CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Emotions fundamentally shape our experiences and interactions. Yet the role of emotions in moral and social life is contested, from an interdisciplinary view. In relation, how emotions are involved in education has been a subject of scrutiny and debate, in the history of education, and across diverse cultural and social contexts. This book explores the intersection of emotions, social life, and education from a fresh perspective. It emphasises education of emotions as a moral process with significant interpersonal, social, and political implications. And it fleshes out a relational approach, through considering the value of various feelings and dispositions in social life and in education, such as happiness, gratitude, resilience, and anger.

In this introductory chapter, I provide a preliminary discussion of the role of emotions in education. I focus on some common assumptions that readers may have about this topic. These assumptions are examples of contrasting perspectives about emotions and education, which highlight divergent approaches to educating (or not educating) about and for particular emotions and related dispositions in school settings. These are also views which, if held by readers, might make a book such as this one seem unnecessary. Critically analysing them here thus helps underscore the value of this present work. These are the views that (1) education does not particularly involve emotions, and (2) emotions are a part of education, but this is non-controversial, with a consensus on the topic established. I examine each of these assumptions and challenge them. Next, the chapter lays out the goals of this book and gives an overview of the main contents of the chapters that follow. Finally, I make some preliminary remarks about the nature of emotions in relation to moral epistemology and virtue as I understand it, which may be helpful for philosophically oriented readers to note at the outset.

1.1 The Role of Emotions in Education

While emotions play a vital role in human life and society, understanding emotions, as experiences and processes, is not straightforward. On the

one hand, emotions are often felt as internal sensations and changes. In this way, emotions are said to occur or to be located 'inside' of people. This seems the case when one 'hides' their emotions, for example. One is said to be able to bury their feelings inside themselves, rather than let them 'out', into their relationships or interactions with others. On the other hand, emotions are typically related to what happens in a person's life. That is, they are related to what happens *outside* an individual's body or mind. Generally speaking, one is not normally expected to become mad, angry, or happy without an external cause. It is usually regarded as functional and normal to be happy after one wins an award or other recognition from others, for example. One is normally expected to be sad at the death of a loved one. Yet people also experience and express emotions in diverse and, sometimes, unpredictable ways, for personal and social reasons. Not everyone feels happy when they win an award. Circumstances can make a difference.

How emotions are personal and individual, versus social and relational, has interested people throughout history. Philosophers have explored at length whether good living requires impartial, passive Stoicism, or steady, determined exercise of personal rationality. They have questioned whether the key to ethics in social life is to increase overall human happiness, or for each person to work to cultivate particular personal habits and emotional dispositions. In modern times, psychologists and anthropologists have focused on what is and is not normal and functional emotional experience and expression, within and across societies. Other social scientists and theorists, from backgrounds such as sociology, economics, political science, and education, have also dwelled upon the question of what is functional and good when it comes to emotional experiences and expressions. They have also explored how personal experiences and perspectives can bias psychologists and anthropologists (among others) towards viewing certain traits as normal or deviant. For example, they may privilege common emotional experiences and expressions of men as normal over those of women, or describe emotional expressions of non-Europeans as backward, irrational, and in need of control.

Different people hold contrasting perspectives and assumptions about the place of emotions in human social life. One might assume that this is not a bad thing. There are contrasting views about all sorts of things around the world. However, contrasting visions about emotions in social life entail different possibilities and directions for education, for what young people do and learn in schools.

This matters because education is a moral practice. Schooling aims to enhance people as individuals and society as a whole. This may not always be obvious, since schools also are oriented towards economic

productivity and developing young people as human capital. But a glimpse at any society's educational policies, or a visit to any school, will reveal that education indeed touches on the moral development of young people, even if it is not the principal objective in any given teacher's lesson plan. At the same time, education impacts people differently. In this context, that there are contrasting views about emotions in society makes a difference for education. It makes a difference for young people's lives and potential, and for society at large. Contrasting orientations to emotions unfold into different approaches to educating the emotions of young people, and for how teachers should treat students, in relation to their emotional experiences and expressions, at schools and in classrooms. These visions also unfold into clashing positions on how young people can and should engage with others around them in society, as citizens and residents of local and national contexts, in the broader world.

