An (Emotion) Problem in Cooperative Education

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Abstract

Cooperative learning is becoming a powerful voice in world education. It proposes that K1-12 teach about the social-emotional world, in addition to traditional education topics. Although promising in the social part, mainly thru the use of team teaching, it appears to be weak with respect to emotions. So far there has been only the mere mention, in passing, of the names of some of the common emotions, such as anger, grief or fear. That is to say it follows the practice of modern societies of dismissing emotions as unimportant, not referring to them at all, or so briefly as to amount to dismissal.This note suggests a provisional way to begin to add emotion components to K12 cooperative teaching, based on descriptions of each of six emotions: grief, fear, anger, pride, shame and fatigue.

Keywords: Cooperative education; Social-emotional; Education

Introduction

Cooperative education and learning is a rapidly growing project in world education, but it is especially strong in the USA. There are thousands of references to each in Google Scholar in 2015 alone, and more than a million overall.Its intent is an increasing emphasis on social-emotional learning, in contrast to just reading, writing and arithmetic. The project seems to be powerful on the social part, since it practices forming and grading teams of students, as contrasted with individual learning. The students on teams can do cooperative, rather than just individualized learning. However, there is a problem with the references that I have read. Although the social part, emphasizing cooperation instead of competition between students, seems to be actually working, there is practically no explanation of the emotional part, much less any empirical evidence or even descriptive examples. Modern societies more or less reject emotions as unimportant and/or destructive. As a result, as in the cooperative education project, if emotions are referred to all, the reference is so short and abstract as be dismissive.

The emotion world

In modern societies, understanding emotions is beset by an elemental difficulty: the meaning of words that refer to emotion are so confused that we hardly know what we are talking about. Virginia Woolf wrote: "The streets of London have their map; but our passions are uncharted" (1922). When compared to beliefs and actual studies about behavior, thoughts, attitudes, perception and the material world, the realm of emotions is still terra incognita. A common assumption is that emotions are unimportant, yet they may play a key role in the behaviors of individuals and even of nations.

Both lay and expert disagree on almost everything about emotions. Several studies have pointed out the lack of agreement [1] reported on twelve investigators, some leading experts in the field. Even the number, much less the specific emotions, is in contention; the fewest proposed is two, the most, eleven. There is not a single emotion word

that shows up on all 12 lists [2] also showed wide ranging disagreement of the 16 leading theorists. This disagreement involves emotion words in only one language, English. The comparison of different languages opens up a second level of chaos. Anthropological and linguistic studies suggest that just as the experts disagree on the number and names of the basic emotions, so do languages. Cultural differences in emotion words will only be mentioned here, since it is too large an issue to be discussed at length.

The supply of emotion words in the West, particularly in English, is relatively small. Although English has by far the largest total number of words (some 800,000 and still expanding), its emotion lexicon is smaller than other languages, even tiny languages like Maori. In addition to having a larger emotion lexicon than English, its emotion words are relatively unambiguous and detailed compared to English [3].

Emotion terms

In my days as a physics graduate student, I learned that scientific terms require both CONCEPTUAL and OPERATIONAL definitions. General concepts require a clear, unitary and abstract definition. Operational definitions are specifically about how the concept is to be measured. These rules allow for no ambiguity whatsoever. But emotion terms, especially in English, are wildly ambiguous.

Grief: In this case, ambiguity might seem to amount only to the choice of words. Most authors use the term grief to refer to the emotion of loss. But there is a large literature on attachment in which the authors use the term distress instead. Distress is broader than grief and implies consciousness and pain more than grief.

For reasons that he didn't make clear, [4] seems to have started the use of the word distress. In the first three volumes of his influential study the word is used frequently, with grief occurring only once. However, in V. 4, there is a sharp change; distress disappears, its place taken by grief.

In the first three volumes it is fairly clear what he means, because he connects distress to loss and crying. In volume IV, he makes this connection using only the word grief. What happened? As far as I

know, there has been no published response to this dramatic change in nomenclature.

The original studies of facial expression of emotion followed Tompkins first usage: neither [5,6] referred to grief. However, later works, such as [2,7] refer only to grief, never to distress also refers only to grief. Others use the word sadness, rather than distress or grief. Still another direction is followed by [8] they elide around both grief and distress by referring only to failure to mourn. It would seem that anarchy rules in the naming of the emotion associated with loss and crying.

