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Charisma in Education: A Cautionary Note

Ziqian Zhou[1]

[1] National University of Singapore, Centre for English Language Communication, Singapore

Correspondence: Ziqian Zhou, National University of Singapore, Centre for English Language Communication, 10 Architecture Drive, Singapore 117511. E-mail: elczz@nus.edu.sg

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Abstract

This paper offers a review of the literature on the nature of charisma in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). This synthesis of the literature will reveal three salient themes that SoTL authors have used to understand the concept of charisma in teaching: namely, that charisma is an uncultivable rare 'gift', that charisma involves the use of humor and that charisma is expressed by intense high energy rituals. It will be argued that all three themes are problematic for SoTL researchers and practitioners. It is hoped that findings from this paper will prompt a reconceptualization of charisma in SoTL research as well as constitute some optimism for teachers whose professional identities are portrayed as lacking charisma.

Keywords: charisma in the scholarship of teaching and learning, charisma in sociology, organizational and management research, teaching excellence, teacher identity

1. Introduction

Charismatic individuals exist in many domains: politics, religions, multi-national companies and even in classrooms. Indeed, in the scholarship of teaching and learning ('SoTL') (Note 1) there is widespread consensus about the value of the charismatic teacher. Authors have argued that such an individual makes learning enjoyable (Qardaku, 2019) which gives rise to greater student engagement (Lin and Huang, 2016, p. 28). It was found that charisma in a teacher positively correlates with students' interests and their enthusiasm about a given topic (Lee et. al., 2014; Lin and Huang, 2016; Qardaku, 2019, p. 78; Sammons et al., 2014). Charismatic teaching is also positively linked to students' perception of improvement in their learning (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2014), to increased teacher-student cooperation (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2011b; Qardaku, 2019, p. 79) and to improvement in intrinsic student motivation (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2014, p. 141). As a result, students associate charismatic teachers with the presence of an overall supportive climate for learning (Lin and Huang, 2016, pp. 27-28); charismatic teachers are, therefore, often held in high regard by their students (Lammers and Murphy, 2002). One author was, thus, led to declare that '[t]hrough the ages, all successful educators are charismatic teachers' (Qardaku, 2019, p. 77).

This short reflective essay, however, takes a contrarian position. Before I proceed, a brief word about the methodology I have adopted is in order. The literature that I have selected draws largely but not exclusively from SoTL publications written in English produced over the past two decades (2000 to 2020). This review is not meant to be exhaustive, but is guided by the aim of marshalling a wide range of definitions or conceptualizations. In my review of the literature I select research material partly in accordance with what is known as the 'snowball' sampling method—having picked out definitions or conceptual summaries of that feature words such as 'charisma (in teaching)' or 'charismatic teaching/teacher' as key-terms from a sampling of widely-cited publications, I proceed to review the works cited by these publications in order to mine a greater number of definitions or conceptual summaries. Not all authors put forth a strict definition of charisma, charismatic teaching or of the charismatic teacher; indeed, some adopt what they take to be an intuitive account of charisma, and couch these accounts in a broader discussion of other topics (e.g. engaging teaching). I have not discounted such informal accounts and have also adopted them in my review of the literature. Finally, by parsing the many definitions or conceptualizations of charisma in education or about the charismatic teacher into smaller clauses and, in turn, comparing amongst these I sieve out three salient themes that, I argue, ought to be receiving more serious critical scrutiny in the SoTL literature.