1.2 Does Education Really Involve Emotions?

Some people assume that education does not particularly involve emotions or has nothing important to provide when it comes to youth emotional development. When people hold this view, they tend to see emotions and schooling as separate topics. There are three understandings of emotions that support this perspective. These are the views of emotions as (1) mostly personal, (2) not moral (i.e. they are not part of the moral domain), and (3) not teachable.

The first view, which is prevalent in some Western societies, is that emotions should be seen as *personal* rather than as part of the social, public, or civic sphere. As mentioned earlier, emotions are often thought to be 'inside' people. Furthermore, because emotions are often regarded as part of the personal domain rather than the social or public domain, there is a sense that schools have no good reason to interfere with, or interact with, students' ordinary emotional development.

John Rawls argues that emotional feelings should have no place in public deliberation, where impartial, neutral reason should prevail (1993). He thus describes a sense of separation between the personal and private, and the public and political. In relation, he encourages teaching of political principles in education, and teaching about a sense of separation between one's strongly held feelings and their participation in society.

This sense that feelings are personal and private, while civic participation should be impartial and reasoned, reflects the philosophical heritage of the United States. Early political leaders there were worried about a population divided by religious values and related interpersonal

community attachments, who could be unwilling to put the personal aside for the public good. In relation, education in 'common schools' was to be neutral, accessible, and palatable to people with different (western European) traditions and (Christian) beliefs.

Many people in the United States today still feel that schools should not teach students about or for cultivating (or not cultivating) strong beliefs, or any related intense feelings or sense of attachment to anything, except perhaps the nation-state (Noddings, 1993). According to this view, the ethical principles of society should be taught. However, teachers and schools should strive to be as neutral as possible about deep, potentially divisive issues. In relation, teaching that supports or invites strong emotional feelings is often viewed as indoctrinatory, and therefore as morally wrong, in public (government) schools in that country, and many others today, as it could impact who children 'become' (Maxwell & Reichenbach, 2005; see also Noddings, 1993; Hand, 2011).

Yet Rawls' divide of the personal versus the public is not easy to pinpoint, when it comes to emotions and feelings. Rawls promotes as part of a public cultural heritage 'the virtues of tolerance and mutual trust ... the forms of thought and feeling that sustain fair cooperation' (1993, p. 195). In the public sphere, he tries to separate these virtues, these 'forms of thought and feeling', from 'comprehensive views'. 'Political' feelings are *minimal* then, in Rawls' view. Rawls promotes the teaching of a kind of thin layer of emotional virtues and related feelings. So feelings, about oneself and others in society, are not altogether absent here.

In contrast to Rawls' recommendations, in the domain of education emotions have not historically been regarded as separable from the social world, even if they are often seen as part of a person's 'internal' experience. Contrary to the assumption that emotions are mostly personal, and therefore not properly involved in schooling, Megan Boler highlights how educators have regarded emotions as a significant part of the public sphere historically (1999). As she shows, the role of emotions in education was discussed at the turn of the twentieth century, in terms of the need for cultivating student discipline and moral training. At that time, teacher handbooks stressed how emotional experiences, for example, of curiosity and activeness, enabled behavioural tendencies towards learning. Anger and cowardice were labelled as deviant and abnormal emotional states, which would disturb the exercise, or functionality, of mental capacity (Boler, 1999), historically (and today). As men and women were seen as playing different roles in society, different emotions were encouraged from boys and girls on different subjects, such as on 'Domestic Economics' classes for girls. As Boler points out, in the medieval ages and beyond, cultivating 'good' emotions and discouraging 'bad' emotions in schooling was also not uncommon, and was normally connected

with developing a good society, as a whole. Boler additionally shows how emotional education has remained common more recently, despite the hesitation by many thinkers to acknowledge it as such.

A second, related view that may underpin the notion that education does not involve, or should not involve, emotions is the assumption that emotions are not part of the moral domain. Some people may think that emotions are not moral, because they are (or can be) 'irrational', separate from and possibly disruptive to capacities for systematic, reflective reasoning, and autonomous personal choice. Kant's 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"' (1784) contrasts methodical thought, which he casts as 'autonomous', with the influences on thought that can arise from internal 'fear of phantoms', or external pressures. More recent scholars similarly contend that emotions 'get in the way' of 'clear' thought, 'clouding' judgement (Hand, 2011; see also Nagel, 1970). Relatedly, as Kristján Kristjánsson notes (2007, p. 50), 'contemporary popular and academic literature on emotion regulation routinely berates the so-called negative emotions', framing a subset of emotions (e.g. sadness, anger) as entirely harmful, and therefore, expendable. On the other hand, some may assume that emotions are not subject to external moral evaluation or education because of their view of the ideal person as *authentic*, with an 'inner voice', marked by personal feelings that should not be judged or manipulated by external forces (Maxwell & Reichenbach, 2005; Kristjánsson, 2018).