Fear/anxiety: Before Freud, fear meant the emotional signal of physical danger to life or limb, and anxiety was just a more diffuse kind of fear. But after Freud, the meaning of these words began to expand. Anxiety became broader, enough to include many kinds of diffuse emotion, but not as broad as "emotional arousal." Current vernacular usage is so enlarged that fear can be used to mask other emotions, especially shame and humiliation. "I fear rejection" has nothing to do with danger of bodily harm, nor does "social fear" or "social anxiety." These terms refer rather to the anticipation of shame or humiliation.

Anger: the confusion over the meaning of this word seems different than any of the above. It involves confounding the feeling of anger with acting out anger, confusing emotion with behavior. We don't confuse the feeling of fear with running away, the feeling of shame with hiding one's face, or the feeling of grief with crying. But anger is thought to be destructive, even though it is only a feeling.

The feeling of anger is an internal event, like any other emotion. It is one of the many signals that alert us to the state of the world inside and around us. In itself, if not acted out, it is instructive, not destructive. The condemnation of emotions as negative in Western societies is another aspect of chaos. Normal emotions, at least, are not negative, since they are brief, instructive and vitally necessary for survival. Like breathing, emotions are troublesome only when obstructed.

When anger is expressed verbally, rather than acted out as yelling or aggression, it can be constructive. It explains to self and other how one is frustrated, and why. Both self and other need to know this information. The confounding of anger expression with acting out can be a seen as a way of justifying aggression, as in spousal abuse and road rage. "I couldn't help myself."

Shame: Substitute terms for anger usually don't hide the emotion, they just soften the reference to it. With shame, however, most of the many substitute words and phrases hide the reference entirely. Current usage of shame in English involves an extremely narrow meaning: a crisis feeling of intense disgrace. In this usage, a clear distinction is made between embarrassment and shame. Embarrassment can happen to anyone, but shame seems to be conceived as so horrible. Embarrassment is speakable, shame is unspeakable. This usage avoids everyday shame such as embarrassment and modesty, and in this way sweeps most shame episodes under the rug.

Other languages, even those of modern societies, treat embarrassment as a milder version of shame. In Spanish, for example, the same word (verguenza) means both. Most languages also have an everyday shame that is considered to belong to the shame/embarrassment family. French pudeur, which is translated as modesty, or better yet, a sense of shame, is differentiated from honte, disgrace shame. If you ask an English speaker is shame distinct from embarrassment, they will usually answer with an impassioned yes. But a French speaker might ask "Which kind of shame?"

Suppose that just as fear signals danger of bodily harm, and grief signals loss, shame signals disconnection. In modern societies, since connecting with others has been becoming infrequent, we usually hide that fact. Instead of saying that we were embarrassed, we say "It was an awkward moment for me." It was the moment that was awkward (projection), not me that was embarrassed (denial).

In English especially, there is a vast supply of code words that can be used as alternatives to the s-word [9], she lists more than a hundred vernacular words that may stand for shame, under six headings:

Alienated: rejected, dumped, deserted, etc.

Confused: blank, empty, hollow, etc.

Ridiculous: foolish, silly, funny, etc.

Inadequate: powerless, weak, insecure, etc.

Uncomfortable: restless, tense, anxious, etc.

Hurt: offended, upset, wounded, etc.

The broadening use of fear and anxiety is another way of disguising shame. To say that one fears rejection or to use a term like social anxiety is to mask the common occurrence of shame and embarrassment. We can also disguise the pain of rejection by acting out anger or withdrawal. Studies of stigma, even though this word means shame, seldom take note of the underlying emotion, concentrating instead on thoughts and behavior.

Apologies suggest another instance of the masking of shame with another emotion. The ritual formula for an apology in English is to say that you are sorry. But the word sorry (grief) serves to mask the more crucial emotion of shame. "I'm ashamed of what I did" is a more potent apology than the conventional "I'm sorry."