To look ahead, it will be argued that although SoTL researchers differ on how exactly to define what makes for a charismatic teacher, we find repeated claims of charisma being an uncultivable 'gift', as involving the display of high levels of communicative or performative energy and as involving the expression of humor. This paper casts a sceptical worry over these three themes just described, and does so by drawing liberally from the disciplines of sociology, and organizational and management studies. This methodological decision is not unmotivated because it is these disciplinary domains that partly constitute the intellectual fore-runners of charisma in the scholarship of teaching and learning. (Note 2) The sceptical worry that I intend to cast over aspects of the notion of charisma has an implication concerning how teachers perceive of themselves. The idea of 'teacher identity' has been discussed in the literature (Hockings et. al., 2009; Izadinia, 2014; McCune, 2021; Trautwein, 2018): it has been found that some sources of teachers' identity or perceptions of their selves (and professional competences) are those from their peers and students. But, what is sometimes overlooked is the effect of scholarly discourse on the formation of teacher identity. The papers cited at the start of this essay are unanimous in their praise of charisma in teaching. But, as I intend to suggest in this paper, teachers should be more ambivalent towards this notion as it is characterized in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Teachers who perceive themselves or who are perceived by others to be '*un*charismatic' need *not* have gotten the short end of the talent stick. The goal of this present inquiry is not to advocate a jettisoning of charisma from SoTL research and practice; rather, I seek to establish a more modest cautionary note, namely that of separating the wheat of what is valuable about charisma from the more disagreeable chaff.

2. Salient Theme No. 1: The 'Gift' of Charisma

Some historical background concerning the notion of charisma is helpful at this point. The word itself is derived from the Greek word 'kharis' which roughly translates as 'grace' or 'benefit' in English. The later term was subsequently adopted by the early Judeo-Christians in the form of the word 'charismata' which refers to God's 'Charis', 'His grace' or, simply, gifts from God that allow chosen individuals to perform acts of prophecy or healing (Konger and Canungo, 1992, p. 87). And, it was through the performance of such miraculous acts that gave rise to the belief that it was charisma that animated or legitimated the authority of religious individuals. The crucial link from this usage by the early Christians to contemporary discourse came through Max Weber, whose writings were instrumental in establishing the methodological identity of the modern social sciences as an intellectually distinct field of inquiry. According to Weber, who was intrigued by the justification of politico-legal authority, it is charisma that imbues a leader with the character that justifies that individual's authority. With charisma, this individual 'is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least ... exceptional powers and qualities ... [which] are *not accessible to the ordinary person* but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader' (Weber, [1924] 1947, pp. 358-9, my emphasis). Elsewhere, Weber makes a similar claim that charisma is a gift 'of the body and spirit *not accessible to everybody*' (Weber, 1968 p. 19, my emphasis).

SoTL researchers have similarly conceived of charisma as a 'gift' whose rarity makes it a prized possession. Lin and Huang, for instance, asserts that '[t]eacher charisma is not an easy thing to define and those with a lot of charisma *are rare* given that charisma is not *a trait to be found in everyone* (2016, p. 141, my emphasis). Echoing this theme of charisma as a gift that one either has *or* does not, Pinto et. al. note that 'the discourse of the charismatic subject constructs a good teacher as one who possesses certain *intrinsic qualities or dispositions, rather than one who has grown as a result of professional training*… (2012, p. 74, my emphasis). Needless to say, this theme of describing charisma as a rare uncultivable 'gift' also permeates research in organizational and management studies (see e.g., Conger and Kanungo, 1988; House, 1977).

The worry with a narrative that conceives of charisma as an uncultivable 'gift' is that it feeds the assumption that one *either* has or lacks some such ability. This assumption bears an uncanny resemblance to the findings of a large study conducted by Leslie et. al. (2015) that surveyed close to 2000 staff and graduate students of high-profile universities. It was found that disciplines such as philosophy, economics and classics that place a premium on the (mysterious) quality of 'raw brilliance' for academic success face an under-representation of women; further, it was also found that that it is usually men who are perceived to possess such a quality. The narrative of a need for 'raw brilliance' has corrosive effects on a female student's self-perceptions and motivations. For instance, she may form the unjustified belief of herself that she lacks the means of coping with possible academic challenges; this, then, undermines her level of motivation (if not self-worth) which, in the eyes of her male counterparts, confirms their existing assumptions about the competences of female students. In an interview with the lead author of the paper, Sarah-Jane Leslie adds that '[t]he study's findings suggest that academics who wish to address the gender gap in their fields should pay particular attention to the messages they

