

Passionate teachers and their profession

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Abstract:

Passionate teachers are those who make great changes in our lives. Through teaching these great educators can inspire, challenge and nurture the minds of the students as they discover the art of learning and the art of life. Passionate teachers can have a direct impact in students' careers. Montavlo, Mansfield, & Miller, 2007 found that when students have passionate and caring teachers they experience motivational and learning benefits. The aim of this article is to identify the perceptions, motivations, attitudes and abilities among teachers who have sustained passion for the teaching profession, to identify ways to instill a similar passion in novice teacher, and encourage them to maintain an enthusiastic passion during their career. This article presents the results that consisted of an analyze of literature, open – ended interviews with 12 teachers from primary, secondary and high school, which were identified by their principals as those having a strong passion for teaching. The findings of this article are useful lessons for the faculty and will inform them for different ways to instill passion among prospective teachers. Educators at all levels must work together to help teachers sustain the fire of their passion for teaching. Maintaining a strong passion for teaching among prospective teacher candidates we teach is critical in teacher preparation programs today.

Key words: teaching profession, teaching, motivation, attracting profession, passion

Introduction:

Everyone remember their best, teachers. Parents all the time are looking for a caring, qualified and passionate teacher for their children. Researches' data on student outcomes reveal differences between classrooms within the same school, reinforcing early evidence that student learning is substantially affected by the quality of teachers' instruction. Montavlo, Mansfield, & Miller's study (as cited in Patricia H. Phelps & Tammy R. Benson, 2012) found that students experience motivation and learning benefits when they have passionate, caring teachers. Evidence is clear that outstanding teachers at all phases can have a profound positive impact on pupils' performance, which in turn leads to better outcomes in further education, pay, wellbeing, and for society at large. Having weak teachers in the classroom is, therefore, detrimental not just to pupils' achievement that academic year but to their, and hence the country's, future prospects. (House of Commons, Education Committee, London, 2012) Thus, there are increasing efforts to provide each student with a skilled and committed teacher and to support the passion of each teacher for their job. As Luther and Richman (2010) (as cited by as cited Phelps & Benson, 2012) indicated, that the best and brightest teachers are leaving classrooms, yet their service and expertise are invaluable. So it must be an important focus of administrators and teacher educators keeping passionate teachers in the classroom. Keeping in mind this need, the commitment to know more about passion among teachers is in focus. The author shares the common passion for teaching herself and also wanted to know more not only in the role as a researcher or as a teacher but also as a parent that wants the passionate teachers for her children. The purpose of this article was to examine what creates and sustain the passion among teachers and to present to the faculty ways to instill passion among teacher candidates.

Methodology:

This qualitative study was designed on deepening the understanding about the same perception, motivations, attitudes, abilities among teachers who have sustained passion for the teaching profession, identify ways to instill a similar passion in teacher education candidates, and encourage teacher educators to maintain and model an enthusiastic passion. Historically, qualitative methodologists have described three major purposes for research: to explore, to explain, or describe the phenomena of interest. Synonym for these terms could include to understand, to develop or to discover. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.33) As a first step the researcher contacted the directors of six schools in Tirana. The selected schools could be described as urban and none of these schools characterized as suburban and rural. The directors were asked to provide the names of two teachers who had more than 5 years and who exhibited a continued passion of teaching. Directors gave the names of the passionate teachers three days after initial request. The protocol of the interviews was developed by formulating a series of questions to cover the teachers' career span. Questions were asked about pre service and in service sources of impact. The researcher also wanted to present the advice of these passionate teachers for colleagues and future teachers. Some overlap in the questions was intentional to look for internal consistencies as well as any discrepancies in teachers' responses. The open-ended nature of the questions was essential to facilitate the study's search for the ingredients or sources of continued passion. These open-ended questions guided 12 total interviews that were conducted on April - May 2015. Experience years of interviewed teachers ranged from 11 to 32 with an average of 19 years. Interviewed teachers taught science, math, foreign language, reading, and social studies. The participating teachers taught at all schooling levels (i.e., elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school). The

interview protocol (borrowed from Phelps, P. & Benson, T, 2012) was as follows:

1. Why did you choose to become a teacher?
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. Do you remember your first day in the classroom?
4. What do you enjoy most about teaching?
5. What keeps you attracted to the profession?
6. How can new teachers preserve their enthusiasm for teaching once they begin their careers?
7. What hurdles do teachers encounter that diminish their passion for the profession?
8. How can teachers share their passion for teaching with others?
9. What can teacher education programs do to ensure that future teachers have a long-lasting passion for teaching?
10. What advice would you give a teaching colleague to help him/her maintain a level of passion?

