emotions and knowledge in pedagogical practices, educators can sharpen their SEC, reduce emotional exhaustion, and create caring and supporting learning environments.

Methodology

I selected a qualitative research method to include "personal, emotional, and embodied narratives" (Bochner, 2012, p. 157), which are important in education where complex personal data can be explored and made relevant to others. Reflection provides opportunities to review the application of learning theories and instructional strategies (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008) while engaging in professional development. This type of research is focused on building teachers' personal and professional effectiveness while expanding pedagogical knowledge.

In particular, autoethnography—a combination of autobiography and ethnography (Adams & Ellis, 2012)—allows educators to reflect on practical demands of teaching and examine how these experiences shape who they are and what they do (Starr, 2010). Autoethnography is referred to as "action research for the individual" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 754) through a process of reflection and action. Reflection allows the educator to uncover strengths and weaknesses not only her or his teaching strategies, but also in relational contexts. Action follows in informing future teaching decisions.

The study involved data collection through written self-reflection and observation while teaching eight grief and loss courses (Master's in Counselling Psychology Programme) to capture my thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, habits, and emotions. As Buckley (2015) suggests, autoethnography helps analyse emotions. This process allowed me to focus on my teaching quality and the emotional dynamics at play. I recorded my interactions with students during class to uncover relationship patterns, thus used myself as subject to collect data. Further, Duncan (2004) reiterates that in autoethnographic studies traditional criteria for judging validity cannot be applied, but this method is useful in explicating tacit knowledge and improving practice.

I was the primary source of data and I ensured other individuals' confidentiality (Chang, 2008) adhering to research ethical guidelines. I have not included data related to any conversations with or written material from students. I maintained students' anonymity by omitting any identifying information. This study received ethical clearance from the university ethics committee.

Findings and Data Analysis

I used a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clark, 2006) to identify themes and an analytical-interpretative writing style to describe, analyze, and interpret the data (Chang, 2008).

As a result of reading and re-reading the data I identified particular features and then themes and patterns from the data shown in Fig. 1 below.

Figure 1
Thematic Map: Understanding Emotions
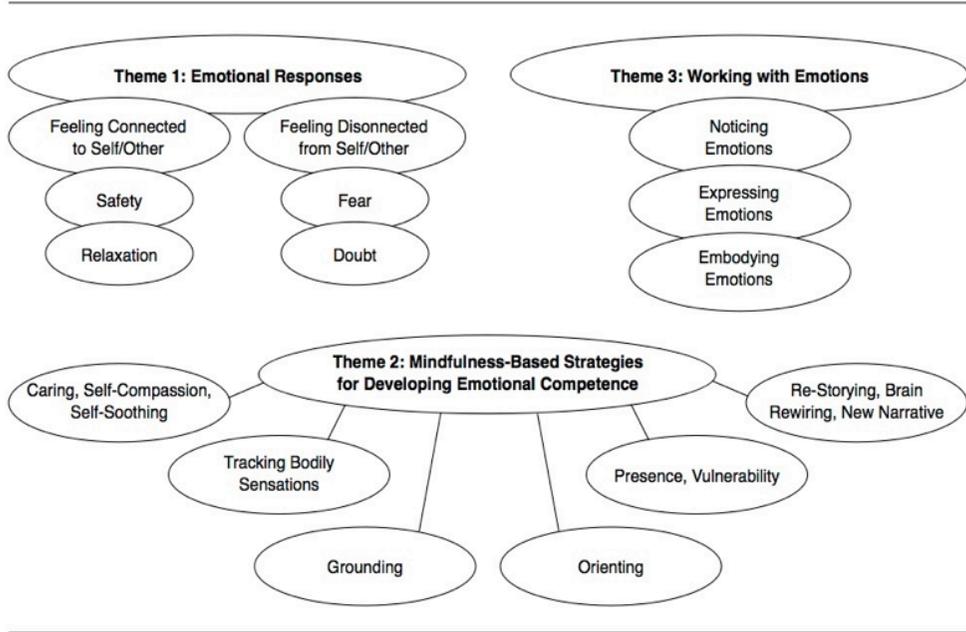
Theme 1: Emotional Responses

Throughout my reflective journal two main responses surfaced: connection and safety/openness: *I feel a bit more relaxed; my body is more at ease in the openness created. I feel connected to the students sharing as I listen and acknowledge their experiences, surprises, explanations, and meaning making.*
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As I leave class my heart is full, the group safety provided the space for many to go deeper into difficult emotions. What was most surprising was the depth of grief that everyone together opened up to and began processing in the group.
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The difficult intense feelings of loss that came up during the movie for everyone are being acknowledged, accepted, and allowed to be during the entire day. I sense that in myself and others. There is a sense of deep sharing and opening for the majority of the students.