send concerning what's required for success… For example, they can downplay talk of innate intellectual giftedness and instead highlight the importance of sustained effort for top-level success in their field' (Leslie quoted in Saxon, 2015). This suggestion echoes the work of Carol Dweck, whose study of the 'growth mindset' has it that it is false to assume that intelligence is a fixed trait that cannot be improved on; on the contrary, the mind is a pliable system that develops on the basis of meaningful effort invested into challenging tasks (Dweck and Sorich, 1999; Hochanadel and Finamore, 2015). (Note 3) An analogous lesson, I suggest, should be drawn concerning how we ought to conceive of charisma in education. The first step, then, is to be more mindful of attaching potentially misleading labels such as 'gift' when describing charisma in education.

3. Salient Theme No. 2: The Humor of Charisma

It has been argued that humor as an essential component of the charismatic teacher (Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, 1991). For instance, Lee et. al. (2014) write,

In a nutshell, some specific traits are shared among charismatic teachers: responsible, fair, tolerant, humble, sense of humor... (p. 1145)

And, so do Bolkan and Goodboy (2014) who claim that,

> [C]harismatic teaching may be a function of instructors' non-verbal immediacy, humor, caring, and confirmation. (p. 141)

Ellis's (1993) study found that the possession of humor is one of five factors that explains why teachers win outstanding teaching awards. Similarly, Huang and Lin (2014), who designed a metric for measuring tutor charisma argues that 'knowledge, character traits, teaching techniques, and humor are the valuable factors for students' perception and that should provide a suitable framework for further work on toward understanding teacher charisma' (p. 286). According to the Huang and Lin, humorous tutors are more approachable and are able to engage students better with their teaching; humor was also reported to help students learn in a less stressful and, hence, more supportive environment. To support these claims, the authors draw from Minchew (2001), Neumann et. al. (2009) and Lei et. al. (2010). These latter three sources, however, do not offer a more nuanced account of how humor is to be understood, save for the occasional use of examples that present something as incongruous or which violates a hearer's expectation set up at the start of a joke. What Huang and Lin do not report in sufficient depth, however, is the very real possibility of the use of humor to go awry. For instance, a source the authors use (i.e. Lei et. al., 2010) warn of the 'drawbacks of humor' such as the use of jokes that involve inappropriate reference to gender or one's physical appearance (Lei et. al., 2010, pp. 239–331). The worry, then, is that such topics as gender or disability may be used to 'lighten up the class or to capture the student's attention' (Neumann et. al., 2009) or to overturn the stereotype of 'English teachers are… dour, prudish individuals with no sense of humor' (Minchew, 2001, p. 58). In other words, inappropriate humor has as much instrumental utility in arresting students' attention as appropriate humor.

I wish to suggest that authors who see humor as an essential component of the charismatic tutor be sensitive to an influential fourfold distinction of classes of humor that was posited by psychologists Martin et. al. (2003). According to the authors, the positive variants of humor are as follow: 'affiliative humor' is humor used to develop one's social relations with others; 'self-enhancing humor' is humor one adopts to deal with one's life more positively. In contrast, humor that has undesirable effects are the following: 'aggressive humor' which is humor used to enhance one's self at the expense of others (e.g. the use of sarcasm, denigration, ridicule or excessively teasing); and, 'self-defeating humor' in which one is the target of jokes (e.g. self-deprecatory remarks) or involve attempts to ingratiate oneself or gain the approval of others by doing or saying funny things at one's own expense). (Note 4) Not surprisingly, as with SoTL research, the use of humor has also been claimed by organizational psychologists and researchers of management to be central to the charismatic person, but with one important caveat: namely, that 'appropriate' use of humor correlates with perceptions of confidence and competence, while 'inappropriate' uses of humor undermine the latter goods (Bitterly et. al., 2017; Bitterly and Brooks, 2020). Now, what is important for SoTL researchers and educational practitioners to note is that organizational psychologists have reported that the telling of *both* appropriate *and* inappropriate jokes also correlates with perceptions of confidence and competence (Bitterly et. al., 2017; Bitterly and Brooks, 2020). In addition, given that humor derives its meaning sometimes from highly localized cultural practices or vernaculars, the 'point' of a joke may get lost in translation (especially in an educational setting that is increasingly internationalized). (Note 5) So, the main takeaway from this brief section is that SoTL researchers are right to see humor not as mere frivolity, but researchers and practitioners alike must also be aware of the dangers of the use of aggressive and self-defeating humor, and entertain the possibility that a teacher who deftly mixes these

with the positive variants of humor may also be perceived by students to be charismatic or effective in teaching, which is surely an undesirable state of affairs.