Face-to-face interview sessions were conducted at off-site locations and lasted approximately 40 minutes. The audio-taped interviews yielded data that were transcribed verbatim. The written transcripts of the 12 interviews were the whole source of data collected in this study. In order to protect the identity of the participant, at the beginning of each interview, the researcher put a pseudonym to the teacher and labeled the audiotape.

Data collection and analysis are developed together and also was done a careful description of the data and development of categories in which to place behaviors, perceptions. The data then were organized in key themes related to the central questions and examined to see how far they fit to the expected categories.

Discussion of findings

Based on the data analyses described above, this qualitative study investigated how teachers maintain their passion for the profession. It explored the barriers that the participating teachers have encountered and examined ways to enhance passion among teachers. Although the interviewees expressed a wide range of perspectives, there were multiple commonalities and several themes emerged.

Motivation

Many studies reveal that while some prospective teacher students choose this profession with altruistic-intrinsic and extrinsic reasons, some others choose it under the influence of others. Students chose teaching mostly with altruistic-intrinsic reasons. (Balyer & Özcan, 2014). For most of the teachers in this study teaching profession was chosen under the influence of the others, based on the system of education of that time when they enter in the profession as prospective students teachers. During the communism period the government took decision about the program of study for each prospective student.

Moreover, in some other studies it is claimed that student choose teaching as a career since it is an autonomous profession while some others think that they can stay young in this profession. This was expressed by Lili a high school teacher with 28 years of experience *“Now I still remember the words of my father “congratulations for this profession that you choose. You will see that it will give a lot of sadisfaction and it will never let you get old, because you will be in touch with youths, pupils” and it was really true. The contact with youths, make me feel young.”*

Values included the intrinsic value of teaching, social utility values (including the desire to shape the future, enhance social equity, make a social contribution and work with children/adolescents), and then personal utility values (these

including job security, time for family and job transferability). This was good stated by Artta a high school teacher with 30 years of experience:

“I did not choose the profession; the commission of that time directed me to enter in the University for the Albanian Language Degree in teaching. I liked a degree in jurisprudence. However the two inspire persons that have an impact in my life as a person and as a professional were: one of my teachers of the middle school, an exemplar teacher of the Albanian Language subject and my grandmother that always trusted in my abilities and made me believe that I would be a responsible, caring and a good teacher in the future. When I was a pupil in the middle school the subject that I liked most was the Albanian language. I loved that subject not only because of the way that my teacher explained it, the way he communicated with us, the way he transmitted the knowledge and the passion for this subject to us, but also because the importance of this subject itself. Now I would be a teacher of the Albanian language, a subject that meant a lot to me. As a teacher I know that I would influence the life of the students, which are the future of our country.”

The interviewed teachers identified as attractors to the profession the chance to make an impact, the opportunity to form relationships with students and their parents, the variety of the job, the content/subject matter, and the challenge to bring change. Although some of the teacher in this study mentioned the extrinsic factor, the teaching schedule and the administrative work, the pull of intrinsic and altruistic motivators was strong among these teachers.

The attractions of these teachers echoed the findings of Phelps & Benson, (2012), where they identified the primary and continuing attractions of teaching. Additionally, the participants said that they were generally able to control their emotions and keep their attitudes positive. Similarly, all teachers in our study discussed the need for positive attitudes or to be in a good mood, acceptance of change or variety,

embracing collaboration, pursuing professional development activities, and building and maintaining strong relationships with students and parents.