These responses demonstrate the importance of emotional connection with self and students. The depth of positive feeling appears to influence the learning experience. As Cozolino (2013) mentioned:

building secure attachments is the gateway to emotional regulation, self-esteem, and learning. Because the same factors that make a healthy home are present in a tribal classroom, teachers

have the opportunity to reparent their students [regardless of their age] and shape new attachment circuitry (p. 245).

Building a supportive environment in the classroom creates the possibility for emotional connection and insight to occur where emotions, even if difficult, can be acknowledged and processed, while everyone's brain is re-wired for healthy emotional expression.

And the opposite it also observed, feeling of fear and irritation are present when there is a sense of disconnection with self and students:

I sense some students are not doing as well. I feel my chest area is tightening as I tune into their experience. My sense of steadiness begins to wane a bit as my feet loose the strong contact to the earth and my head is somewhat spacey…By the time we are back from lunch I am supposed to lecture on working with intense emotions. I feel partly numb/dissociated, my brain doesn't work, I am unable to clearly articulate my PowerPoint presentation. I decide to use a YouTube video to help me.

My belly is swirling. I run for the bus and begin to notice I feel so much grief, my heart is heavy and would love to just sob but I don't have access to tears, I just want to so deeply. It's a very hot summer day, unusual for [name of city], the bus is filled with sweaty and somewhat edgy people, is that an expression of what is going on inside?

Presentations day, I expect to be an easier day but that didn't turn out that way. I feel flabbergasted: What was that all about? I am unable to facilitate this group of students. I feel hot, my heart is slightly racing I'm worried that if I say something and call on students' behavior it would came across as a threat. My mind is full of negative judgments. I witness one older student at the back of the class, staring at the wall instead of listening to a group's presentation. This follows by one student verbally attacking another who just shared something very revealing about herself, one student is mortified and the other completely oblivious. And to top it all off, another student is playing with her hair, constantly looking at her cell phone and putting on make up. So much disrespect for one another, it makes me angry and ineffective. I doubt my ability as an educator today and call out these behaviors. These students will eventually have to deal with these nonconscious reactions when they begin to see their own clients—ah, another judgment.

These excerpts give voice to reactions based on threats against self. We tend to react to these threats as if our bodies were in danger. Feeling uncomfortable with body reactions may bring about past feelings of shame and humiliation shutting down learning and social interactions and there is no space for new learning to occur (Cozolino, 2013). There is a necessity to protect personal and students' fears and insecurities to create the conditions for emotional processing. As we care about our difficult feelings we set up the conditions for change.

Theme 2: Mindfulness-based Strategies for Developing Emotional Competence

The second extracted data from my journals are mindfulness-based strategies, which have been part of my theoretical orientation and practice for over 15 years. Hanson (2009) explains, "mindfulness involves the skillful use of attention to both inner and outer worlds. Since your brain learns mainly from what you attend to, mindfulness is the doorway to taking in good experiences and making them a part of yourself" (p. 13). These strategies do not consist of formal practice, but of meditation-in-action techniques that allow me to notice habitual repetitive thoughts, emotions, and bodily postures, gestures, and sensations. These habitual patterns arise as ways of covering up fear and sadness. In my experience being willing to feel these emotions is a necessary step to learn to work with emotions and shift painful emotional memories to positive learning experiences. In the following journal entry, I describe a number

of mindfulness-based strategies:

Day one of my summer semester begins with smoke filled skies and a red sun. I feel a level of anxiety for the destruction the fire might cause. I begin class with a meditative check-in, and invite students to bring their awareness to their body, feel their feet on the ground, their thoughts, their feelings, sensations, the totality of their experience [grounding]. This check-in helps me establish a sense of presence within the class and a greater sense of safety prior to the individual sharing of grief experiences [presence]. As I listen to students sharing their stories I feel fully engaged with a sense of compassion and honor the tears that fill my eyes at various points [caring]. I am surprised by the number and variety of grief experiences the students have encountered, sinking deeper and deeper into the feeling of grief, my body feels heavy and slightly shaky [tracking bodily sensations]. I smell the smoke, I feel pretty uncomfortable and a little numb now [tracking bodily sensations]. As the sharing ends I ask everyone to stand up, feel their feet on the ground, orient to the room, slowly taking in the details from left to right, back and forth, to each other, move, stretch and gently shake their body [orienting]. The heaviness begins to lift as my body is relaxing and opening up, my mind is now clear. I am struck by the students' willingness to share and by my own emotional reaction to the sharing. I sense the sharing circle has created a much greater sense of safety and reflect on the gift of presence, this initial exercise has been about giving each other the gift of presence while I simply hold the space for that to occur. The intense emotions, grief, anger, sadness move through, as they are experienced in the body, the mind, and the environment—the space within self and other [re-storying].

This excert is an example of resonance and mutual regulation between teacher and students. I was aware of my somatic reality, my students' experience, the interaction with the surroundings through a re-enactment of unconscious structures (Caroll, 2009). There are elements in this entry that demonstrate the importance of emotional connection with the material presented and the potential for powerful positive influences on the learning experience. The elements presented are as follows: grounding, orienting, tracking bodily sensations, caring: self-compassion/self-soothing, presence/vulnerability, and re-storying. I use these elements to work with emotions and they are present throughout my journal entries.

Grounding is an ancient mindfulness technique (Mipham, 2004) that brings awareness to the present moment (and the breath) experience, allowing me to notice what is occurring in my body, mind, and environment. Grounding is "used to support and increase capacity for somatic mindfulness, connection and nervous system regulation" (Heller & LaPierre, 2012, p. 228) thus it brings awareness back into the body supporting inter and intraconnection.

Another example for grounding and tracking bodily sensations:

Following small group discussions on traumatic deaths, I felt queasy and decided I needed some grounding so I invited everyone to notice their feet on the ground, raising the front of their feet while leaving the heals on the floor, then dropping it, and alternating both feet; gently tapping the top of their heads, faces around the eyes, chins, chests, stomach and belly area. They were then asked to notice the sensations in their body. I notice the feeling of queasiness moving through my stomach area, changing and shifting, then releasing into my belly, and down my legs.

Orienting is another mindfulness technique that helps me relax, and I often guide students through this practice when I sense the need to check in and re-focus. Here is an example:

Bring your awareness to the room, slowly moving your face from right to left, take in your environment, places of shade/light, corner/angles, textures, colors. Where do you like to place most of your attention to?

Caring is about loving-kindness practice, or encountering and embracing negative situations

with kindness and concern. Caring includes being able to experience difficult emotions and "bringing warmth to unwanted feelings" (Chodron, 2009, p. 90). Another example for caring:

During the initial check-in students express being very stressed as they have many assignments due this week. I sense the tightness in my body, my shoulders, my belly, my calves. I need to change this state and hopefully it will help students as well, so I invite them to take a moment to connect to how they feel now. Close their eyes if that feels comfortable, nothing needs to change, simply allowing themselves to feel how they feel. We spend no longer than a minute feeling together, in silence. There is a sense of gathering and accepting that fills the room, I begin to relax, a sense of warmth is permeating my body and the room.

Presence is the fundamental underlying quality of the therapeutic relationship, involving "therapists being fully in the moment on several concurrently occurring dimensions, including physical, emotional, cognitive, and relational" (Geller & Porges, 2014, p. 179). This experience can also be cultivated between students and teacher. Here is another example of what can occur when attuning deeply to one another:

Following the students' work on their "loss line" exercise everyone discusses their experiences with losses, how they were affected and how they coped with them. Students and myself are surprised how powerful it is to simply be with another. Many acknowledge the healing power of truly joining in actively listing to their stories. Presence seems to have the power to calm, normalize and validate transmitting a space of trust and openness.

Re-storying, as employed in Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990), is focused on the ways in which our personal narratives are told. Our narrative sense of self is ever evolving, internalising individuals' perceived past, present, and imagined future. This sense of self is linked to our sense of body through the language we internally speak to ourselves (Borghi & Cimatti, 2010). By re-storying our personal narrative, feeling the intensity of our emotional life, we can embody our emotions; acquire new knowledge of who we are and how we operate in the world. I practice re-storying every time I reflect, either in internal dialogue, or in writing, about the experience of teaching.