4. Salient Theme No. 3: The Emotional Toll of Charisma

It is fairly common to observe authors describing charismatic teachers also as being 'energetic', 'inspirational' (Derounian, 2017; Qardaku, 2019) or 'passionate' (Sammons et. al., 2014). These superlatives could mean many things, but they are often used in conjunction with descriptions that portray charismatic educators as impassioned or highly energetic at '*transmitting* enthusiasm' (Qardaku, 2019, p. 78, my emphasis), that they are 'dynamic' *communicators* adept at 'displaying nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, gesturing, and vocal variety that reduce physical and psychological distance' (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2014, p. 137). The sustained display of some such energy is thought to be highly appealing to students (Huang and Lin, 2014, p. 2). In a similar vein, the literature from organization and management studies holds that charisma of the kind involved in 'transformational leadership' (Note 6) reflects 'attributes of people who are *dynamic* [and] *self-confident*' (Bass, 1985b, p. 46, my emphasis) and who possess the 'ability to *articulate themselves in an inspirational manner*' (Conger and Kanungo, 1994, my emphasis). So, here we notice that the theme of charisma as a form of communicative emotional interaction as posited by organizational psychologists (House, 1977, p. 189) is of a piece with what we see in the SoTL literature.

But, the authors just cited may not have fully appreciated how *complex* it is to engage in those highly-charged displays of charismatic communicating. Metaphors like 'dynamism', 'energy' and 'confidence' only skirt the issue by relabelling the intricate phenomenon to be understood; and, novice teachers would attest that there is much more to a charismatic delivery, and that adroitly engaging in 'eye contact, smiling, gesturing, and vocal variety' may come across as stilted, forced, or inauthentic (Wong and Chiu, 2019). In this section, I wish to gesture at the hidden complexity of such dynamic displays of communicative prowess, and to explain why it comes at a cost. In a recent monograph titled *Charisma* by sociologist Randall Collins (2020), the author offers us a micro-sociological (Note 7) theory of how charismatic individuals generate high levels of energy. Consider first the following passage by Collins that deserves to be quoted in full:

> A charismatic leader pumps up followers with EE ['emotional energy']... We have seen plenty of example of charismatic leaders in politics and religion. To add an example of a business entrepreneur whose success was based on charisma: Steve Jobs was not an engineer or a designer, but he had excellent judgment as to who were the most creative people to hire. He recruited them, in part, by touting the revolutionary things they would invent, and offering generous shares of the profits. Above all, he challenged them to do things that they thought were impossible… The way it worked was by an extremely intense interaction ritual in the workplace. Steve would visit the most advanced work group, look at what they had done, and start criticizing it. His comments were crude, obscene, and insulting... Steve would insult them until they were really angry; then he would stay and argue with them. His persistence was incredible—he would argue with them for hours. He was famous for dropping in on people and staying up all night arguing and expounding his vision. Obviously, Steve has a lot of emotional energy to be able to do this: he shows the familiar pattern of the charismatic leader who doesn't need sleep, a single-minded workaholic who never takes a break. (2020, Appendix).