Positive attitudes

Teachers in this study emphasize the need for a positive view in this profession. This was an advice given by them to new teachers in order to maintain the enthusiasm in teaching. Kristina one of the primary school teacher with 18 years of experience expressed: *“When I am not in a good mood I choose to be in touch with teachers who are positive“*, While Jolanda another primary school teacher with 22 years of experience said *“I always advice one of my new colleague when she feels overwhelmed by the routines, forget everything just feel positive and remember that it is all about pupils, feel the satisfaction they give to you. See they grow through each day and how they become competent in each homework you give to them.”* Putting the students first seemed to create a source of intrinsic satisfaction for the teachers. Rita a high school teacher 32 remarked on how important it is to keep the big picture in perspective. *“Even when I get caught up by negative, I do not let the routines to get me down. I plan and choose the things that can help me to maintain up my motivation on teaching and have fun together with me pupils. Pupils come first. This is what keeps me up. I had to be in a good mood for them and construct a healthy academic environment for them”* Kozeta e high school teacher with 15 years of experience emphasize the importance she has in the achievements of the her pupils and also to inspire a good direction for them in the future. She said *„I remember a moment when I was in the university. While I had a conflict inside of me to accept the degree that was given to me, the first class contact was with a teacher which had an angry face, a cold voice. I remember that I asked myself what is the problem with her, what did we do to her? I remember also that this was the moment when I decided that if I will stay in this profession, even I would have different problems in my personal*

or professional life, I had to be in a good mood for my students, or my pupils. They did not have the fault for what would happen in my life. How could I be a inspiring person for their direction in the future or a stimulating teacher, while I express only problems through nonverbal or verbal communication? This is not what they want. This is not what I wanted at that time. I wanted somebody that could help me or stimulated me and also could give me the best or directed me in order to decide what I should do in the future.”

When teachers realize the powerful impact they have on their students and the world in general, their sense of passion remains. With this perspective, it becomes easier to maintain a positive attitude.

Openness to change

Passionate teachers are those who seek and embrace change. Collinson, V. (2012) in her study stated that the exemplary teachers simply assume that a career-long pursuit of academic and pedagogical knowledge is a necessity for doing one’s best. According to her what teachers in her study have specifically sought is the development of self-knowledge, knowledge of others, knowledge of how they influence others and in turn are influenced by others, and ways to change themselves—ways to change their thinking and behaviors in order to do their best and get the best out of students.

This was mentioned at some point by all interviewees. According to these results, teachers who serve long time in teaching are open to change, engage in professional development, have a learner perspective, reach out to colleagues for support, and engage in self-reflection/examination. Aida a teacher of 29 years expressed that *“It is inside of me that each time I have to find out a new way on how to explain a new concept to my pupils. I have to find a new strategy, a new approach to bring the knowledge to the children. I hate the routine, this is me and that is what revitalizes my interest in my subject and I think choosing a*

different way to transmit to the pupils they can see that energy too". Kozminsky (2012) claim that the teachers' perceptions of their professional identities have an influence on their sense of self-determination, including their sense of autonomy, competency and relatedness. Constructing an identity is a process by which the person integrates among his/her values, status, roles, competencies and experiences to create a coherent image of self. Teachers (including teacher educators) construct their professional identity via interactions with self and others, including students and colleagues, and the constructed identity has an impact on their job satisfaction and determines their attitudes toward educational changes and reforms. Committing to and feeling part of a community helps retention, and policy needs to recognize and reward this commitment. (MacIntyre, Joana 2010).

Collaboration as a key of professional development

Teachers learn as much as possible from students, parents, and colleagues—but particularly from working with colleagues and observing them teach. (Collinson, V., 2012) (Phelps & Benson, 2012 found out the importance of maintaining strong connection with other positive teachers among passionate teacher. Also teachers in their study suggested some creative ways.) Stavri a teacher of 30 years in teaching expressed: *"I always advices to the novice teacher do not make compromises and agree of what you know. What you know cannot give the answer of all the questions of your students. Try to see an issue in different point of views. For that you have to be connected with different sources of information and also ask and collaborate with other professional colleagues. Do not interrupt the connection with the education. It is really important in our work"*. Trainings for professional development for the teachers were really helpful for all of them. These trainings and workshops gave to them the possibility not only for having new information about different issues but also sharing their experiences among professionals. Generally, personal and