The word pride in English is also ambiguous. Unless one precedes the word with "justified, authentic or genuine," there is an inflection of arrogance, "the pride that goeth before the fall." Pride is also one of the Seven Deadly Sins [10,11]. This type would better be called false pride, since it implies hiding shame behind arrogance or egotism. False pride is only one more way of hiding shame.

A list for beginners

The chart that follows brings together much of the discussion of emotion words above. It is based on what [12] called "the attitude theory of emotions." He proposed that the foundation of every emotion was bodily tension of a specific kind: bodily preparation for certain kinds of inner activity in which the resolution is delayed. Dewey didn't offer names even of specific emotions, much less detailed examples [13] citing Dewey, went further by discussing three emotions at some length: fear, grief, and anger.

Bull left out shame and pride entirely, and even her discussions of fear, grief and anger are not sufficiently detailed. She also failed to explain the distinction between "good" cries or laughs bad (painful or pain inflicting) versions which will be discussed briefly below. The chart below proposes a workable model of the Dewey/Bull idea that emotions are bodily preparations for actions that have been delayed. For example, suppose that grief is based on bodily preparation to cry that has been delayed. The table provides similar models for five other emotions in addition to grief (Table 1).

Name	Stimulus	Preparation For	Visible Cues
Grief	Loss	"Good" Cry: Sobbing and tears	(Recent work suggests
Fear	Physical danger	Shaking and sweating	that the first three have
Anger	Frustration	Body Heat	universal bodily cues)
Pride	Feeling accepted	No preparation: the normal state.	Tranquility
Shame/Humil. Embarrassment	Feeling rejected.	"Good" laugh.	Hiding behavior
No name	Physical stress and illness	Yawning with tears	(Little studied)

Table 1: Emotional models.

This table proposes that fear is a response to physical danger, and that it involves bodily preparation to shake and sweat. Anger is a response to frustration, and that it involves bodily preparation for heating up the whole body. Authentic pride (as distinguished from the egotistical kind) seems to be the natural state of humans, so it needs no preparation. Shame is a response to rejection, and it involves bodily preparation to have a good laugh.

Finally, I have included a response that that has never been considered an emotion: ordinary physical stress and illness can produce bodily preparation to yawn and tear. Most people assume that yawning is caused by boredom, or sleepiness, but systematic studies have failed to support these ideas.

This whole approach requires differentiating what I am calling "good" laughs and cries from other kinds of responses. In my earlier work, I used the drama theory that had been developed in the humanities since antiquity to explain the emotional effect of theatre on audiences. This theory suggested that responses could be at three "distances" from emotion: overdistanced is no emotional response, underdistanced involves a re-enactment of unresolved emotional moments without changing them. Successful theatre depends on what might be called "optimal distance," neither too far nor too close (The actual term used in drama theory is "aesthetic distance").

At the right distance, what seems to happen is that the audience feels the emotions generated by the play by reliving their own emotional past, but also constantly aware that they are not just bogged down again. When watching, they have the reassurance that they are safe and can stop instantly, even leaving the theatre if the play is too underdistanced. As dramatists will be glad to explain, producing theatre at optimal distance is not easy. In real life it seems be just as difficult.

Conclusion

Our society has so much catching up to do with respect to emotions that it is difficult to visualize it happening. Here is one suggestion (seriously): instead of pledging allegiance to the flag, perhaps school children should recite the following, beginning in the first grade, adding another line in the second grade, and so on [14,15].

- Hail to thee, all emotions!
- Especially pride, grief, anger, fear, and shame.
- Having a good cry when needed is essential, even for boys.
- Fear can save my life, and has nothing to do with cowardice.

- I deserve to feel proud, since it means at least one other person accepts.
- Me just as I am.
- Shame is the basis of morality and is not shameful.
- I need to feel and reveal my anger, but without yelling.
- Yawning is good for me, so get off my back.

And so on up to 16. Perhaps in the last year or two of college they would need to learn the idea of distancing of emotions in a way simplified enough so that they could understand it. Two centuries ago, the poet Wordsworth came close with the phrase "strong emotions recollected in tranquility." For example, they might be helped to understand why they like horror movies and roller coasters rides as a way of resolving hidden fears.

This whole procedure is provisional on future research that will support the various emotion models. But in the meantime, while waiting, perhaps we should go ahead with testing its usefulness in K-12 classrooms.

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