Collins breaks down the intense interaction ritual just described into three parts, which reveal the hidden mechanism of charismatic interactions. The first is what Collins call 'situational copresence' where people occupying the same space tacitly monitor each other's behaviour ('feeling each other's moods'), signal disapprobation towards deviation from what is expected with an intention towards some sort of uniformity of action. The second component involves a 'focused interaction' (Note 8) where everyone is paying attention to the same thing and aware that everyone else is paying attention to the same thing; indeed, the more intense or formal an event the higher the level of 'focused interaction'. The third component is the presence of a 'shared emotion' which is what results from the first two components of situational copresence and focused interaction. Examples of such shared emotion may be the intense excitement of a crowd in a sporting match, the feeling of anger in a street protest or the anxiety and frustration that arise from a need to resolve a problem at work (as in the Steve Jobs example). Finally, all three components, according to Collins, have a feedback effect that results in 'rhythmic entrainment' which generates more 'emotional energy' in the individuals. This process is likened to a 'socialized trance' which is 'a little social system with its own boundary maintaining tendencies' (Goffman quoted in Collins, 2004). (Note 9)

The anecdote concerning Steve Jobs is perhaps an extreme example of the interaction patterns of a charismatic individual, the display of which will be unacceptable in an educational setting. But, the worry that I wish to press remains: the discourse in the SoTL literature that emphasizes the good a charismatic tutor's ability to generate what Collins call high 'emotional energy' may come across as alienating for a good many teachers. I explain why in the following paragraphs.

In her highly influential study *In a Different Voice* (1982), psychologist Carol Gilligan argues that the experience of girls and women—unlike that of men—gives pride of place to the role of the emotions, personal relationships, the need for intimacy and reciprocity in one's moral thinking. Gilligan's conception of a morality associated with the psychology of women—which attaches value to relations of intimacy, responsibility and caring—is known in the literature as an 'ethics of care' (see also Noddings, 1984). The worry, then, is that the quest for the ramping up of high emotional energy as described by Collin's charismatic individual, or the emotional domination expressed by such individuals to get others to see *their* point of view, is in tension with the values identified by an ethics of care or of how it is that women are being socialized. The charismatic individual, as exemplified by the anecdote involving Steve Jobs, is energized by the feedback loops of emotional energy generated by a group with such an individual at the centre of intense interactions. (Note 10) If such displays of emotional energy are psychologically alienating for women, then the aspect of charisma that emphasizes the production of high emotional energy can be construed as a gender role expectation, specifically that associated with masculinity. The call, in other words, for more charisma in one's teaching may be but a culture-based gender norm that attaches value to the masculine attributes of, for instance, dominance, winning and emotional control (Connell, 2009; Mahalik et. al., 2003). (Note 11)

To be sure, the goal of this section is not to criticise the ability of charismatic individuals, such as Jobs, to rouse or enact intense interactional rituals. This is because one might argue (though not unproblematically) that such an ability fits the purpose of 'transformational leadership' which, (Note 12) as management and organizational scholars tell us, is highly outcome oriented; indeed, it is the raison d'être of organizational leaders to articulate a 'strategic' or an 'inspirational vision' with the intention of fostering 'an impression that they and their mission are extraordinary', and be agents of change (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2011b, pp. 4-5; see also Conger, 1999; Conger and Kanungo, 1994). (Note 13) But, here is where the crack between disciplines begins to show itself: even if one makes the (not uncontroversial!) assumption that charisma fits the purpose of political or business leaders, is remains problematic to claim that teachers should be *similarly* charismatic. This is not to say that the field of education is not 'outcome oriented', but only that those outcomes differ or, if similar, differ in emphasis (for instance, that of caring about a *student*'s learning achievements—as opposed to organizational success—is widely regarded as important in education (Bledsoe et. al., 2021)).