Yet if we continue on these lines of thought, the solution advocated by most political and educational theorists, psychologists, and others writing in this area is not that one 'do nothing' about their emotions, in relation to their possibly 'non-moral' status. Few suggest that one should just ignore their risky emotions, or 'let them be'. Given these possibly 'irrational' feelings, what is commonly recommended is some kind of action or reaction by the individual towards their 'natural instincts' or tendencies, at least so that they do not obstruct the capacity to learn, think and evaluate, and behave well, in accordance with their aims and conditions. School textbooks and teachers have taught students, historically and today, to adjust and control their emotions, to make them more manageable and 'better'. Martha Nussbaum (2001, 2016) argues that it is a moral endeavour to control and cultivate one's emotions. Positive psychologists also assume that positive emotions are important to good life, to be educated accordingly. Thus, emotions are normally related across various fields and perspectives to moral thought and action, even if the relationship is not always particularly straightforward.

The third view of emotions, which can intersect with thinking of them as personal and as not moral, is that they are *not teachable* and are therefore not in the realm of schooling. This view can stem from the

assumption that emotions are not controllable. If emotions are not controllable, then it does not make sense to try to educate them. On the one hand, it is true that emotions are not entirely controllable and that (at least) some people are not adept at controlling their emotions. On the other hand, emotions are, to some extent, often controllable, for most people. Most people can learn, with personal effort and guidance, to recognise, reflect upon, and regulate how they feel in everyday life, as part of becoming a good person in society. This assumption undergirds common parenting and schooling practices, for example, of encouraging children not to cry, be selfish, or fight others out of rage.

Yet there are three related, more nuanced positions, worth further considering in relation to this view. The first is that emotions should not be taught even if they are teachable, since they may introduce irrational rather than rational processes and behaviour. Thus, they can only be taught in an indoctrinatory way. This position has already been considered in part. Even for those who are against education for indoctrination and propaganda, and who argue for clear-headed, autonomous thinking, such as Michael Hand (2011), Rawls (1993), and Kant (1784), the answer is not to ignore or 'leave alone' the way that emotions enter into decision making. On the contrary, these thinkers advocate for education to enhance thinking and behaviour, in part through discouraging reliance upon irrational impulses or overly emotional dispositions and inclinations. Teaching students passionate, irrational feelings can be indoctrinatory. But teaching about and for self-regulation of emotions and related processes is distinct from this, and commonly held as beneficial.

A second relevant view is that because emotions are not entirely the products of autonomous personal choices, it is not moral and/or realistic to expect people to (learn or be able to) control them. As previously mentioned, emotions are not entirely controllable. People's emotional experiences are impacted by many things outside of their control (Appiah, 2008). These feelings are also influenced by physical, biological, and cognitive processes, which are also difficult to understand, let alone to control (Doris, 2005). There are also puzzles surrounding 'moral luck', and when one is or is not blameworthy for 'bad emotions' or a lack of virtuous emotions, given that emotional processes related to thought and behaviour are not absolutely controllable (McConnell, 1993). Thus, how much we can expect emotional control among others and regard it as praiseworthy (and deficiency in this area as blameworthy) are questions of longstanding debate.