Theme 3: Working with Emotions

The theme of processing emotions is evident in my journals and these extracts are taken from reflections that highlight the following subthemes: noticing, expressing, and embodying emotions:

Following the death contemplation exercise I notice a number of students' bodies tightening, some of their breathing is shallow and they looked white, oh no, sign of shock [noticing]. As my body is fully present I sense the chilling shock. I continue to pay attention to my feet and the ground beneath. As one of the students begins to sob I invite her to sit on the floor with me and invite all those who are comfortable to do the same. I work with her asking her to touch the ground with her hands, asking her to tell me about the weekend at the folk festival, she remembers the feeling of cool water so we use that image to bring her into feeling of safety, cool sensations in her body, the feeling of water running through as she begins to let go coming back into her body, the rhythm of her breath is back to normal despite the sobbing and the letting go [expressing and embodying]. I continue to look around me so see who needs my help. Another student has a hard time breathing, I move closer and ask her to bring her attention to the moving of the breath in her body, we found a memory to work with and bring her back to the present moment. She is slowly making her way into the room while talking about her current experience [expressing]. Another student is still sobbing deeply I know the pain in

her body is moving as, resonating with her, I sense the movement within my own body [expressing and embodying]. Another student's memory of pain is coming up for healing. I say can you feel us with you? She acknowledges that. I ask her to take her time, as she explains this is a familiar feeling for her [expressing]. She begins to sob deeply as we simply stay with her and let the emotions move through. A feeling of quiet and peace begin to come about. I feel we are going through the healing now; the frozen parts have come up and moved on [embodying]. One last student is saying it's hard to be in the room. I move closer and ask her to call in her ancestors for help and to go back to where she comes from. She brings into mind a canyon with a sacred river. I ask her if she can put her feet into the river. She says that's sacred and is upset [expressing]. So I simply tell her to do what she needs to do for us [embodying]. More feeling of peace come about. Grace is with us. We spend some time basking in the grace then we break for lunch. Great, lunch time now I'm walking in the sun, I feel waves of sadness and grief moving through my body [noticing], as I find a quiet corner to let it out [expressing] it's taking a long time, the mountains and the water are soothing to look at. Then it's done, my body is unwinding, my shoulders are relaxed, my belly is alive, I feel safe and connected now [embodying]…Emotions want to communicate, emotions need to come up, be felt and move through. As an educator, I need to learn how to be comfortable with these emotions so that we move them within in the community of relationship. When I am able to access body memories through the felt-sense I can begin to discharge pent up energy stored in the body from previous hurts.

To summarise the three steps process: firstly, "emotions rely on subjective, cognitive interpretations of situations and their accompanying embodied reactions…and are essential to managing life" (Immordino-Yang, 2016, p. 19). Noticing begins with sensing the bodily aspects of emotions, or visceral sensations that alert one on the power of what is occurring in the moment. Physical sensations associated with emotions are connected to the somatosensory systems of the brain that sense the body states (Damasio et al., 2000; Immordino-Yang, 2016;). Noticing will bring about emotional thoughts linked to memory, past histories, and reactions. At this point we may feel safe enough to express emotions staying socially engaged, or overwhelmed, our basic survival neural system will fight-flight-freeze our states.

Secondly, "expressing an emotion is an early step toward coming to know what that emotion is…setting the stage for a number of important emotion-related processes, including emotion awareness, emotion understanding, and of course, emotion socialization" (Southam-Gerow, 2013, p. 23). Expressing emotions is the first step to healthy emotional regulation. Emotion naturally seeks expression, it is how the brain moves us, but we must feel it first. However, negative difficult emotions may be suppressed as they are uncomfortable, and these emotions may hide beneath our conscious awareness. These inhibited emotions may cause behavioural problems. An understanding of emotional expression helps explain why emotional movement alone can lead to emotional balance—for example the best way to get rid of grumpiness is to encourage its expression (Neufeld, 2016) throught facial expressions, voice, gestures, and body movements to transmit this emotion. Emotions provide important information about our reactions to situations, whereas inhibiting the expression of emotion can lead to impaired immune system function and poor health (Danese & Baldwin, 2017; Frija, 1986; Goleman, 2005;). Additionally, there is increasing understanding of the importance of emotional knowledge and emotional understanding in enhancing social competence and development (Neufeld, 2016). When I am triggered and ask myself to stop, calm down, and to keep things under control I teach my body to suppress emotions, and this internal suppression leads to uncomfortable visceral sensations. In the past, I have come to learn to fear and distrust bodily

sensations and this, in turn, led to me becoming numb or dissociated. The way back to feeling is slowing down my emotional thoughts enough to re-connect with emotional messages.