5. Conclusory Remarks: Implications of This Present Study

The goal of this paper is not to recommend a jettisoning of research into charisma nor is it to discourage teachers from cultivating it in the classroom. Rather, my wish is to show how the intellectual precursors of charisma in SoTL research—especially those of leadership, organizational and management studies—may have resulted in the SoTL research on charisma inheriting elements not fit for purpose. The charisma of the former disciplinary domains is constructed on the basis of research goals such as those of making sense of justified coercion, developing group unity and the measuring of organizational success, all of which are not necessarily also the ends of education. An ethics of care in educational practice, for instance, focuses on vulnerabilities and reciprocal obligations; but, transformational leadership on settings of 'visions', employee efficacy, the 'bottom-line' or, simply, hard profits (Avolio et. al., 1988; Holladay and Coombs, 1994). To be sure, it is highly plausible that the problematic aspects of charisma as characterised by SoTL research may have multiple causes. For instance, it is arguable that the problematic aspects of charisma are of a piece with certain widely-held assumptions about 'teaching excellence' or of the 'effective teacher'. Skelton (2009), for instance, rightly pointed out that the notion of 'teaching excellence' is not without its problematic assumptions. For instance, the notion is wont to characterize high quality teaching not in relational or contextual terms but in the essentialistic powers possessed by the lucky selected few. Indeed, one can read Skelton in light of the more general claim that the very idea of the 'excellent teacher' is a contested notion that bears critical scrutiny, not least because institutional awards and grants are often bestowed in accordance with 'measures' of teaching excellence (Gunn and Fisk, 2013; Land and Gordon, 2015; Macfarlane, 2007; Skelton, 2007). So, the first implication of this paper comes in the form of a plea for a broadening of the exercise of 'reflective teaching' to also include scrutiny of those very concepts or assumptions that have defined the allocation of prestige in teaching or higher education in general. Reflective teaching, in other words, ought not to be divorced from 'a form of critical theory which seeks

to inform understandings of how the present has come to take the form and shape it has, in particular how our self-understandings have come about' (Manathunga, 2011, pp. 349-350).

Recall that I cast scepticism over the aspect of charisma that borders on emotional domination (an extreme example of which may be that of the late Steve Jobs). And, I did so by drawing from the work of Gilligan who argues that the moral deliberations of women give expression to an ethics of care which attaches value to relations of intimacy, responsibility and reciprocal obligations. I now describe three ways that such an ethics of care bear out in practice and I do so by drawing liberally from the work of Nel Noddings (1984). Noddings, who endorses the work of Gilligan, recommends a 'relational' form of teaching—this involves, amongst other things, that teachers be more aware of the needs and interests of their students, and attempt to develop classroom activities or learning materials that are sensitive to such needs and interests. For instance, it could be proposed that a foreign language tutor can adopt which is called 'translingualism' in which the teaching of a foreign language involves multiple languages or use learning materials expressed in multiple languages, with the aim of leveraging on student's existing knowledge and expressing respect towards a diversity of cultural backgrounds (see Andersen 2018). Next, tutors teaching courses that deal with matters of ethics or morality ought, wherever possible, model those very virtues or ethical standards being taught in the classroom. For instance, a lesson on academic plagiarism may involve the tutor displaying the virtue of intellectual honesty; a further lesson on negotiation or conflict management may involve the tutor modelling patience and objectivity and engaging in attentive listening when interacting with students. A third way in which an ethics of care, as developed by Noddings, bears out in practice is that of the engaging in dialogical exchange, which as Brookfield and Preskill (2012) have argued, enlivens the classroom as it does prime the mind for lifelong learning. Now, this dialogic or collaborative practice is an instance of what is known in the literature as the pedagogy of a 'student-centred teaching and learning' in which the needs of students are prioritised (Hoidn and Klemenčič, 2020), didactic teaching—with its emphasis on teacher control and top-down knowledge dissemination—diluted (Cannon and Newble, 2000), and more emphasis is placed on students' willing participation and autonomy or sense of ownership and control over the learning process (McCombs and Miller, 2007). Patel-Junankar (2017) sums up the differences between two pedagogical systems as follows:

Table 1. Teacher-Centred Versus Learner-Centred Pedagogy (Patel-Junankar 2017)

Teacher-centred	**Learner-centred**
Focus is on the instructor	Focus in on both students and the instructor.
Students work individually	Students work in groups or alone, depending on the activity
The instructor observes and corrects students' responses	The instructor provides feedback and corrective action when needed
Only the instructor answers students' questions	Students may answer each other's questions and use the instructor as a resource
Only the instructor evaluates students' learning	Students evaluate their own learning, which is supported by the instructor

More generally, theories of teaching and student learning need to locate the learner in relation to her society, where such a relation is continuously shaped by inequalities in authority or social roles that are themselves products of historical inequities (Haggis, 2009). This more contextualised or social approach to SoTL inquiry suggests itself as the second (by no means novel) lesson to be gleaned our discussion of charisma in the literature.