professional achievement and success seem to be among other factors to make good teachers retain in the teaching profession. (Kavenuke, 2013) *“It was a great day and I felt fantastic. It was a first time that I organized an open class with my students. I had to explain an issue to my students. Participants in this open class were also some of my professional colleagues. We were all together teachers and students in that event. The interesting thing was that during that event we were in both position and sometimes we exchanged the roles as teachers and students. The issue of that day was explained and described in different point of views. I felt really good when my colleagues congratulate me for this event, but I felt fantastic when they wanted to know more in order to experience that in their classrooms. This kind of activities gave you a lot but more for professional success”* – expressed Alma, a teacher of 13 years of experience.

Relationships with parents and children

In this study all the teachers invested a great deal of psychic and physical energy into building relationships with the young people in their care, sometimes into being their significant *grown-up*. All the participants agree that sometimes relationships with parents and students are inspiring factors to their profession, while sometimes these relationships were consuming of time, and of efforts for the teachers. When asked about this Rita a middle school teacher expressed: *“In 1996, because of a personal reason I left my position as a teacher in Fier and I came in Tirana. I was waiting for a new position here in Tirana. I remain three months unemployed . During that time I did not break the connection with my colleagues here. Once I was going to meet one of them I had to wait for her, because she was in the meeting with the parents of her pupils. While I was waiting, I began to cry. After finishing the meeting, my friend came and saw me crying. She asked me and I answer to her that I missed a lot those meetings, I missed a lot my pupils, I missed a lot the relation with them and their parents. I cannot understand myself and I am feeling that I am*

lost without these relationships. This is me...” One consequence of establishing strong relationships with the children in school is a greater sense of belonging to the community within and surrounding the school. As the teachers in the study spend time in schools developing existing relationships and building emerging relationships with new students, this sense of belonging is increased. For these teachers, relationships matter: relational ties are key to an individual’s sense of identity and to their identification with a close-knit community of people. (McIntyre, Joanna 2010)

While Stavri a middle school teacher expressed *“Some parents really understand you and they help you in this process. You feel good and try to make your best, because both of us want and work for the best interes of the child.”*

Barriers to Passions

Teachers in this study all agree on the fact that the teaching profession nowadays is a demanding and a time – consuming job and also they have to deal with the parents’ expectation. These were common hurdles to their passio. Luli a primary school teacher with expressed: *In one day I have to fill adminstrative issue, I have to give statistics, I have to fill the files of 40 students in my classroom, I have to asses their exams, I have to make a plan for other noformal activity for the students. I have to this and I have to do that and in a moment I find myself asking: Do I have all the hours to accomplish all this duties? What about teaching?* Urani a teacher of a high school with 29 years of experience point out that: *“Sometime we miss teaching a lot. We are doing everything except teaching.”* According to Phelps & Benson (2012) paperwork seems to be one of those time stealers that rob teachers of the joy they could experience in their daily work.

Teachers in this study pointed out also some other barriers to their passion like parents’ expectation, managment of the classrooms with a large number of students and district

or school requirements to participate in comitty meetings or professional developments.

Conclusion:

This was the voice of a group of passion teachers that gave different insights to the program educators. It would be interesting for further studies to explore how did the directors identify these passionate teachers? Also it would be interesting to research who is a passionate teacher in the eyes of parents and students?

Quartz et al emphasized that in the real world: *The real heroes of urban schools are those who figure out ways to stay connected to their profession, their pursuit of social justice, their colleagues, their students, and their communities. These heroes are not born; they emerge from an extensive network of support and a solid understanding of pedagogy (Quartz et al 2003: 105)* Teachers in this study who were identified as exemplars of keeping the passion alive in their teaching all discussed the need for positive attitudes, acceptance of change, embracing collaboration, pursuing professional development activities, and building and maintaining strong relationships with students and parents. This conclusion is consistent with Patricia H. Phelps & Tammy R. Benson (2012) study, which indicated that these were the main aspects that all this “model of wisdoms”, these teachers have and stimulate them to have a continuing passion for their profession.

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