

Narrative Inquiry into Teachers' Experiences of Empathy in English Language Teaching

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Abstract : Empathy is crucial for teachers working with teenagers in secondary school. Despite that, little attention was paid to English language teachers' experiences of empathy in class. Empathy contains cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are manifested in the teaching practice. The qualitative study focused on how Chinese ELT teachers expressed empathy in interaction with students in public high schools and private institutions and what factors might lead them to show empathy in different ways. Four participants were invited to attend the individual interviews to share their stories about their empathic experiences. Classroom observation was conducted to investigate teachers' language use in teaching and non-verbal communication with students to witness their behavior of expressing empathy. Through thematic analysis, three main themes relevant to different types of empathy in teachers' interaction with students were generated: 1) perspective taking, 2) emotional connections, 3) action taking. Based on the participants' statements of their personal experiences, the discussion concluded the reasons for their differences in expressing empathy. The result underlined the significance of the role of empathy in building a rapport with students and motivating their language learning. Further implications for the role of empathy in ELT teachers' professional development are also discussed.

Keywords : teacher empathy, experiences, interaction with students, ELT class

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