Observing Teachers’ Emotional Expression in Their Interaction with Students

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to establish the types of emotions that are expressed by primary school teachers, their frequency, and the situations that trigger them. Teachers were observed by primary education students during their practical work at school. The observations of 108 teachers in 93 primary schools in Slovenia were analysed. The results show that teachers express a variety of emotions with the unpleasant ones prevailing. Anger was the most frequently expressed emotion. The situations that triggered emotions were varied. Among them, students’ discipline and academic achievement triggered the majority of pleasant and unpleasant emotions in teachers.

Keywords: emotion, emotional expression, teacher, classroom, observation.

Introduction

Emotions are complex psycho-physiological processes which include specific sequences of physiological changes, cognitive processing, verbal and non-verbal expressions and behaviour or action tendencies (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996). They can be understood as subjectively construed processes, influenced mostly by personal characteristics such as temperament, expectations or personal resources that shape the cognitive appraisals given to a specific situation by a specific person (e.g., Lazarus, 1991). Emotional experience is also socially structured and managed through social expectations in an individual’s environment (e.g., Hargreaves, 2000).