Thirdly, "perceiving and thinking about emotion involve perceptual, somatovisceral, and motoric re-experiencing, or embodiment, of the relevant emotion in one's self. The embodiment of emotion…causally affects how emotional information is processed" (Niedenthal, 2007, p. 1002). This last step is most important: learning to trust the body's messages and openness created by moving through intense emotions. The movement of emotions experienced as tightness in my jaws and shoulders with difficult emotions and expansion in my chest and belly with positive emotions. I reconnect with the rhythm of the body and the breath to reestablish a sense of safety when I feel overwhelmed or numb (Stanley, 2016). This sense of embodied presence, a quiet aliveness, clarity and strength is guiding the process of emotional movement. Levine (2008) eloquently explains: "once you learn to pendulate successfully, you'll discover that your seemingly infinite emotional pain begins to feel manageable and finite. This shift allows your attention to move from dread and helplessness to curiosity and exploration" (p. 57). This pendulation, or oscillation, occurs when past negative emotional associations are re-experienced in the present and held in either a pleasant memory, or a caring presence with relationship with another, for example teacher-student. It is a mindful-based technique of shifting awareness like a pendulum between one felt sense and another, between positive and negative physical/emotional states (Ogden et al., 2006; Stanley, 2016). Emotions and memories are experienced and expressed in and through our bodies. As I sooth the intensity of grief, I trust the movement of bodily sensations, which might include dizziness, nausea, trembling, knottiness, heaviness, and fear reactions will shift within the felt sense—a caring feeling of presence—into relaxation reactions. This process supports and relieves anxiety, as the emotions continue to move emotional thoughts and feelings change to positive and new ways of being with the intensity of the grief now becoming feelings of peace and grace. Now the body and the brain have opened up a new pathway supporting emotional processing. In short, this theme is an example of mutual affect regulation (Rolef Ben-Shahar, 2014) as previously described.

Discussion

Emotions and cognitions are interdependent neural processes. Immordino-Yang (2016) explains, "it is literally impossible to build memories, engage in complex thoughts, or make meaningful decisions without emotion…we only think deeply about things we care about" (p. 18). Thus, learning has to include emotional connections to personal narratives. Instead of fearing the power of emotions it can be included in the classroom. As I notice my own uncomfortable bodily sensations (tensing or relaxing muscles, shallow breathing) contributing either consciously or nonconsciously to emotions, they will in turn influence cognitive processes such as attention and memory (Immordino-Yang, 2016). As I notice these bodily sensations, acknowledge their presence, care for and sooth their intensity by giving them attention, my body will begin to relax, safety is created, the fear subsides, and these emotions can be expressed (internally or externally), move through, embodied with a novel narrative (Stanley, 2016). This is how the brain is re-wired with new ways of being in the world.

What I am proposing is the inclusion of emotions in everything we do in the classroom. As Immordino-Yang (2016) mentions, "people learn through experience how to interpret situations, as well as how to make sense of their emotional reactions…experiencing or feeling emotional reactions and how these feelings steer thoughts and behavior, consciously or not" (p. 21). If emotions are not acknowledged, or worked with, fear and doubt may run behind

the scene, making it challenging for new learning to occur. If emotions are acknowledged, through noticing the automatic mental and bodily reactions to situations, students can learn to tend to the magnitude of bodily reactions, healthy emotional expressiveness, and the subjective embodied quality of individual feelings can be consciously dealt with.

Understanding emotions is about making meaning and making new meanings. Emotions as main subject should be at the forefront of every school and every curriculum—as we educate students and teachers about their emotional lives, we raise kinder and healthier individuals who learn to harness the power of emotions for building a better world. Surpressed emotion on the other hand may cause havoc and alienation toward the self and other. Since we evolved to pay attention to unpleasant experiences, our negativity bias overlooks positive experiences and highlights negative experiences creating stress and anxiety (Fogel, 2009; Hanson, 2009).