Here, the question of *how* to regulate and control emotions can also be related to the question of *should*. When and how to intervene, or exercise tolerance or acceptance, in relation to one's problematic emotions or those of others is a practical question and a moral one. Emotions and emotional

control are not just internal processes, but complicated interpersonal and institutional ones. In some Western societies, there are debates over how to view and manage children's (especially boys') hyperactivity. Some hold that youth hyperactivity is partly a 'natural instinct', that should not be controlled and that has benefits. Others see it as a barrier to discipline and social and intellectual development. The value of anxiety and sadness (more prevalent in girls) is also controversial. Again, debate relates to how these states impact people's lives in society. Anxiety and sadness can be seen as natural responses to external stimuli. It can be functional to feel anxiety before a test or grief after the loss of a friend or family member. Yet these feelings can also reflect dispositions than can be destructive and anti-social over time. They may therefore be regarded as undesirable and avoidable with tools like medication, therapy, and behavioural treatment. Those who question whether it is moral to intervene in others' emotions in relation to these topics may be more precisely concerned with the morality of emotional manipulation for instrumental ends, particularly in cases where the benefits of treatments are not obvious in the first place for those receiving them.

Additionally, it is important to note that generalisations and expectations about normal capacities for emotional control and regulation do not reflect the experiences of all people, or all the experiences of many people. Across societies, over ten percent of people experience *alexithymia*, a trait characterised by the inability to identify, name, or describe one's emotions (Panaite & Bylsma, 2012). Normally distributed in a population, alexithymia is often related by psychologists to emotional developmental challenges (Goerlich, 2018). People with alexithymia can be 'highly reflective, self-aware, and conscientious' (Kennett, 2017, pp. 372–373). Yet common forms of guidance for developing emotional identification and control may not particularly benefit them, given their different emotional processing capacities. Alexithymia is not psychopathy, and it need not prevent people from living good, more or less ordinary lives. Yet if it is assumed that people can and should learn to identify and control their emotions, people with alexithymia may be held as deviants and moral failures.

Such diversity requires careful consideration, in relation to the moral and practical implications of teaching emotional regulation in schools. More generally, sceptics of education for emotional control are right in identifying and questioning how some taken-for-granted techniques in schooling use emotional manipulation for non-moral, convenient purposes, such as to attain particular behavioural outcomes, apart from other considerations (Maxwell & Reichenbach, 2007).

There is one final viewpoint worth identifying here that challenges people in thinking about emotions as teachable, and as part of education.

This is the view that because emotions are internal in a sense, and cannot be seen or known by another with full transparency, they cannot be effectively educated in schools, compared to things that can be learned more visibly. Schooling involves measuring of student learning and demonstration of skills in increasingly standardised tests. In relation, there is a sense that education should primarily provide certain kinds of visible changes in young people (Hattie, 2008; Biesta, 2017). Given that significant human and material resources go into schooling, some question here the value of 'soft skills' education, when it is difficult to evaluate its effectiveness through empirical means. Opening a window on subjective internal states and how they change is more difficult than testing student retention of content knowledge. This is therefore considered an obstacle to enhancing education for emotional cultivation, when contrasted with learning in content areas. One way that some work to resolve this issue of visibility is by taking into account student expressions – verbal and nonverbal – as indicative of emotional states. A researcher or educator may ask students about their emotional states, or about their experiences and perspectives about their capacities to regulate their emotions. Such methods have value, but also limitations. The challenge of identifying emotional processes should be recognised in approaches to educating emotions.

In sum, emotions clearly play a role in moral life and society, and there is value in teaching young people about emotions in schools. Yet it remains the case that understanding and educating emotions is not easy or straightforward, from a moral or practical perspective. Emotional processes can be challenging to identify, learn about, and control in the best of cases, and they are complexly related to other important practical and moral purposes of schools in society. The question this work centrally tackles is how to educate emotions in a society and on what empirical and moral grounds.

1.3 Is There a Consensus View on Educating Emotions?

Some may recognise that education involves emotions, and assume that the research literature has developed a clear consensus on the topic: on what emotions are, their value, and how to educate about them. That all of this has been established and is easily applied is suggested in texts such as *Authentic Happiness*: *Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment* (Seligman, 2002), *Exploring Well-Being in Schools: A Guide to Making Children's Lives More Fulfilling* (White, 2011), and *Positivity: Discover the Upward Spiral that Will Change Your Life* (Fredrickson, 2009), and in scores of articles in academic and popular presses reporting on the benefits of educational and other kinds of inventions for emotional development.

