

MORE THAN A LESSON PLAN: THE EMOTIONAL LABOR OF TEACHING

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Teaching is a noble profession that helps shape the minds of learners and of the future generation. But behind the lesson plans, classroom management, and curriculum delivery lies a less visible reality: the emotional labor that teachers carry every day. It is a crucial aspect of the job that is seldom addressed in training manuals, yet it significantly influences teachers' performance, student interactions, and well-being.

The term emotional labor, first introduced by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983), refers to the effort involved in managing one's emotions to fulfill the expectations of a role. For teachers, this can mean maintaining composure while facing student misbehavior, staying patient through repeated explanations, or showing empathy to students who come to school carrying personal burdens. These emotional demands are often compounded by systemic challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and high expectations from parents and administrators.

In the Philippines, teachers are often expected to give their all and even go beyond for their academic duties, often without proper support or even recognition. There is a demand for educators to also take on the roles of counselors, disciplinarians, community liaisons, and even second parents. A 2022 study by Abulon and Reganit found that Filipino teachers regularly extend support to students in crisis—whether emotional, financial, or familial—without formal training or compensation for these additional roles (Abulon & Reganit, 2022). This constant emotional engagement, while rooted in care, gradually builds up and not only leads to drain and exhaustion, but eventually to teacher burnout.

Recent global research also confirms the toll of emotional labor on educators. A study conducted by the Education Support Partnership (UK) found that 75% of teachers reported stress-related symptoms due to emotional demands, with many citing the pressure to remain “strong and composed” in front of students as a key factor (Education Support, 2021). Similarly, in the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO (2022) has highlighted teacher mental health as a growing concern and emphasized the need for its resolution.

Despite these realities, emotional labor in teaching is often invisible. Unlike lesson planning or test preparation, it is not something that is formally scheduled or easily measured. Yet it directly affects teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. When teachers are emotionally depleted, their ability to connect with students, manage classrooms positively, and sustain high-quality instruction can suffer.

However, this does not mean that forming emotional connections and being emotionally invested is entirely negative. In fact, many teachers view their emotional commitment as central to their purpose. Acts of care, such as checking on a quiet student, providing encouragement after class, or celebrating small victories, can create valuable connections and inspire students. But for emotional labor to remain sustainable, it must be recognized, supported, and balanced.

One way to help teachers is by offering organized emotional support through mentoring programs, wellness initiatives, or mental health resources. Professional development should also include training on emotional regulation, resilience, and healthy boundaries. Furthermore, policies should recognize that ensuring teacher well-being is not a luxury but a fundamental requirement for delivering quality education.

It is time to treat teaching not just as a profession, but as an integral process that supports the growth and survival of our society. Teachers are not robots operating solely on power and are programmed to deliver lessons – they are people who care, feel, and carry burdens of their own. By valuing the emotional labor of teaching as much as the

intellectual aspect, we move towards establishing schools that foster the growth of not just students, but also the educators who lead them.

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