Negative emotions are often felt in the body. These physical reactions involve the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, creating numerous negative consequences for physical and mental health. These negative experiences correlate with the amygdala releasing of threat-signals and the reactions are as follows: the thalamus sends signals to pay attention to the brain stem, which in turn releases stimulating norepinephrine in the brain; the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) sends signals to organs and muscle in the body to fight-flight-freeze; and the hypothalamus, regulating the endocrine system, prompts the pituitary glands to release stress hormones: adrenaline and cortisol (Hanson, 2009). Learning is impared when individuals are in constant high-stress states.

After living on constant high alert—at times unrecognized—there may be a need to learn how our body works and ways to engage the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) to produce feelings of relaxation and contentment, essential for healthy emotional regulation. Optimal learning requires a sense of safety. Social engagement—a system connecting the social muscles of the face (eyes, mouth and middle ear) with the heart, regulated through a myelinated branch of the vagus nerve—provides a way to counter the overstimulated nervous system creating the conditions for feelings of safety (Porges, 2011, 2017). The neural circuits that support social engagement and emotional regulation are available when the ANS deems the environment safe. It is therefore possible to learn to observe facial expressions, body posture, and nonverbal communications of self and others to understand and shift internal states from stress-based responses to relaxation-based responses. This process engages the right brain, which is considered dominant for the implicit, nonverbal, holistic processing of emotional information and social interactions (Schore, 2014).

The table below summarises the process of working with emotions, including strategies that I find helpful in my own work as an educator

Table 1
Developing Emotional Competence

Process	Strategies
1. Noticing emotions: Emotional thoughts Physical sensations Feelings	• Caring • Self-compassion • Self-soothing • Presence

2. Expressing emotions: a). Fear, repress/overreact (fixated frozen) b). Safety, express (move/flowing)	• Psychoeducation (ANS) • Grounding • Orienting • Tracking bodily sensations • Caring • Presence
3. Embodying emotions: New narrative around emotions (self other) Brain Rewiring New behavior/action	• Slow down (internal/external narrative • Bring awareness to bodily sensations and pendulate/oscillate between comfortable and uncomfortable sensations, thoughts, images, gestures • Caring • Presence • Re-storying emotional thoughts, bodily sensations, emotional reactions, emotional expressions

This process and these strategies may be utilised as a framework to teach about emotions in classrooms, beginning with kindergarten up to K–12, and beyond, in teacher education programs and teachers' development at the district level to develop social emotional competencies. This training is also applicable to facilitate clinician development for masters in counselling programs, clinical supervision settings, and body-oriented psychotherapists.

Limitations and Recommendations
Chang (2008) pointed to the risk to validity and accuracy of data in what the researcher places their focus on while leaving out other reflective material deemed not important. I chose to concentrate my research on emotions as a teaching tool in the hope that my narrative and analysis provide the reader a degree of resonance and credibility. The autoethnographic approach can be revealing and I was willing to confront myself both emotionally and professionally in order to find ways to improve my practice.

This study was limited to myself as the researcher and based on my background, education, and experience. It would be compelling to include a number of educators in various settings (higher education, undergraduate, primary, and secondary teachers) in a more diverse ethnographical study. This study could be performed following a specific training to work with emotions enhancing educators' emotional life.

As recent research reveals, the ways in which individuals learn is based on life-regulating goals implemented by emotions (Immordino-Yang, 2016). In order to acquire new knowledge, educators need to understand the relationship between emotion and cognition to create supportive learning environments (Immordino-Yang, 2016). A specific training program on the neuroscience of emotions, including practical tools to work with emotions may include the followings:

1. Learn to identify conscious or nonconscious body sensations or thoughts triggering emotions both in social and non-social contexts.
2. Autonomic nervous system (ANS) education to understand both body sensations, or signals, racing emotional thoughts and numbing behaviors.
3. Strategies to support emotional expression and healthy emotional regulation.

4. Embodied reflections to assist in re-wiring the brain and learning to harness the power of emotions.

This program would enhance educators' social emotional competencies, which in turn could help teachers implement the redesigned British Columbia school curriculum. Furthermore, children, adolescents and adult learners could benefit from such training facilitating self-recognition, self-awareness, and a healthy emotional life.

BIOGRAPHIES

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