Now, given the three worries I have discussed in this paper, two further implications suggest themselves concerning future research into charisma in the scholarship of teaching and learning. First, one might choose to retain what it is about charisma in education that is valuable. This upshot separates the wheat from the chaff as it recommends a sieving out of what is pedagogically desirable about the charismatic teacher. To my

understanding, these are numerous: charismatic teachers are knowledgeable (Huang and Lin, 2014; Joseph, 1998; Qardaku, 2019, p. 79), are pedagogically adaptable in that they possess a range of teaching methods (Huang and Lin, 2014; Joseph, 1998; Qardaku, 2019), are caring, trustworthy and empathetic (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2011a, 2014; Huang and Lin, 2014; Qardaku, 2019), possess effective feedback practices (Qardaku, 2019), all of which create a supportive and stimulating learning environment (Qardaku, 2019). One could, in other words, sought to sculpt a definition of tutor charisma that is more fitting for the purpose of education, as Raelin (2006) has done with when he asserts an account of the charismatic teacher as one possessing the virtues of tolerance, openness, honesty, patience, compassion and 'unconditional attention and focusing on student learning'. *But*, two important caveats need to be entered at this point. First, recall that the first implication I recommended above is a plea for a broadening of the exercise of 'reflective teaching' to also include critical scrutiny of the those very concepts or assumptions that define the distribution of the institutional goods of prestige amongst educational practitioners. Now, it may very well be that some items in the list of charisma I cited above may themselves not be above board. I mention one in passing: elsewhere I have attempted to argue that the psychological process of empathy is skewed towards a teacher's identifying only with 'the near and the dear'; if so, then capacity of empathy becomes a hidden mechanism for understanding and caring those one *already accepts* as part of one's 'in-group' (Zhou 2022). Second, even if some items on the list described above can be justified, one ought to remain sharply aware that teaching is a relational or collaborative practice and the theorizing of teaching has to locate the learner in relation to her society, which is the second implication entered above.

Another upshot, given the three worries I have discussed in this paper, has to do with the idea of teacher identity associated with teachers perceived to be 'uncharismatic'. Consider the following passage:

> Research into school teacher identity (Day et. al., 2006) suggests that the formation of professional identities is influenced by how teachers feel about themselves. This seemed to be true for university teachers too. Kelly saw herself as 'approachable' but 'neither entertaining nor charismatic in the classroom'. The fact that her students told her they valued her 'approachability' and 'availability' reinforced for her this aspect of her identity. Colin, by contrast, described himself as 'passionate', 'outspoken' and 'enthusiastic' and he 'delivered' his lectures 'with an awful lot of energy'. He wanted to 'enthuse' students and 'build on their enthusiasm'. He sought to use this aspect of his identity to create an environment of openness and trust in the classroom. (Hockings et. al., 2009, p. 489)

Given the three worrisome themes of charisma described in this paper, the sense of ineptitude experienced by Kelly is far from justified for the following two reasons. First, as Heffernan (2022) has argued, student perceptions or evaluative observations of their teachers are influenced by student demographic—which determines whether they 'identify' with or 'endorse' the cultural and gender identity of their tutor—as well as existing racial, sexist and homophobic prejudices. So, Kelly's receiving relatively lukewarm ratings or approval in contrast to her male colleague may be the result of factors independent of her teaching and teaching material. (Note 14) Second, by being '*un*charismatic', she may have avoided cleaving to and reproducing a narrative of charisma as an uncultivable gift, may have been more authentic as an instructor (without seeing the need to be the epicentre of intense interactional rituals) and may have avoided the use of humor that is damaging to herself and others. It is Colin, rather, that one worries about. Such a worry can, however, be allayed should educational practitioners and administrators turn a more sceptical eye towards the notion of tutor charisma which may not be fit for purpose (insofar as the notion of charisma in SoTL research may have been influenced by studies into leadership, organizational and management studies). Scepticism towards the notion of tutor charisma ought to encourage educational institutions to reconsider how institutional goods—such as those of teaching awards or, less tangibly, that of peer recognition—are distributed. Relatedly, a refashioning of the notion of charisma that emphasises a more learner-centred or relational approach to teaching will allow tutors such as Kelly to form a more edifying conception of their own professional identities and, hopefully, self-esteem.