One prevalent view that frames educating emotions as straightforward comes from psychology, particularly positive psychology. Psychology deals primarily with individual functioning (and dysfunction). Positive psychology can be distinguished from other forms of psychology for its focus on positive rather than deviant or problematic emotional states, and how positive experiences promote health and well-being (Seligman, 2002). In this case, psychologists aim to benefit people with knowledge about how to function better with regard to their emotional processes. Positive psychologists view the task of people learning to manage their emotions as personally and socially beneficial, and therefore as valuable and worthwhile. A related trend is the promotion of 'emotional intelligence' or 'emotional quotient'. Similarly, associating emotional regulation with personal and social value and benefits, 'EQ' and 'EI' have become common-sense notions about educating emotions in some Western societies (Goleman, 1995).

Psychologists base their views on therapeutic rather than educational contexts. Scholarship in education and philosophy often echoes psychological views, however, framing educating emotions as fairly straightforward work, and worthwhile. Scholars with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham argue that teaching emotion-related virtues enhances students' experiences and behaviours, for good living. The Jubilee community has included academics influenced by psychology and educational psychology, as well as by philosophy, particularly virtue ethics (Arthur et al., 2014; Arthur, 2019). Nel Noddings also emphasises that young people can and should learn to regulate their emotions for flourishing, and that schools should particularly cultivate caring and happiness among students (2003). Nussbaum (2013, 2016) examines emotional regulation and emotional cultivation as part of character development.

The next chapters will analyse the extent to which there is consensus across these and related disciplines and views, regarding educating emotions. Across this text, I expose divergences in research orientations and findings, which debunk the notion that there is a substantive consensus view on this topic. I provide a look beneath the surface of apparent consensus, to reveal conceptual, empirical, and perspectival differences. Conceptually, how emotions are understood, within and across fields, is not uniform. This means that processes involved in identifying, developing, and regulating emotions are not understood in the same way by diverse scholars. Empirically, what is sought and how it can be observed and studied is also messier when one dives into the research literature, than it appears in commonplace calls to follow 'what works'. Thinking about methods brings us to differences of perspective. How and why a particular kind of educational intervention is regarded as effective,

moral, or socially just is also understood differently across thinkers. What is called for in educating for emotional virtues, and on what moral or other justificatory grounds, is a matter of debate, not consensus.

Take one emotion: anger. Many people, including laypeople and academics across the social sciences and arts, regard anger as generally negative. Anger is the kind of state educators, psychologists, and philosophers typically encourage young people to 'work through', eradicate, or 'move beyond' (Noddings, 2003; Seligman, 2007; Nussbaum, 2016). It is said to inspire 'payback', negative outward behaviour displays of harm, or intention to harm others (most commonly, those seen as causing a wound to the angry person). If anger leads to negative outcomes and harms to others (and possibly to oneself), then it makes sense to encourage people to recognise and work against their anger in schools, alongside other settings. This may be described in terms of 'anger management', or 'conflict resolution'.

However, people have different definitions of anger. Some would include an instinctive rage not directed towards any other person as part of their definition, while others would focus on a cognitive-based desire or plan for retaliation (Nussbaum, 2016). How one understands what anger is makes a difference in what they think should be done about it. For those who view anger as an instinctive feeling, the plan to eradicate anger entails understanding it as such and finding ways to induce oneself emotionally to avoid or evade it (e.g. APA, 2019). For those who view anger as more cognitively based, related to a sense of reactive self-interest and self-preservation or self-maintenance, its resolution will involve a different tactic, such as acting on the capacity to see the difference between reasonable and unreasonable experiences of and reactions to anger (Nussbaum, 2016).

On the other hand, some do not think that anger is altogether negative. Again, this may depend on how anger is defined as an emotion. When one thinks about emotions as 'inside' people, then it perhaps makes sense to think of anger as basically negative: as an unpleasant experience, compared to others. However, emotions are also part of social interactions and communal experiences. In such cases, anger can lead to harm, but it can also serve to prevent harm. The situation and context of anger make a difference (Srinivasan, 2018). Boler (1999), Patricia White (2012), and Cris Mayo (2016) explore the potential for a positive place for anger in education. Kristjánsson (2007) also emphasises anger not as expendable, but as possibly justified. Sara Ahmed defends anger (2004a, 2010) as valuable in understanding injustice. A notion of 'righteous anger' is seen as good in relation to horrible situations of oppression, and is invoked in texts across religious traditions (Kristjánsson, 2007). Raymond Novaco (2016) notes anger's personal and communal functions