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Notes

Note 1. I use this appellation broadly to refer to any evidence-based inquiry on teaching and student learning that draws from scholarly research and methodologically sound reflections on localized contexts (Felten, 2013).

Note 2. A research subject in the fields of sociology, political science, and organizational and management research is that of investigating what it is that accounts for the *legitimacy* of authority or domination of leaders in their respective fields (Bass, 1985ab; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; Zaleznik and Kets de Vries, 1975; Bryman, 1992). From religious institutions, to socio-legal coercion, to current day 'transformational leadership' studies, it has been claimed that charisma is that which grounds or legitimizes authority, control or power. Educational researchers, by appropriating the latter research just described, seek to make sense of tutor efficacy or teaching excellence. This translation of research from one domain to another is not without its costs, as this paper intends to show.

Note 3. Two caveats are in order. First, Dweck leaves it open how best one ought to understand the highly-contested notion of 'intelligence'. I agree with Dweck in that one can be committed to the growth mindset thesis while leaving it as an unsettled question how best to conceptualize the notion of intelligence. Second, to say that the qualities of a teacher (such as those related to 'intelligence') can be improved on is not to say that it is *only* the qualities of a teacher that matter to student learning in particular or education in general.

Note 4. It was also found that individuals who scored highly in affiliative and self-enhancing humor tend to be individuals with better moods, self-esteem and overall well-being, while aggressive and self-defeating humor are associated with anxiety, depression and poorer overall well-being. To my mind, the authors of the study may have overlooked the use of 'inside jokes' that promote groupism at the expense of the 'othered' group.

Note 5. Indeed, our 'sense of humor' bears some similarities with other sensibilities such as those of shame, guilt and remorse in that these are often shaped by highly localized cultural factors and institutional norms.

Note 6. Transformational leadership is a research area closely affiliated with organizational and management studies (see e.g., Bass, 1985ab, 1988).

Note 7. Micro-sociology can be understood as a method of investigation, inspired by Durkheim, that studies the small-scale everyday interaction patterns of groups of people.

Note 8. Or, what Collins also calls 'collective consciousness' or 'inter-subjectivity'.

Note 9. It is not accidental that Erving Goffman, whose work on micro-sociology Collins extends, is highly influenced by Emile Durkheim who alongside Weber are thought to have laid the foundations for modern-day sociology.

Note 10. Indeed, in his political writings, Weber calls the person with 'tireless energy' a 'charismatic individual' or, interestingly, a 'genuine politician'.

Note 11. Or, what some authors call 'hegemonic masculinity' that attaches value to relations of dominance alongside those of physical strength, technical competence, autonomy and self-reliance (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Note 12. I say 'not unproblematically' because it is controversial to claim that charisma as I have described is normatively valuable for fields such as business or politics. It is not my intention to endorse the legitimacy of

charisma as expressed in these fields; my claim, rather, is that we *can understand* why charisma in SoTL is theorised the way it is, namely, because it has inherited conceptions of charisma from domains outside of itself, amongst other reasons.

Note 13. Interestingly, it was found that the more leaders are disposed to the taking of 'personal risk' and of the displaying of 'unconventional behaviour', the more their employees perceive such leaders to be charismatic (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2011, p. 5).

Note 14. For more on how prejudices endemic academic settings have influenced tutor identity and perceptions of each other see Kwok and Potter (2021), Lakeman et. al. (2021) and Sigudardottir, et. al. (2022).